

A HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF SELF-STUDY OF TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION PRACTICES*

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Abstract

For a growing number of teacher educators, Self-study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) has become an empowering way of examining and learning about practice while simultaneously developing opportunities for exploring scholarship in, and through, teaching. Over the past decade, the work in self-study has been increasingly shared, scrutinized and extended so that emerging understandings of some of the issues in self-study might be further encouraged and debated. This chapter is designed to offer insights into some of the factors that have led to the development of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices and to begin to describe and articulate some of the distinguishing aspects of this work that appear important in defining this field of study.

Korthagen (1995) reminds us that despite the popularity of the notion of reflection and reflective practice among teacher educators in the early 1980s, that it still took almost another decade for teacher educators to see the importance of doing themselves what they were encouraging teachers to do – study their own practice. One reason for this slow uptake may be related to the conflicting demands of the work of teacher education as opposed to the expectations of the academy:

For a long time, the academic world was not supportive of the position of creative researchers who tried to build on another epistemological basis ...

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teacher educator/researchers who dared to carry out this difficult task [self-study] in an area in which this is largely unprecedented: the world of teacher education practices ... these people are intimately familiar with the two worlds: the world of scientific research on education **and** the world of practice. And they try to combine the best of both worlds. (Korthagen, 1995, p. 100)

This attempt to combine the best of both worlds is one way of understanding why and how self-study has emerged as an approach to carefully examining teaching and learning. This chapter aims to explore the nature of self-study and in so doing, to also explore the historical roots of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices. The chapter begins with a brief overview of different uses of the term self-study over time in order to build a picture of how self-study is currently understood in the research literature. This is followed by an examination of the reasons for conducting self-study, a review of the historical context that led to the formalizing of self-study, then closes with an exploration of how self-study is framed, interpreted and portrayed.

Background

A simple search of the ERIC database shows that almost 2000 papers have been written in which self-study is used as a major descriptor. However, analysis illustrates a diversity of ways in which self-study has been used and interpreted over time. For example, a predominant early use of the term was related to the notion of students individually completing tasks through self-paced/self-evaluation approaches to learning (Glasser, 1966; Impellitteri, 1967; Kellett, 1966). In this understanding of self-study, the focus was largely on participants instructing themselves through the completion of diagnostic tests or other forms of information/knowledge attainment. This approach was no doubt innovative at the time as it placed more emphasis on the individual learner and suggested that responsibility for learning might be influenced by factors other than just the teacher. This use of self-study was one way of questioning the more traditional approach to classroom instruction.

Self-study was also used as a descriptor for exploring individuals' concept of self and was the focus of psychological studies whereby associated views about, and influences on, one's personality and the development of self image were examined in an attempt to better understand shaping factors in the development of, for example, beginning teachers (Tuska & Wright, 1966) or academic success (Simmons, 1968). In a similar vein, self-study was also used to explore understandings and practices of self-disclosure (DeLeon *et al.*, 1970) as well as the influence of introspection (Cosgriffe, 1966).

The use of self-study in many of these (and related other) works was then a window into some of the psychological aspects of self and offered a small but significant entry point into examination of one's own teaching (e.g., Blumenthal, 1977). Interestingly, in this early literature there are also examples of self-study

whereby the self was an institution (e.g., University or College) rather than an individual.

The purpose of studying the self, when the self was an institution, was related to questioning existing structures and functions within the institution, or finding new ways for that institutional self to carry out its role (Coffelt *et al.*, 1966; Minter & Thompason, 1968; Huberman, 1969; Sinclair Community College, 1969). In this case, the use of the term self-study relates more to notions of institutional evaluation and could in many ways be interpreted as auditing programs in order to determine whether the espoused intentions of a program are in accord with the practices within the program. This institutional use of the term self-study is one that has dominated the literature for a considerable period of time and although it is used across a range of disciplines and professional fields, it has also consistently been linked to evaluating institutional approaches to teacher education (Behling, 1984; Bender, 1984; Coombs & Allred, 1993; Mortimer & Leslie, 1970). A feature that all these interpretations (above) have in common is the expectation that beliefs and practices should be closely aligned and that the self (however that might be described, from the individual through to the institution) carries a major responsibility in establishing this alignment.

In respect to this handbook, the use of the term self-study is used in relation to teaching and researching practice in order to better understand: oneself; teaching; learning; and, the development of knowledge about these. Through this use of the term, the recent literature illustrates that there exists a clear impetus for practitioners to coalesce around these ideals of self-study in ways that encourages ongoing involvement in such work.

Self-study in relation to teaching and teacher education practices has emerged from the work of teachers and teacher educators themselves. That is, that their attempts to better understand the problematic worlds of teaching and learning have led to an increasing focus on their work so that researching their practice better informs them about their teaching and enhances their students' learning. Therefore, from the initial use of the term self-study has grown a strong and vibrant educational community that generally seeks to, "... investigate question[s] of practice ... that are individually important and also of broader interest to the teacher education community" (Pinnegar & Russell, 1995, p. 6).

The Purpose of Self-Study

It is interesting to reflect upon the way in which educators have come to embrace the notion of self-study and how this field has spawned a diversity of practices across a range of settings. One reason for this variation appears to be related to the appeal of the underlying purpose of self-study and the desire for individuals to study and better understand their practice. Self-study has become a focal point for those pursuing a better knowledge of their particular practice setting and the work of those with a concern for teaching and learning in parallel fields (such as reflection, action research, teacher research, participant research and

practitioner research) has been influential in shaping how self-study is perceived and conducted.

An important touchstone for understanding the nature of self-study is the book *Reconceptualizing Teaching Practice: Self-Study in Teacher Education* (Hamilton *et al.*, 1998). This book considers the philosophical and methodological perspectives of self-study then explores these through individual and collaborative case-studies that are designed to bring these perspectives to life. Although it is not intended as a recipe for self-study, Hamilton's book is certainly a valuable starting point for coming to understand self-study. It offers reasons as to why teacher educators choose to pursue studies of this kind.

As teacher educators, we recognize that we are teachers. We believe that research on teaching practice by teachers holds invaluable promise for developing new understandings and producing new knowledge about teaching and learning. Formalizing such study of practice through self-study is imperative. ... The value of self-study depends on the researcher/teacher providing convincing evidence that they know what they claim to know. ... This book provides evidence that self-study undertaken with rigor ... will lead to both reconstruction and reconceptualization of teacher education. (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, pp. 243–244)

Hamilton and Pinnegar suggest that the purpose for conducting a self-study is an important facet of such work and one does not need to delve too deeply into self-study reports to see that many authors make a point of the purpose for conducting their self-study. A common 'big picture' purpose for many self-studies is linked to the desire of the teacher educator to teach in ways commensurate with the hopes for their student-teachers' teaching (i.e., the notion of 'practice what you preach' or modeling). At first glance, this purpose seems more than reasonable and certainly highly appropriate to the world of teaching and teacher education, yet any reading of the literature immediately demonstrates that this purpose itself creates tensions, difficulties and dilemmas and, consequently, demands new ways of managing and responding to both the research and its outcomes. Although there are many purposes for conducting a self-study, it is perhaps helpful to consider one purpose in detail in order to highlight the interplay between a purpose for conducting a self-study and the problematic nature of such work.

Modeling

Since the purpose of teacher education is to shape how student teachers will act when they eventually find themselves in schools, it is of central importance to see to it that their learning becomes deeply embedded in their perceptions of schooling and of their own future role in schools ... That is why it is so valuable to involve students in the processes of self-study since it will demand of them precisely the critical reflection that they require as learners. (Barnes, 1998, ix–xiii)

Modeling is an important term in self-study. ‘Practicing what you preach’ has long been recognized as a powerful teacher as students learn much more from what a teacher does than what a teacher says. Therefore, teaching student-teachers using the methods and approaches that they themselves are encouraged to use in their own teaching matters – a lecture on co-operative group work does not necessarily offer great insights to teaching or learning through group work. Modeling through self-study may then entail involving students and sharing the steps of the investigation with them as well as illustrating how the classroom is a site for reflection and inquiry. However, the term modeling can create difficulties for it is easily misconstrued as, in some cases, it is viewed as a synonym for mimicry, or the creation of a model or template for easy replication.

Tochon (1992) recognizes this difficulty in his consideration of educators’ narratives when he notes that modeling the self may be seen, by some, as an invitation to indoctrination. Fenstermacher (2002) similarly noted this possibility in his discussion about that which constitutes validity in research on self-study and the scholarship of teaching. Despite the possibility for misinterpretation of the term, modeling itself is often to the forefront of a teacher educator’s mind, and through self-study, the language, intent and outcome of modeling is better understood.

For example, consider LaBoskey (1997) who highlighted the possibility for misinterpretation of modeling in her consideration of her teaching about the construction and use of teaching portfolios. Her self-study was driven by a purpose to do herself that which she asked her students to do. In participating in the process in the same way as her students, by placing herself in the same vulnerable position as her students and, in doing so in a public forum which was real and risky for her, she was modeling actions that she hoped would explicitly illustrate (to her students) the value of being seriously involved in the process of learning through developing a teaching portfolio. At the same time she was also conscious that her modeling could be misinterpreted as offering a ‘model’ or ‘prototype’ for the ‘right way’ to construct a portfolio and how to respond to questions about it, despite the fact that she explicitly intended her modeling to be a way of helping to show the value in the process (of portfolio construction) through real and personal involvement.

The literature suggests that an important intent in modeling, despite the possibility for misinterpretation, is that it is a way of illustrating that, “... experimenting and the inevitable mistakes and confusions that follow are encouraged, discussed, and viewed as departure points for growth ... [and, in so doing, the teacher educator] make[s] this evident to the student-teacher” (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 23). In LaBoskey’s (1997) case, she was hoping to illustrate for her students that learning through experience is an important shaping force in better understanding not only oneself, but also one’s teaching. However, as she noted, a most important outcome for her was in the development of her understanding about, and empathy with, students in terms of their learning to articulate their views about their teaching. In this case, she came to feel what it was like to do the tasks she was setting for her students and in so doing came to better

understand and shape that work in more meaningful ways. Through modeling she learnt more about what she was doing with, and for, her student-teachers. Hence, although she had a clear purpose, she could not have anticipated some of the outcomes (cognitive and affective) that she would be confronted by in doing her self-study.

Modeling may be performed in many ways. There is the modeling of specific teaching practices (Goos & Moni, 2001; Hoban, 1997; LaBoskey, 1997), the exploration of teacher thinking during teaching (talk aloud approach, Hutchinson, 1996; Loughran, 1996), journal writing (Schiller & Streitmatter, 1994; Trumbull, 1996) and educative relationships (Whitehead, 1998), to list but a few. At the core of these teacher education practices is the practitioner's desire to influence their students' learning. Examining in detail the learning as a result of modeling illustrates interesting insights into the difficulties and dilemmas that can be created by pursuing this purpose in self-study.

Consider, for example, Schulte's (2001) work. As a graduate assistant, Schulte supervised student teachers in their final semester of an elementary education program. Her duties as a supervisor were to observe student teachers and hold pre- and post-observation conferences and to observe student teachers in their field placements as well as conducting seminars for all of her students each week. She was well aware from her reading of the literature that success in changing pre-service teachers' beliefs were often far from successful. However, she also knew that building upon pre-service teachers' beliefs was more likely to be successful than trying to replace them. With this knowledge in mind she embarked upon a self-study whereby she asked herself the question, "How am I able to help student teachers challenge their assumptions about teachers, students, and schooling?" As her study developed, she modeled her own approach to challenging her own assumptions and in so doing learnt that:

Doubts and insecurities about my teaching continued to plague me despite my best efforts to understand them and learn from my mistakes ... My coping mechanism was to share the process with my students so I was explicitly modeling the same kinds of fears and anxieties they were having. If I truly wanted my students to be life-long learners of teaching, then it makes sense that I should demonstrate the same by exposing my process to them ... I was insecure and doubtful, but this study also led to a certain confidence. Forcing myself to "risk" my relationships with students so that I might challenge them to better understand multiple perspectives has provided me with a base of experiences to draw upon in the future. My students have said that many of the strategies and activities I used were successful, at least in the short term, in helping them to challenge their assumptions about teaching and themselves ... Practice and my students' positive feedback have given me courage. (Schulte, 2001, pp. 109–110)

It seems clear then that when self-study practitioners explore their own modeling of practice, when they genuinely attempt to practice what they preach, they gain

new insights into teaching and learning. As opposed to the transmission of propositional knowledge (White, 1988) so common to the traditional lecture format of tertiary education classes, the interplay between teaching and learning becomes more accessible and valuable as this purpose of self-study (modeling) creates ongoing experiences that offer opportunities for both teachers and students to experience meaningful learning for themselves. As noted by Schulte (above) learning through self-study by modeling creates new ways to understand and shape teaching and learning environments by inviting learners to learn rather than expecting them to absorb information, ideas, and points of view. Further to this, it creates genuine situations whereby the teacher is also a learner and invites new ways of seeing into teaching and learning situations – it can give one the courage to continue to take risks and approach teaching and learning in new and meaningful ways.

Modeling also highlights the belief by many involved in self-study that learning about teacher education practices evolves over time (Schulte's study was based on work in her fourth and fifth semesters as a graduate assistant). By approaching the development of teaching about teaching in this way, teacher educators may learn how to challenge the traditional view of teacher education as training as they begin to learn how to address the privilege of public theory over private theory – theory grounded in personal experience (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001) – which is so often tacit and at the centre of the dilemmas, concerns, issues and tensions that trigger self-study.

In considering this modeling purpose of self-study, it becomes immediately apparent that self-study places personal demands on participants and creates situations and learning outcomes that require (in some cases) immediate response. Therefore, one might well question why self-study continues to attract the attention of teachers and teacher educators. The answer is bound up in the conditions that encouraged a call for work of this nature. These conditions are reviewed through a history of the formalization of self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) that came into being as a Special Interest Group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in 1993.

Historical Roots of Self-study of Teacher Education Practices

In terms of formalizing self-study, a 'coming together' of like-minded people with similar interests, issues and concerns¹ occurred through a 1992 AERA Division K symposium titled 'Holding up the Mirror: Teacher Educators Reflect on their own Teaching'. The papers presented (Guilfoyle, 1992; Hamilton, 1992; Pinnegar, 1992; Placier, 1992 – collectively known as the Arizona Group – and Russell, 1992) in this symposium were critiqued by Fred Korthagen from the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, and his critique of these papers, based on his extensive work in the field of reflection, helped to push the boundaries of the presenters' views of practice in such a way as to encourage others to similarly respond to the challenges being raised – both by Korthagen and the participants.

In this symposium, much interest focused on the manner in which the presenters publicly articulated, and honestly portrayed their personal and professional struggles in interactions with their students as they endeavored to enhance their learning about teaching. Through this process the participants were openly questioning the very nature of the way they themselves conducted their own teaching and were conscious of wanting to know if and how their teaching made a difference for their students' learning about teaching (which strongly links to the previous section on purpose and intent in self-study).

In the case of the Arizona Group, they were also confronted by an ongoing difficulty in terms of attempting to understand the unspoken rules about gaining tenure. For them, their interest and concern about the relationships embedded in teaching about teaching and learning about teaching were becoming increasingly important. However, for them, this created a dilemma – and was a point of identification with many in the audience – for it appeared (to them) that such research was not necessarily acceptable to the academy – a point noted by Korthagen in the introduction to this chapter. Thus to pursue such work (which now would be described as self-study) was perceived as inhibiting their chances of gaining tenure.

While the Arizona Group as emerging academics were concerned for their future prospects and were partly mystified by the unspoken rules of tenure, Russell, as an experienced and well established professor, was questioning many of the taken-for-granted assumptions of teacher education that he considered negated the very essence of what teacher education purported to do; to teach about teaching. Russell's questioning of the taken-for-granted assumptions about teacher education and the Arizona Group's concerns had many aspects in common yet the two parties were very different in terms of academic status. So although the issues may have been similar, perceptions of their relative position in the academy influenced how such questioning might be conducted as well as the standing that exploration of such questioning might carry.

Russell was, in effect, beginning to conceptualize what he would later publish as the tensions of teaching about teaching through the authority of position (as is commonly used in teacher education) and contrasting it to valuing and responding to the authority of experience (Munby & Russell, 1994; Russell, 1995). This differentiation of pedagogies underpinning approaches to teacher education (Russell's views) combined with the personal struggles associated with attempting to teach in meaningful ways (The Arizona Group) seemed to embrace a growing groundswell of interest at that time. Hence, the gathering of like-minded (teacher) educators was encouraged as others rallied around, driven by similar tensions in their own practice.

It could well be argued that the questioning of practice and the place of research on practice that began to be played out through this symposium was one public response to earlier calls for studies of teaching about teaching and of teacher educators themselves in line with the issues and concerns raised by Lanier and Little (1986). Hence, the Arizona Group were raising personal concerns about the difficulties experienced by new faculty members (see for

example, Boice, 1991; Diamond, 1988; Ducharme & Agne, 1989; Whitt, 1991) in conjunction with concerns about the nature of learning to teach about teaching (Knowles & Cole, 1991; Trumbull, 1990) that were being reported at the time. Yet in this particular case, the combined effect of the symposium (later published see Korthagen & Russell, 1995; Guilfoyle *et al.*, 1995) could well be regarded as having pricked the consciousness of many teacher educators as the right issues were being raised at the right time and in the right place. It invited others to respond to some of the earlier calls for action, to be involved, and to name their concerns so that they could act upon them.

At that time, Self-study of Teacher Education Practices had not yet been formally named, but there is little doubt that it was, in part, an extension of the notion of reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983, 1987). Reflection was being encouraged through the work of other teacher education scholars (for example Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Clift, Pugach & Wilson, 1990; Grimmer & Erickson, 1988; LaBoskey, 1994; Russell & Munby, 1992; Tom, 1985; Zeichner, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1987) and its growing popularity was further impetus for questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions of practice. Those researchers involved in reflective practice were also questioning teacher education practices and they added to the groundswell that further pushed forward the ideas beginning to take shape around self-study. One outcome of this questioning was encompassed in a challenge to teacher educators to seriously look into their own teaching practice.

This questioning of practice was also developing through studies in other associated fields by individuals involved in, for example, action research (McNiff, 1988) and teacher as researcher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). A confluence of questions, challenges and actions that could barely be ignored by the teacher education community led many to pursue studies that could be characterized as teacher educators as researchers of their own practice.

The threads of these areas of research were resonating in the lives and practices of many teacher educators. Collectively, these teacher educators were beginning to respond with a common sense of purpose as they tackled some of the salient questions that they perceived as needing to be answered. Some of these questions were, “How can I better help my students to learn?” and, “How do I live my values more fully in my practice?” Some teacher educators were also beginning to publicly examine and respond to instances in practice of being, “a living contradiction” (Whitehead, 1993). Importantly though, it was not that these questions were necessarily new, but more so, that they were being seriously considered and responded to by those involved in teaching about teaching.

The desire to help students better learn about teaching and to do so in ways that involved much more than telling became a recognizable characteristic of, and purpose in, the growing field of self-study. Therefore, a renewed focus on the complex nature of teaching and learning about teaching was a catalyst for careful attention to teacher education practices by the very people responsible for conducting that practice. Through this focus, teaching itself was being

re-examined in ways that highlighted the difficulties associated with many of the implicit aspects of practice.

This crucial need to question and articulate the tacit understandings of practice in ways that could make clear pedagogical reasoning (Shulman, 1986) drew on another emerging field of research, teacher thinking. This need to be able to access and examine the thoughts and actions of practitioners overtly linked to developments in studies of teacher thinking (e.g., Clark & Peterson, 1986). A point of difference though was that the examination and articulation of the thinking associated with self-study was being conducted by the practitioners themselves. The similarity in intent and purpose was nonetheless apparent and Clark's (1988) question certainly struck a chord with many as it reflected the very essence of the important challenge of the time:

Do teachers of teachers have the courage to think aloud as they themselves wrestle with troubling dilemmas such as striking a balance between depth and breadth of content studied, distribution of time and attention among individual students ... teaching disasters, and the human mistakes that even experienced teacher educators make ... (Clark, 1988, p. 10)

Responding to questions such as Clark's was one way of casting light on the pedagogy of teacher education and for those teacher educators being drawn to self-study it spawned a number of responses.

One important outcome was the new access offered into teacher educators' thinking about their own teaching as it was beginning to be made much more explicit – for themselves and their student-teachers. The modeling and think aloud approach to teaching about teaching that developed illustrated ways of helping students learn about teaching in new ways. Some of the resultant research (Loughran, 1994, 1996) simultaneously highlighted aspects of teacher educators' knowledge of teaching about teaching that was a direct result of making the tacit explicit and was a clear indication to some of the possibilities for knowledge claims resulting from the process of self-study.

There was a growing commitment amongst teacher educators to this work and a desire to move it forward in a systematic fashion. By 1994 Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices was a fully functioning AERA SIG and self-study (carrying this new meaning as a descriptor) appeared for the first time in the AERA conference index. With the work now being categorized and therefore more easily recognizable, it also became more readily accessible to others.

The S-STEP SIG has built on these foundations by developing more formal professional networks and creating opportunities to further develop the work of self-study. To date, S-STEP has conducted four CASTLE Conferences and published Proceedings (Richards & Russell 1996; Cole & Finley, 1998; Loughran & Russell, 2000; Kosnik, Freese, & Samaras, 2002) and it is through these conferences that much of the work of self-study of teaching and teacher education has been sustained. Questioning, critiquing and debating the nature of self-study of teacher education practices have been common features of the CASTLE

conferences as a development of such things as language, method, rigor and practice of S-STEP have been examined and re-examined. One purpose for this form of public debate is linked to the need for enhanced understanding of the field and the importance of developing common meaning so that ideas, issues, concerns and practices can be shared and built upon by others.

As this section illustrates, self-study has become more formalized and the ideas more readily accessible through the development of the S-STEP SIG of AERA. In so doing, what once may have been viewed as individuals pushing ideas and interests about teaching and learning in less traditional ways has led to a transition in the position, or status, of self-study through questioning mainstream methodologies and practices. However, the organization of the S-STEP SIG should not be interpreted as limiting self-study to teacher educators or teacher education practices alone. More so, it is that this group has been more active in the manner in which they have worked to shape the nature of their teaching and learning environments by documenting their research and interrogating their findings within the self-study community.

Yet despite the development, refinement and clarification that has occurred through S-STEP it is clear that the 'one true way', the template for a self-study method, has *not* emerged. Rather self-study tends to be methodologically framed through the question/issue/concern under consideration so that it invokes the use of a method(s) that is most appropriate for uncovering evidence in accord with the purpose/intent of the study. Pinnegar (1998) offers one way of understanding this situation when she states:

While the methods and methodologies of self-study are not much different from other research methods, self-study is methodologically unique. ... [self-study] is not another challenge in some kind of paradigm war, but instead ... although participant observation, ethnographic, grounded theory, or statistical methods might be used in any single study, self-study involves a different philosophical and political stance ... researchers who embrace self-study through the simple act of choosing to study their own practice, present an alternative representation of the relationship of the researcher and the researched ... as they explore the development of understanding in a practice context. (Pinnegar, 1998, pp. 31–32)

Hence across the self-study literature, a remarkable range of methods is used and, as a consequence, a range of reporting styles is equally evident. Therefore, to understand what a self-study might look like requires a consideration of the range of factors that shape the research as well as the nature of the subsequent portrayal that is constructed in order to communicate the findings to others.

Factors that Influence the Nature of Self-study

Despite the fact that there is no specified method for self-study, there is a range of factors that influence how a self-study might be conducted and communicated.

For example, Loughran and Northfield (1998) describe ten features that they see as shaping both a self-study and its subsequent portrayal in response to the purpose and demands of the research and the perceived audience of the report. This section of the chapter examines these factors through examples from the literature.

Self-study Defines the Focus of Study, Not the Way the Study is Carried Out

This feature is characterized by a need to understand the context of a given self-study and to use data gathering approaches that are determined by the study rather than being predefined.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) focused attention on context when they began to make the knowledge of context explicit as they, like many others (see for example, Bauman, 1996) illustrated that context matters because it can not be assumed that simply stating the site of an inquiry, or the main features of a study, will carry sufficient understanding with which others might identify. There may be some elements in common across different “similar” sites, but points of difference are in themselves sufficient to create issues, concerns and questions for others who might be attempting to apply the learning from a given self-study to their own context.

It has been made abundantly clear that teacher educators are practitioners who are continually adapting, adjusting and altering their practice in response to the needs and concerns in *their* context (Richert, 1997; Schuck & Segal, 2002). The same applies to the way in which they interpret and utilize others’ learning in their own work. Hence a thorough understanding of the context in which a study is conducted is important in shaping how teacher educators might construct their own interpretation of others’ results in their own situation. Understanding the context of a given self-study is then important in shaping the perceived relevance – or extent of application – of others’ work to one’s own.

Examples of this contextual factor abound in self-study reports. It is particularly strong in the work of Oda (1998) as she explains how her personal images and memories of growing up as an Asian-American influenced her self-study of teaching about cultural and linguistic diversity. Her explanation of her context becomes an important signpost in informing others involved in similar work about particular views and understandings that emerge in, and shape, her practice. In a very different context, Lomax, Evans and Parker (1998) make clear the issues surrounding their collaborative self-study as teacher educators in terms of both their expectations of themselves and their students as they attempt to make explicit how the experience of action research unfolds with their students. Their context embraces two aspects of their work: working with teachers in action research; and, working with teachers who teach pupils with special needs. Both of these contextual factors need to be clear to the reader as they impact on the nature of the work from both perspectives.

Another aspect of the importance of context and how it shapes a self-study is

in the work of Nicol (1997) and Hoban (1997). Each of these authors build a strong sense of context into their self-studies as they report on their approaches to dealing with what they view as inherent dilemmas in methods teaching in pre-service courses of mathematics and elementary science respectively. The system in which Nicol works in Canada is different to that of Hoban in Australia and so the contextual differences matter in shaping the way their studies progress and are reported. However, because they account for the particular nature of their contexts, a reader who might also be a method lecturer in a pre-service teacher education program is encouraged to see beyond context alone and to abstract the learning from the mathematics and science situations to their own.

All of these examples (above) illustrate the impact of context in different ways. Interestingly though, there is not necessarily a major heading in these reports informing the reader that context is the issue under consideration – although this could also be appropriate. The point is that an understanding of the context is integrated into the report, informing the reader throughout the account in ways that reflect how the study itself is buffeted by the nature of the setting and the associated influencing factors (an excellent example of this point is in the work of Brown, 2002). Through a consideration of context, the relationship with research and the subsequent learning by the researcher is made available in meaningful ways.

The next four aspects of importance to self-study I group together to consider as a whole for they are intertwined in the way they build on each other. These features are:

- the need for an individual to illustrate a commitment to checking data and interpretations with others. “It is through the involvement of others that data and interpretations can be viewed from perspectives other than one’s own and therefore be scrutinized and professionally challenged” (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p. 12);
- the difficulty for individuals in genuinely challenging interpretations of their own experiences. Being personally involved in experiences can limit one’s ability to recognize oneself as a living contradiction and therefore impact the self-study;
- Colleagues are more likely to frame an experience in ways not thought of by the person carrying out the self-study and is, “a natural progression [from the two preceding points] in that the need to work with others broadens the possibilities for validation and clarification as well as reframing” (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p. 13); and,
- Valuable learning outcomes are more likely if self-study is a shared task.

Thematically grouped, these four aspects comprise the challenge to the individual paradox of self-study and encompass the need to seriously pursue alternative perspectives on experience.

Seeking Alternative Perspectives

The term self-study does not universally convey an understanding of a commitment to checking data and interpretations with others, so to the unwary, it is

easy for self-study to be a misleading descriptor. An initial response to the term self-study may well conjure up notions of withdrawn, self-reflective individuals, more concerned for themselves than the world around them. It is not surprising then that, for some, there is unease with the term as a descriptor of their interest and actions, and this very point has been made (Barnes, 1998; Loughran & Northfield, 1998; Munby, 1996). In such cases, the term appears to carry with it constraints or barriers that are not intended but which nonetheless arise. Yet paradoxically, the involvement of others, the checking of data and interpretations is crucial in addressing this very 'egocentric' concern.

Louie *et al.* (2002) highlighted the prime importance of this point and made it abundantly clear as they illustrated how their individual views and interpretations were challenged, buffeted and changed through checking their data – and the subsequent conclusions – with each other. Berry (2001) also illustrated the importance of this aspect of self-study through the manner in which she reflected on her teaching through her journal, but then made these reflections public through the world wide web for feedback from her students. In so doing, she found that her students challenged some of her initial responses to situations as they highlighted different perspectives and interpretations on the same experiences.

Writing a weekly public journal helped me in ways that may not have occurred if the journal had been private. ... In addition to learning from my own writing, students' responses to the journal entries helped me better understand my students' learning and my teaching practice. After one session I wrote that I had been feeling disappointed that I had not handed control of summarising the session over to the students (Open Journal – week 3). Soon after posting this entry, I received an e-mail from a student who described how my summary helped her learning at that point in her development. She helped me to understand the session through her eyes, in a way that I had not previously considered. (Berry, 2001, p. 5)

An extension of this feature of self-study is what Whitehead (1993) terms as being a "living contradiction". When he introduced the phrase to the (then) emerging self-study community, it immediately resonated with others. Being a living contradiction carries with it a recognition that being personally involved in a given situation may in fact negate the ability to apprehend contradictions in one's own practice – it is very difficult to step back from personal experience and examine it in a detached manner. Self-study calls for this stepping back to happen, it is central to the work of self-study. Therefore, being able to illustrate that one does respond to this difficulty is important in demonstrating that self-study is not about simply rationalizing existing behaviors, but honestly examining practice.

Kuzmic (2002) described how he was confronted by his own contradictions in practice only when he 'stepped back' from his work and then came to see that what he was advocating for his students was something that he was unwittingly negating. Through his self-study he learnt how his hopes and aspirations

for his students as teacher researchers were being supplanted by his implicit understandings of his university researcher position – with all the power and dominance that that entailed. He found it hard to see this in himself until he saw it in others; he subsequently came to recognize the same within. Being personally involved in the situation, initially, limited what he could see about himself.

Recognition of this aspect of self-study is also well noted by Hamilton (2002) as she pays particular attention to her position and the privileges she is afforded as a white woman. She considers carefully how her white privilege is, “too often an unseen barrier to social justice that dams the progress that might be made ... As visible change agents, white scholars must ask questions and confront issues that are too easily overlooked in a privileged environment” (Hamilton, 2002, p. 187). Interestingly though, it was not this position of privilege that was the focus of her self-study, yet, perhaps, it was because of this different focus that she was able to see things in herself that caused her to begin to question her position and her actions in relation to her work in teacher education. As a consequence, she makes a clear and unequivocal call for others to begin to see in themselves issues that they might otherwise easily overlook because of who they are and the position of privilege that they are afforded.

This feature of self-study leads to a consideration of the notion of reframing (Schön, 1983). It is not sufficient to simply view a situation from one solitary perspective. Reframing involves seeing the situation through others’ eyes in order to gain alternative perspectives. Hence there is an ongoing need to be able to view the teaching and learning situation from different perspectives. Thus the value of collaboration and the notion that self-study is enhanced when it is a shared adventure.

There are important differences between individual and collaborative self-studies. At the heart of this issue is the argument that reframing is much more difficult from an individual and personal perspective as opposed to acting in collaboration with others. This point stands out most in studies that report on the nature of framing and reframing that was realized through collaboration (for example, Arizona Group, 1996; Maltbie *et al.*, 1996; Cole & McIntyre, 1998; Feldman & Rearick, 1998; Freese, Kosnick & LaBoskey, 2000; Clift *et al.*, 2000). Such studies demonstrate how the link between reframing and collaboration has created new ways of seeing ‘the taken for granted’ and/or opened up new possibilities for the development of understanding. For some, the way of doing this has been through an overt concentration on their students’ understandings and although this issue is considered in much more detail in chapter 5, a brief overview here is warranted.

Listening to Students

Zeichner (1999), Fenstermacher (1997) and Barnes (1998) all noted the importance of the explicit link between self-study and the students of teaching. The S-STEP literature also illustrates that students are crucial as participants and

mirrors for information, feedback and advice (e.g., Hutchinson, 1996; Freese, 1998; Trumbull & Cobb, 2000).

Within the S-STEP literature, students are not simply part of the study; they are also fundamental in shaping and responding to the study, because the purpose of studying one's own practice is often linked to a desire for practice to impact on student learning. Hence students' views, understandings and participation are of more importance than an 'easily accessible' or 'simple data source'; students are fundamental to understandings of practice.

Consider, for example, the work of Russell and Bullock (1999). Bullock, a student in Russell's class, is a source of feedback and data for: framing and reframing; pedagogy; learning; and, evaluation. But how this occurs is far from simple. In their account Russell makes explicit to his students his pedagogical reasoning and risk taking, which includes the highs and the lows of his practice, in order to help them see 'learning about practice in practice' and to therefore hopefully help them to make links with their own teaching experiences. Bullock grasps the opportunities offered by Russell and begins to illustrate how the experiences created for him begin to shape his own practice as he apprehends similar possibilities in his own teaching.

Tom was adept at not giving 'the right answer' ... instead he would ask more questions ... I now realize that he was avoiding the pitfalls associated with ... 'Answerland' – the near-universal tendency of teachers and students to focus on the pursuit of right answers ... He could have just as easily said 'I disagree because ...', but instead he asked me questions that required me to look at deeper issues. I have since explored the notion of interpreting experiences in different ways. (Russell & Bullock, 1999, pp. 138–139)

This (quote) may have been a cue to Russell that his modeling of *My Teaching Is The Message* was perhaps being recognized. However, without a sustained and thoughtful study of his practice and his students' learning, he would surely only be interpreting, or assuming, that what he was attempting to portray was being apprehended by his students. The importance of genuine involvement and collaboration with students in S-STEP is further underlined when Bullock goes on to write,

... 'How we teach is the message'. It is a concept I have taken very much to heart. If I want students to construct an understanding of the world around them, I must create an environment rich in experience. Through questioning, Tom helped me create links between various ideas and philosophies that I was discovering ... and [I was] seeing independently. ... [that I had a] concern about students being active learners as opposed to 'theory sponges'. (Russell & Bullock, p. 140)

The data in this study is rich and strong and together teacher and student examine their learning about teaching and how they came to better understand their teaching and their students' responses to their teaching. They highlight

how developing new and powerful perspectives on practice is intensive and time consuming, but they also make a plea that in sharing their experiences of their research it might help others, "... to take similar risks to overcome the invisible and private nature of most teaching and thinking about teaching" (p. 150).

There are many equally powerful S-STEP reports that include similar attitudes and approaches to including students' perspectives (Freese, 1999; Hoban, 1997; Hutchinson, 1998; LaBoskey, 1997; Nicol, 1997). However, one issue fundamental to all of these studies is that the students are at least as important to the study as the teacher educator. Hence the question is not the usual, "Should students be included in this study?" more so the question is, "How can I include students in ways that will help me (and them) learn more through this study?"

Clearly, students of teaching are the best placed to be critical judges of the day to day experiences 'dished up' in teacher preparation programs. Consequently, students' interpretations, acceptance or rejection of such experiences inevitably influences their personal and collective understandings of the complexity of teaching and learning. And how appropriate, helpful and applicable their own learning about teaching might be to their subsequent practice as teachers, an issue surely at the heart of teacher education. If students of teaching are offered opportunities to be collaborators and sources of feedback in self-study, then their learning might also be enhanced so that they similarly question, and learn through their own experience of practice. Therefore by acknowledging the involvement of students in self-studies, there is a greater likelihood that these students will also be positively influenced in their experiences of teaching and learning – thus enhancing the likelihood of educational change in their own post-teacher education teaching that has long been highly sought and consistently called for in the teacher change and learning literature, yet so rarely achieved (see for example, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Fullan, 1993, 1995, 1999; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Wilson & Berne, 1999). This work of self-study, however, demands confidence as such work is risky business.

Self-confidence and Vulnerability

The sixth aspect pertains to the self-confidence that is so important in conducting a self-study and relates to the need to be comfortable with the sense of vulnerability necessary to genuinely study personal conflicts and the sense of dissonance that is so often the driver for self-study as a professionally rewarding experience. Berry (see section 4 of this Handbook) outlines a number of tensions that she sees as crucial (cognitively and affectively) in influencing the nature of self-study.

In choosing to examine any of these tensions as a focus for one's own research there is an implicit expectation that a real sense of self-confidence would be necessary in order to carry through with the personally challenging and confronting aspects of so doing for the differences between the personal images of one's beliefs and the public images of one's practice must highlight discrepancies. This issue was studied in detail by Kelchtermans (1996) when researching teacher vulnerability whereby he came to articulate the nature of such discrepancies in

terms of two, “interwoven domains: the professional self (a teacher’s conceptions about her/himself as a teacher) and the subjective educational theory (the personal system of a teacher’s knowledge and beliefs about teaching) ... [and he noted that] teachers’ sense of vulnerability [emerge through critical incidents] ... and always provoke emotions of distress, unease, doubt and uncertainty” (p. 308). This makes clear the need for self-confidence to accompany exposing such vulnerability.

For example, there is little doubt that attempting to better understand how one manages the tension of, “making explicit the complexities and messiness of teaching and helping student teachers feel confident to proceed” could call into question one’s perceived ‘expert status’ as a teacher of teachers, consequently any such investigation would inevitably expose one’s own shortcomings, doubts and concerns; an obvious invitation to be confronted by one’s own vulnerability (cf. Berry & Loughran, In Press). The demand that self-study requires self-confidence and unmasks vulnerability is also explained by Hamilton and Pinnegar (2000) through the notion of trustworthiness and the critical role the self-study plays in illuminating this perspective:

Basing a teacher education program on trustworthiness has two main problems. The first between the teacher educator and the future teacher and has to do with our students’ perceptions of us. The second resides in our own integrity ... The larger problem for using trustworthiness as the basis for teacher education lies not in the misjudgment our students might make of us (as their teachers, we already have that vulnerability); more importantly, it is the judgment we must make of ourselves. As teacher educators, are we willing to act with complete integrity? Are we willing to be trustworthy? (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2000, p. 238)

In paying careful attention to the development of self-confidence and ensuring that being vulnerable is not a ‘destructive’ action, there is also a need to respond appropriately to the learning from self-study as it unfolds. This leads to the seventh aspect.

The Outcomes of Self-study Demand Immediate Action

A common aspect of researching teaching about teaching for teacher educators is that new findings and teaching become interwoven (similar to that noted by Baumann (1996) when he was considering the situation for teacher researchers). In teaching there is a sense of the need to act immediately on new possibilities and to adjust one’s teaching in accord with these possibilities. The research focus therefore alters and, as adjustments are made, new insights and possibilities emerge. Hence the intertwining of teaching and researching is such that as one alters so does the other, so the traditional notion of research whereby *holding the problem in place while it is researched* is not so straightforward in self-study. In researching teaching, the problem under investigation develops, shifts and changes in response to the continual shifts in the teaching.

This means that one outcome of teacher educators researching their own practice is that they commonly design and implement new approaches – classroom interventions that are intended to achieve change. These are not always successful, and may be ‘failures’² especially when first tried. An emerging difficulty for teachers then is that, unlike traditional researchers, they have to deal with the consequences of their interventions as part of their daily routine with their class(es). Negative consequences can affect a class for the remainder of the program/course and that is also a matter of concern for teachers concerned with the teaching and learning environment in which they and their students collaborate. This means that research can be a high-risk activity for teachers and can therefore significantly affect their primary role as a teacher and illustrates again why self-confidence and vulnerability impact on self-studies.

Jeppesen (2002) illustrates this point well through her efforts to encourage students to use linking as a learning strategy. Mid-way through her teacher-research project she responded to a particular learning situation (see vignette, overloading students with all this thinking, Jeppesen, 2002, pp. 108–111) in a manner that forced her to be confronted by the consequences of her actions. In this case, her research focus led her to make dramatic (and instantaneous) changes in her teaching practice that rebounded on her research in ways not common in more traditional studies of researching teaching. Being the teacher and the researcher meant that actions in either domain demanded immediate attention and response. This leads to the next important feature of self-study and it is one that hinges on a subtle but crucial differentiation between reflection and self-study.

There are Differences between Self-study and Reflection on Practice

Self-study builds on reflection as the study begins to reshape not just the nature of the reflective processes but also the situation in which these processes are occurring ... reflection is a personal process ... self-study takes these processes and makes them public, thus leading to another set of processes that need to reside outside the individual. (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p. 15)

At the heart of both reflection and self-study is the ‘problem’ that initiates the investigation. Yet, problem in this case is not a negative term, it is, as explained in the next section, linked to the notion of a curious or puzzling situation or dilemma, tension, issue or concern. It is something that causes one to stop and pay more careful attention to a given situation.

Reflection is a thoughtful process, but it is something that largely resides within the individual. Reflection may be indicative of a way in which a teacher might learn and develop professionally, however, self-study pushes the virtues of reflection further. It may build on the work of reflection; it may be an extension of this reflective approach and/or attitude to learning about practice, because self-study demands that the knowledge and understanding derived be communicated (and as has become clear in the literature, this occurs in a variety of ways),

so that it might be challenged, extended, transformed and translated by others. And, this is due to the fact that a defining feature of self-study is that it is available for such public critique and dissemination, rather than solely residing in the mind of an individual. The next aspect is one that develops as a result of the focus of self-study and sits comfortably within the 'researching practice' traditions.

Dilemmas, Tensions and Disappointments Tend to Dominate Data Gathering in Self-study

As experienced teacher researchers have consistently noted (see for example Boyle, 2002; Berry & Milroy, 2002; Mitchell, 2002; Mitchell & Mitchell, 1997), it is not so much "that which works well" that attracts the researcher's attention as that which does not work as anticipated. Hence, "successes tend to be glossed over in an almost 'to be expected' fashion as the mind focuses on the unexpected and the unexplained ... constant attention to apparent 'failures' is demanding and somewhat unrepresentative of the total situation being experienced" (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p. 15).

The normally helpful notion of the "research question" might, in many self-studies, be better described as a dilemma, contradiction or tension derived from or created through particular approaches or expectations of practice. In some instances these dilemmas, tensions or contradictions might be framed in terms of the Whitehead (1993) questions, "How do I help my students to learn better" or "When/why am I being a living contradiction". As such, self-study may be an attempt to better understand how to manage the dilemma (as a dilemma itself is something that is continually problematic), rather than a search for *the correct* response to a specific question.

This way of viewing the problem is similar to that described by Shulman (1992) and Mitchell and Mitchell (1997) in their extensive work in the development of cases. Their studies highlight how the nature of *what it is that is being investigated* is qualitatively different when the practitioner defines the problem rather than the problem being introduced/imposed by an external observer whose own work is at a distance from the practitioner.

This point is illustrated well by Clandinnin (1995) whereby her dilemma centered on coming to recognize and understand her story of, and therefore consequent approach to, becoming a teacher educator.

As a student in my teacher education class, I was a student character in what we call the sacred theory-practice story. I was there to be filled with theory that I could then apply to my teaching practice ... my unnamed dilemma, however, was that I knew I needed to be judged as adequate ... by the university teachers. So even as I recognized the inauthentic nature of the sacred story, I needed to live and tell a 'cover story' that would convince my university teachers that I both knew enough theory and could apply it well enough in practice. ... Dissatisfied and uncertain about the constraints of what I can now name as the sacred story, the alternative

[teacher education] program offered new possibilities [as] ... we attempted to live out a new plot line, one that would be a competing story to the plot line of the sacred story. (Clandinnin, 1995, pp. 28–29)

Through being dissatisfied Clandinnin came to frame that which created/encouraged this sense of unease or discomfort. And, because teacher educators commonly focus on the big picture in teaching and learning situations, examination of a dilemma or contradiction in practice carries with it different expectations and demands to traditional research. Therefore, investigating features of being a living contradiction and seeking to better understand the complexity of teaching and learning influence self-study in ways that a more traditional approach to the research question may not so readily encapsulate. This is not to denigrate a more traditional approach but rather to highlight that recognizing the difference has as much to do with what is being studied as it has with the purpose for that study; examining a tension, dilemma or contradiction then leads to a different form of research question and different conceptualization of a research program.

One way of considering this element of self-study is through the work of Bullough (1997). He offers rich detail in explaining the factors that have shaped his development as a teacher educator as he grapples with the question, “Why do I teach teachers as I do?” He explains how his principles of practice have been influenced, “Through seeking an active conversation between private and public theory, played out in my classroom, I have come to behold teacher education more richly and more fully, albeit still only partially” (p. 20). Therefore an answer for Bullough is not confined to the question, “Why do I teach teachers as I do?” Rather, his answer is enmeshed in his ways of examining his practice and his students’ learning as well as in ways that foster a recognition of his framework of principles of practice largely derived from seeking to develop an understanding of the big picture of his practice.

In his discerning overview of his own practice, Bullough does not appear to seek solutions to his questions, rather he hopes to explore them with his students so that such examination might shed light on how his principles of practice are enacted – as they are continually being tested and challenged in their teaching and learning situations. This approach could well be described as an ongoing filter for instances of being a living contradiction, and importantly, is an illustration of a search for meaning rather than a search for a solution to a given problem (Bullough & Gitlin’s (1995, 2001) collaborative work illustrates how these ideas can also be pursued to shape teacher preparation programs more generally).

The final aspect that appears crucial in influencing the nature of self-study is the audience for whom the report is intended.

The Importance of the Audience in Shaping the Nature of Self-study Reports

There is little doubt that, “If self-study is to move beyond the individual, it needs to resonate with others in similar situations. Therefore, the way self-study is

reported is important in helping to make the findings clear and meaningful to others” (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, pp. 15–16).

There have been ongoing calls for the evidence on which the assertions, knowledge and conclusions from self-studies are based to be to the fore in S-STEP reports (Whitehead, 1994, 1995; Munby & Russell, 1995; Allender & Whitehead, 2000) and what the call for evidence generally highlights is the diverse nature of the data used in self-studies. For some, this has created tension; for others, it has been liberating in opening their eyes to what counts as data and how such data might be reported. Much of the argument about evidence is embodied in questioning, “Who is the self-study for and what is the intended audience for the report?” In viewing the argument this way, Barnes (1998) in reviewing the first CASTLE conference noted:

On the one hand, there was reflective investigation of one’s own teaching, often highly informal. On the other, was a version of self-study that approached formal research with all the priorities and concerns that implies. The difference appeared to be related to the different audiences to whom the self-study was to be addressed. When the reflective investigation of a course was solely intended to enlighten those who were teaching it, there could be an emphasis upon openness. ... Such studies could be systematic and based upon collected material. Since everyone concerned had been involved in its collection and interpretation, its validity could be assumed ... in contrast ... once self-study becomes public, once it is involved with the micro-politics of status and power in academia, then the validity of its methods, its evidence and its interpretive arguments become extremely important ... [those] papers that fell into this category were profoundly concerned with validity and persuasiveness and the standing of their studies in the institutions where they worked. (Barnes, 1998, p. x)

As Barnes suggests, a self-study designed for oneself (e.g., Hamilton, 1995; Pinnegar, 1995) will carry different expectations of evidence and acceptability of data, than will a self-study intended for teacher educators considering their teaching approaches together (e.g., Schuck & Segal, 2000; LaBoskey & Henderson, 2000; Louie *et al.*, 2000) or indeed a self-study that focuses on an educational institution and its practices (Myers, 1995, 2000; Russell, 2000). However, it may not be so much that the need for the type of data changes with the expectations of the study, but, that although a diversity of data are always available, the relative importance of some data is highlighted over others in particular settings and for particular audiences.

For example, *Mindscapes* (Cole, Elijah, Finley, & Knowles, 1994) was a collaborative self-study whereby analysis of data became the basis for the ‘script’ of the performance that became the public reporting of these participants’ learning through self-study. Performance has also been important in reporting self-studies such as those by Austin *et al.* (1996, 1999), Cole and McIntyre (1998), Mitchell and Weber (2000) and Weber and Mitchell (2002). In these cases, the

performance was purposely organized so that the audience would be further engaged in discussion and debate about the nature of the particular self-study. And, it would seem fair to assert, that through performance, that which is being represented offers new ways of accessing thoughts, ideas, actions and feelings in ways that are not possible when they are simply displayed as text on a page. Performance then is an attempt to offer a lived example of the “practice what you preach”, or the “walk the talk” expectation central to many self-studies as the form of representation adopted is explicitly chosen in an attempt to better reflect the nature of the study itself. Performance then is an extension of the learning from self-study for both the author(s) and the audience.

The interplay of the inquiry, its value, and form of representation, inevitably impact on whether or not a self-study will speak to those envisaged as its audience. As is the case with all research, the audience is the final arbiter of the integrity of the work and is an increasingly strong determinant in shaping the manner in which self-studies are portrayed for others. Audience is also important in terms of community, whereby many of those involved in S-STEP see themselves as working together to be a positive influence in their field of endeavor – teaching and learning about teaching.

The S-STEP community itself is an important audience and it serves a number of functions. Community offers support in encouraging the examination of the work of teachers and teacher educators while simultaneously creating an informed audience for critique and modeling (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). Through developing an S-STEP community and capitalizing on the collective intellectual assets available, there are immediate opportunities and forums for sharing experiences and developing understanding of self-study.

As has become obvious, and expected, through the CASTLE conferences, this community also offers an environment in which the audience encourages approaches to teaching and learning about teaching through risk-taking as well as honest sharing of teaching and researching successes and failures in teacher education, each of these being pushed further by an explicit call to present reports in new and engaging ways and in ways that are more congruent with the self-study itself. A community also offers valuable support through networking and linking to other teachers, teacher educators and teacher education programs and approaches. This broadens participants’ access to, and understanding across, diverse fields of academic endeavor.

Finally, community also offers extensive possibilities for mentoring and modeling that can help with one issue that has often created confusion, anxiety, tension and distress in the academy – tenure and the challenge to develop, and have accepted, one’s scholarship. This issue was one of the original catalysts for the development of the S-STEP SIG and the community that has subsequently developed has done so in ways that purposefully attempt to move beyond the sometimes singular, isolated and unduly competitive nature of academia by placing a high priority on people.

Overview

Generally then, self-studies of teaching and teacher education practices tend to be recognized more by the manner in which they respond to these features and the underlying purpose which initiates the study, rather than by a particular method or context, despite the fact that an early contentious issue surrounding S-STEP was related to method. However, as has become increasingly clear, questions pertaining to method might equally be asked of any form of research so that answering questions such as: “Does the method employed actually help to shed light on the problem being examined?” and “Is the method used able to uncover data that is valid and convincing for others?”, is, in terms of method, what matters most. It is then perhaps more helpful to consider questions related to “the method of self-study” in terms of Cole and Knowles’ (1996) expectation that concrete and public ways of sharing self-studies must be employed in order that such research will be accessible and transparent to others; how that happens is a matter of academic choice.

Conclusion

Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) highlighted the importance of the individual or the ‘self’ in research on practice and the shift in the research focus (over the previous two decades) from studying teaching at a distance to trying to understand how teachers defined their own work. This shift in focus, they argued, was important because the knowledge of teachers (which is largely untapped) is an important source of insights for the improvement of teaching. The same clearly applies to self-study, as the knowledge that might be made available through such research is of immediate importance in informing other educationalists not only about teaching, but also teaching about teaching and, learning about teaching.

As this focus on those involved in teaching has intensified, so too has the growing interest in self-study as the participants in teaching and teacher education have espoused their desire to do more than just deliver a subject, course or program. Self-study then is an academic activity that is responsive to these individuals’ desire to better understand the nature of teaching and teaching about teaching and in so doing, improve the quality of teacher education. Self-study of teacher education practices can be perceived as offering both an invitation and a challenge for teachers and teacher educators. The invitation involves using self-study to better understand one’s own practice and, from the learning through this, to influence the very nature of teaching and teacher education programs. The challenge is for self-study to demonstrate rigorous, valid and meaningful responses to this invitation that enhance our understanding of the complex worlds of teaching and teacher education. Zeichner (1999) showed little doubt about his view of the response to this challenge when he noted that:

Contrary to the frequent image of the writings of teacher educators in the

wider educational research community as shallow, under-theorized, self-promotional, and inconsequential, much of this work has provided a deep and critical look at practices and structures in teacher education. ... This disciplined and systematic inquiry into one's own teaching practice provides a model for prospective teachers of the kind of inquiry that more and more teacher educators are hoping their students employ. (Zeichner, 1999, p. 11)

Self-study allows teachers and teacher educators to maintain a focus on their teaching and their students' learning – both high priorities. At the same time, self-study also offers opportunities to improve teacher education through an application of the learning about teaching practice. However, just because self-study may be seductive to many teachers and teacher educators there is no suggestion that the nature of such work should be unquestioningly accepted. There is a constant need to examine what is being done, how and why, in order to further our understanding of the field and to foster development in critical and useful ways so that the learning through self-study might be informative, accessible and useable for others.

In teaching and teacher education, for numerous reasons, there has been a long history of research that has had little influence on practice. One reason often cited by teachers themselves is that much of the research from the 'Ivory Tower' has little to say to them as the end users of such research. However, when these 'end users' of research shape the focus of inquiry and, conduct the inquiry, then research has an immediate value to them.

As I trust this chapter has made clear, for those involved in self-study, the focus of such study matters and, the subsequent research is inevitably directly applicable and valuable in their work – otherwise there would be little point in pursuing it. Through an exploration of the context and history of self-study the hope is that it will be informative, useful and applicable to those who might also be encouraged to 'make a difference' in teaching and teacher education.

Notes

1. An example of the type of work that was a precursor to the formalization of S-STEP is that of Diane Holt-Reynolds. One of her papers (published in AERJ in 1992 and reprinted with permission as an appendix at the end of section one of this Handbook) highlights the types of issues, concerns and research in teaching and learning about teaching that were influential in shaping a growing understanding of the need and value of self-study. Diane was a founding member of S-STEP whose work was particularly influential in the field of personal history, beliefs and practices in teaching about teaching.
2. Failure in this case refers to the fact that what was being implemented did not work 'as planned'. In light of the development of understanding of teaching through risk taking and learning from experience, failure is in fact an aid to the learning and understanding of pedagogy so that as Dewey (1933) describes it, "... failure is not mere failure. It is instructive" (p. 114). Therefore, failure is an important learning event in teacher research.

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