

Chapter Two Reforming Teacher Education through Self-Study

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In this chapter we provide an overview of the general nature and purposes of self-study research and work, its current role and status in the academy, and its emerging role and status in the teacher education community. In so doing we hope to characterize the self study of teacher education practices as a vehicle for teacher education reform, and offer some ideas on how those involved in self-study work might advance the reform agenda through a course of individual and collective action.

We organize the chapter with a series of questions: What is self study of teacher education practice? What is the broad intention of those who engage in self study of teacher education practices? What concerns do self-study researcher-practitioners have about engaging in such work? What are the reasons for and bases of these concerns? How is the status quo challenged by self study? And, how and why is self-study "research"? We conclude with a discussion of the role of self study in teacher education reform and a call for community action to promote self study as a powerful reform mechanism.

The Nature and Intention of Self Study of Teacher Education Practice

What is self study of teacher education practice? What is the broad

intention of those who engage in self study of teacher education practices? Although the self study of teacher education practices takes many forms, broadly speaking it has two main purposes. Teacher educators, many of whom were classroom teachers prior to entering the academy as university-based educators, engage in self study both for purposes of their own personal-professional development and for broader purposes of enhanced understanding of teacher education practices, processes, programs, and contexts.

Sometimes both of these purposes are made explicit in self-study work; sometimes one is implicit in the other. The purposes are not mutually exclusive. The former purpose typically has a largely practical (often pedagogical) focus and is usually self-oriented in that the general aim relates to the ongoing improvement of one's own (pedagogical) practice. The latter purpose has a broader aim more generally related to the production and advancement of knowledge about teacher education practices and the programs and contexts within which they are situated. Both purposes have to do with refining, reforming, and rearticulating teacher education.

Self study for purposes of self understanding and professional development is essentially being thoughtful—in a Deweyan sense—about one's work. It is reflective inquiry, similar to that widely advocated for teachers. As a form of professional development, self study is inherently valid and defensible as a sound (pedagogical) professional practice. Its practice has obvious inherent benefits for learners as well as for teachers, and within academic contexts where progressive teaching is valued, so too are those who engage in self study.

As a form of research (that is, a process aimed at the production and advancement of knowledge), however, self study is less well accepted in the academy both because of its recent inception and, more significant, because it represents a challenge to the status quo of what counts as research and knowledge. Teacher educators who engage in self study of teacher education practices need to be aware of their vulnerable and marginal status within the academy.

Concerns about Self Study

What concerns might self-study researcher-practitioners have about

engaging in such work? What are the reasons for and bases of teacher educators' concerns about engaging in self study? Concerns about institutional responses to self study are rooted mainly in issues associated with tenure and promotion, since most of those engaged in self-study research do not have full rank and status security. For others, concerns may relate to marginalization or isolation.

The reward structure of the academy is straightforward and, for the most part, universal. Publications are most meritorious; the more the better, of a particular perspective, style, or genre, and in prestigious refereed journals. Getting self-study work published in most education journals is a challenge. Those who have had self-study work (or other reflexive accounts) reviewed for publication by unsympathetic peers can attest to the conserving nature of the review and publication process. Characterizations such as "narcissistic," "self-indulgent," "egocentric," and "solipsistic" are often used to describe self-study work.

In many presented and published accounts, and even moreso in informal conversations, self-study researchers themselves voice concerns about the perceived legitimacy or validity of their work within the context of the academy. For example, in a reflection on a self study of his teaching, Hugh Munby (1996) wonders, "While I welcome the impact the self study had on me, I have to question its value for others: 'Why would anyone be interested in what I experienced?'" and, further to that, he questions whether his self study and, by extension, others' can be considered valid research (p. 65). In an earlier publication we commented on the professional development merits for us of our self-study work but raised questions about how that work might be perceived by our respective institutions.

From a pedagogical standpoint, and based on our beliefs about the importance of understanding ourselves as persons and professionals in the contexts within which we live and work, there is no question that we need to continue to commit ourselves and our time to self-study work.... What we do not yet know, however, is whether our [research] currency of self-study has a sufficiently high exchange value. In other words, in the eyes of institutional evaluations and assessments: Are the publications viewed by those who work with us as contributing to the institution and field? Is this work published in "the best" journals? Do funding

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agencies have sufficient interest in the kind of work we do? How does it contribute to work within the local institutional context? Will it contribute to "institutional recognition"—elevated status for the employing body? (Cole & Knowles, 1995, p. 148)

As it turned out, our respective institutions at that time did indeed attach very different value to self-study work.

In the epilogue of *Teachers Who Teach Teachers*, Tom Russell and Fred Korthagen (1995) comment on the historical tensions and dilemmas—which we would say still exist—associated with attempts to challenge the traditions of the academy. They assert that survival, for those who engage in alternative forms of research and practice including self study, depends on individuals' abilities to keep hidden their non-traditional beliefs and practices and show a traditional face to the academic public.

A failure to live with this split-personality syndrome was, and still is, punished by expulsion from academia-tenure positions generally open only to staff members with a sufficiently long list of publications in the field's traditional journals, which generally support the old research paradigm. Moreover, the academic world has other means to safeguard its dominant paradigms; publications that are regarded as out of the mainstream are often just not cited [or reviewed favorably] by the veterans in teacher education. (Russell & Korthagen, 1995, pp. 188-189)

The punishment of "expulsion from academia-tenure positions" is a practice with a long history, and the espoused grounds for such action generally relate to the individual's demonstrated competence in carrying out professorial responsibilities or the individual's "fit" with the institution's values, mission, or mandate. The real grounds for denial of tenure are seldom made public and are likely known only to the one or more individuals responsible for the decision. Despite the meticulously defined procedures and requirements articulated by some institutions, two points about the tenure system are well known: that if an individual is not wanted in the institution, a way will be found to deny that individual tenure regardless of the strength of his or her tenure case; and, that the tenure review process is one of the academy's great mysteries. The tenure system, instituted to protect academic freedom, also works counter to that intention for pre-

tenure faculty. As W.G. Tierney and E.M. Bensimon (1996) observe,

If one of the reasons for the creation of tenure was to protect faculty so that they could engage in intellectual battle without fear of reprisal, then that purpose has been lost.... If a faculty member does not walk the ideological line, he or she will be at risk of not attaining promotion and tenure. (p. 8)

When the topic of tenure denials is raised in informal conversations among academics, it is only a matter of minutes before collective remembering produces a lengthy list of names of prominent and not so prominent scholars, who Tierney and Bensimon might call "radical riff-raffs purged by their universities." Given the profile and reputation of many of these scholars and the perspectives they reflect, there is little doubt about the real, though not necessarily stated, grounds for their dismissals. In some way—ideological, personal, or political—they represented a threat and challenge to the status quo of the institution and were not content to play the split-personality game.

Many academics have openly engaged in research and practices counter to the dominant discourse of the institution and have successfully achieved tenure and the protection of academic freedom, among them are those who engage in self study. We suggest, however, that because the self study of teacher education practices represents a challenge to the status quo, those who engage in self-study work might also be considered "radical riff-raff." The following two examples are cases in point.

Gary Knowles, who described himself in a recent interview as "someone who challenged the status quo and came off second best" (see Chapter 18), was recently denied tenure at a high profile research university in the United States of America. We cite a passage from that interview.

[Gary]: ...For the most part it seems, the [negative tenure] decision rested on an assessment of my scholarship.... Also, given that a good part of my scholarship was directly related to my responsibilities as a teacher [educator] (parentheses in original), and some of it was "self study," it's my guess that those of the committee who were very traditional researchers had difficulty with the practical orientation of much of my work.

Although the "real" reasons for the tenure decision will never be known to anyone but the committee members who made it, we surmise

without a great deal of risk that the decision rested in Gary's blatant insistence to "be true to himself," "to look in the mirror each day and say that I haven't sold out in order to obtain some level of professional security and intellectual freedom." He was unwilling to play the split-personality game, and he was punished by expulsion.

Another example is provided by Jack Whitehead, who is at the University of Bath in the United Kingdom. Jack is well known within the self study of teacher education practices community for his notion of "living educational theory" which presents a challenge to teacher educators to understand the educational theories and values they practice and to make themselves accountable to themselves and their students. To many teacher educators, and especially those committed to self study, this is not an outrageous viewpoint by any means; interestingly but not surprisingly, it is also very close in spirit and intent to Gary's position. To the status quo of the academy, however, Jack's ideas were seen as "disturb[ing] of the good order and morale of the School of Education" (Whitehead, 1994, p. 5).

Beginning in the 1970s, Jack's attempts to challenge the traditions of the university by freely expressing the values that constitute his educational relationships were met with abject rejection: failures of his two PhD dissertation submissions, and a threat to terminate his employment. As is indicated in a letter from the University Council from which Jack quotes, several years later he was punished once again for his writing and education activities: "Your activities and writings are a challenge to the present and proper organization of the University and are not consistent with the duties the University wish you to pursue in teaching and research" (p. 6).

Hence, while engaging in self-study research may seem like an innocent and well meaning endeavor, it is not necessarily perceived as such by the governing forces of the academy. There are, at present, many snares for the unwary.

Self-Study and the Status Quo Perspective of the Academy

How is the status quo challenged by self-study research? In conservative-minded institutions value is attached to those individuals who uphold

through their work the dominant ideology of the institution. By and large, this means that research should follow the scientific doctrines of positivism and meet criteria of objectivity, measurement and quantification, predictability, and generalizability, and be presented in relatively detached, impersonal ways. Self-study research is antithetical to all of these principles. Although multiple means of representation are possible and are used, in general self-study research is personal, subjective, practically-oriented, qualitative in nature, and usually creatively communicated in narrative form.

Self-study research, by its "up-close and personal" nature, renders both individuals who conduct it and their affiliated institutions vulnerable and accountable. Self-study researchers lay bare for public scrutiny aspects of themselves, their practices, and their institutions. This effectively disarms the safety features that render academic institutions, and those within them, untouchable. It razes to ground level the ivory tower. It enables the commoners to peek inside.

It has been only in the last decade that the teacher education professoriate has been the subject of any significant amount of research reported in the teacher education literature. And until recently most of these reports were traditionally-oriented examinations of the professoriate, its responsibilities and roles, and its problems. Reports on self study of teacher education practices are an even more recent occurrence and, relatively speaking, literature on the topic is scant. But over the past few years the self study of teacher education practices has begun to acquire a scholarly and organizational presence in the teacher education community. Publications such as *Teachers Who Teach Teachers* (Russell & Korthagen, 1995) and *Learning about Teaching* (Loughran & Russell, 1997), two special issues of *Teacher Education Quarterly*: "Self-Study and Living Educational Theory" (Pinnegar & Russell, 1995) and "Beginning Professors and Teacher Education Reform" (Knowles & Cole, 1996), and the recently published, though with limited distribution, *Empowering Our Future: Conference Proceedings of the First International Conference on Self Study of Teacher Education Practices* (Richards & Russell, 1996) are substantial volumes on the topic. They are preceded and followed by numerous other journal articles by a variety of authors in the area. Thus,

self study has achieved a presence as a bona fide process and topic of interest and focus in the teacher education community. Within the context of the academy, however, self study is still very much an alternative form of research and practice. It represents a challenge to the status quo and it is as yet a marginalized activity.

Publicized research that is both personal and practical in its orientation not only endangers the reputation of the academy but also is, by virtue of its very nature, part of a political agenda to challenge traditional conceptions of what count as knowledge and research. It is not in the best interests of the academy (and those who align themselves with the academy) to support such an agenda. Self-study work that is true to its nature and spirit leaves no holds barred, no processes sanctioned, and no topic sacred.

In addition, self-study researchers' vulnerability might be further explained by their status within the academy. Typically, those engaged in self study are teacher educators committed to teaching, the teaching profession, and teacher education reform. As such, they already are self-identified marginals and typically do not hold positions of power within the academy. Edward R. Ducharme (1993) indicates that many faculty in education and other disciplines who are involved in the preparation of teachers choose not to identify themselves as teacher educators, most likely because of the low status of teacher education in the academy. It is no secret that schools of education are one of the least powerful members of the academic community. Hence, self-study researchers remain a marginalized group challenged to demonstrate how their self-study work counts as research.

Self Study as Research for Teachers and Teacher Educators

How and why is self-study research? In many ways self-study researchers vying for legitimacy in the academy face challenges similar to those met by qualitative educational researchers over the past couple of decades. In essence, self-study research is qualitative research focused inward. It primarily utilizes the characteristic qualitative research tools of observation, interview, and artifact collection, although clearly with different kinds of goals and emphases. And it adheres to the same

standards of rigor as qualitative research. Given how qualitative research has gained in status, there is hope for a similar outcome for self-study research. But, of course, unless self-study processes are applied more widely, such as in the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and the like, chances are that this progression of acceptance will not happen with the same potency nor at the same pace.

A parallel can be drawn between self study of teacher education practices research and the teacher research movement. In effect, self study of teacher education practices is a form of action research, the hallmark of the teacher research movement. By extension, we might think it would be deemed the same kind of acceptability (although it must be noted that action research also has a long history of contentious struggle in the academy). The action research and teacher research movement have very successfully fought for the legitimacy of teacher research. And, in the struggle, the political stance of the movement as an epistemological challenge to the status quo conception of both knowledge and research have been made explicit. Joe L. Kincheloe notes:

The critically-grounded teacher-as-researcher movement is designed to provide teachers with the analytical tools to overcome...conservative and liberal blindness. Researching teachers would possess the ability to challenge the culture of positivism, exposing the origins of many of the constraints which obstruct their ability to implement educational strategies that respond to the experiences and lived worlds of students from all backgrounds. (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 65-66)

But while there are obvious similarities between teacher research and teacher educator research, which in theory suggest a similar kind of acceptance, in practice acceptance is curtailed by a major contextual distinction.

It can be argued that the success of teacher research being accepted as bona fide research is conditional, and the condition relates to the traditional hierarchical relationship between schools—as sites of practice—and universities—as sites of theory. Even though the teacher research movement was successful in removing total control over educational research and theory development (especially as it pertains to the improvement of classroom practice) from those socially and traditionally sanc-

tioned as academic experts, the hierarchy of status still applies.

Kincheloe observes, "Even after their involvement in educational action research teachers are reluctant to say that they really did research; even if they admit to having done research they maintain that it was unscholarly or of low quality" (Kincheloe, 1991. p. 18). "Real" research is carried out by "real" researchers—experts from the academy: Examine any teacher action research periodical and it is clear that authorship by members of the academy still predominates. And, as John Elliott (1989) reminds us, action research already has been co-opted by educational managers and policy makers (and we would add academics) who have and apply a technocratic agenda. Thus, in a very real sense, action research has yet to meet with wide acceptance in the academy. Especially questionable is that work which obviously incorporates a socio-political agenda.

What would happen, then, if researchers in the academy were sanctioned by their institutions and the broader academic community to throw off their "expert" mantles and act like ordinary, curious people with practically-oriented questions, including questions that might challenge "the system"? How could universities hold onto their status as elite societal institutions?

Even if self-study research "measures up" according to criteria used to judge qualitative research in general or action research in particular, it is not likely to be readily sanctioned by the academy—not because it is methodologically flawed but because it is epistemologically and politically "flawed." Thus, the more important question is not about how or whether self study is research, but rather how it can be openly practiced by teacher educators without fear of reprisal from the academic community.

Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices and Teacher Education Reform

Self-study researchers are individually and collectively committed to teacher education reform. As Karen Guilfoyle, Mary Lynn Hamilton, Stefinee Pinnegar, and Margaret Placier (1995) observe:

We study our own practices.... Whatever we want our students to do in their own practices—study and reflect, use innovative pedagogy, be a

change agent—we ask of ourselves.... Our practices as teacher educators re-create and redefine teacher education.... They have the most potential to help us understand what it means to teach, to teach teachers, and to gradually re-create education practices. (p. 53)

Action research or teacher research is noted for its reformatory purpose and power; yet, we know that reform is a slow and uphill struggle. The self study of teacher education practices movement has the same kind of potential for substantive and systemic reform of teacher education.

Whitehead (1995) suggests that through self study teacher educators can help to transform what counts as educational knowledge and educational theory in the academy. While we agree that individual and local change efforts often have greater impact than systemic top-down measures, it seems to us that in order for the power of self study as a reform mechanism to be realized, collective will and action are required. The struggle for legitimacy in the academy is a political struggle. And, as in other political struggles, organization and solidarity are key.

To conclude, we offer several practical ideas for moving forward with self-study research. In so doing we do not intend to define or map out the scope of self-study work, but, rather, to frame and propel individual and collective action. The ideas are listed in three clusters: research and publishing; community building, and political action.

Research and Publishing

To promote self-study research, researchers could endeavor to:

- ◆ Take care to explicate goals, intentions, and processes of individual and collective self-study work so that appropriate appraisals can be made about the value of such work;
- ◆ Work toward maintaining the integrity of self-study research through explicit adherence to methodological standards (broadly defined);
- ◆ Make clear the epistemological and methodological issues associated with self-study work by focusing on its unique strengths

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rather than on its dichotomous relationship with more traditional research approaches;

- ◆ Focus self-study work on issues/matters/processes/problems that also have value to others, and make explicit how self-study work contributes to the broader understanding (and reform) of teacher education.

Community Building

To further develop and extend our organizational presence self-study researchers could strive to:

- ◆ Continue "community building" activities such as meetings, conferences, newsletters, electronic mail networking;
- ◆ Maintain and build on the various networking efforts already established by self-study researchers so that those who are at the boundaries of self-study and more traditional research practices can enter the conversations;
- ◆ Facilitate the work of colleagues and graduate students who wish to initiate their own self-study research and, if appropriate, join with them in collaborative self-study work;
- ◆ Work towards establishing "centers" of self study in local institutional contexts.

Political Action

To effect more thoughtful and sustained responses to self study:

- ◆ Engage other faculty and administrators in conversations about the integral value and place of self study in ongoing professional, program, and institutional health and development;
- ◆ Make self-study processes (and work) a central component of ongoing course, teaching, and program evaluation;
- ◆ Increase the scope of activities of self-study work by writing

for "popular" audiences as well as scholarly and professional ones;

- ◆ Become part of publishing, tenure and promotion, and grant agency decision-making groups where and when possible;

- ◆ Become politically savvy, active, and expressive with regard to focused energies on academy and school reform through self study.

And, finally, to sustain focus and overall purpose it is important for each of us engaged in self-study work to:

- ◆ Acknowledge that individual self-study activities are part of a larger teacher education reform movement.

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