

EDITORIAL



Improving Teacher Education through the Self-Study of Practice

Volume 5 of the *International Encyclopedia of Education, Fourth Edition*, edited by Tierney, Tierney et al. (2023), includes two chapters on the self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP). This volume, *Teachers' Lives, Work and Professional Education*, also contains five other chapters by authors who have made significant contributions to the self-study community. This form of recognition reflects the impact of self-study in teacher education and beyond and its continuing growth as an inquiry approach.

The first self-study chapter, 'Improving Teacher Education through the Self-Study of Practice' by Julian Kitchen (2023), considers the development of self-study from its inception to the present:

The self-study of practice has established itself as a robust approach to teacher education. The field was established in 1993 by teacher educators ... This chapter, which builds on Tom Russell's (2010) overview of self-study in the third edition of this encyclopedia, focusses primarily on how self-study aims to improve preservice teacher education practices. (p. 488)

He concludes:

The ongoing work of S-STEP as a community of practice and scholarship dedicated to studying and improving teacher education practices is worthy of acknowledgement. Its development as a methodology and its considerable body of published work merits celebration. At the same time, we need to take stock of the ways in which we as a self-study community can work towards improving education practice *and* programs at all levels—teaching, teacher education, community-based, and higher education. (p. 494)

In the second, 'Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices: The Complex Challenges of Learning from Experience,' Russell and Fuentealba (2023) invite researchers to:

self-study of teacher education practices from the perspective of two teacher educators who have engaged in a long-term critical friendship between Chile and Canada. The authors describe their own progressions from novice to practitioner of self-study, including both changing their assumptions (reframing) and changing their personal teaching practices (repracticing). Their mutual critical friendship is analyzed as a way to emphasize the value of sharing self-studies conducted simultaneously in different contexts. Data tables are provided in both Spanish and English. Emphasis is placed on sharing and critiquing what we learn from personal experience. (p. 458)

This editorial makes connections between Kitchen's framing of self-study and the six articles in this issue of *Studying Teacher Education*.

In S-STEP, Kitchen notes, 'the *self* is engaged and directing the *study*' (p. 489) and is, in Martin and Russell's (2020) words 'investing time in the context of professional action; learning from experience demands reflection-in-action as an alternative frame of reference for personal learning' (p. 1059). Rebecca Buchanan and Evan Mooney, as experienced teacher educators who have explored 'frustration in their practice', shift their

attention in their article to ‘moments of success’ in, ‘Unpacking Moments of Success in Teacher Education: Discovery of Nuance through Collaborative Self-Study.’ By probing deeply into each other’s practice through rigorously collected data, they ‘uncovered convergences and divergences in [their] practices that were previously hidden.’ This led them to examine the value of their ‘gut feelings’ and developing more nuanced understandings of their practice and the collaborative process. They demonstrate that self-study is ‘a meaningful way for uncovering important facets of the knowledge of practice’ as it helps teacher educators ‘capture, unpack and portray and the complexities of teaching and learning about teaching in ways that might lead to deeper understandings of practice’ (Loughran, 2005, p. 13).

S-STEP as a methodological approach, Kitchen argues, is open to employing a wide range of methods to examine the research questions asked. Self-study is characterized by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) as a ‘mongrel’ as ‘the study is always of practice, but at the intersection of self and other and its methods are borrowed’ (p. 15). Today, this ‘hybridity’ (Fletcher, 2020, p. 270) continues to define self-study. This receptivity to art-based approaches is evident in the blackout poetry employed Mangala Jawaheer in ‘A Self-Study of My Parallel Journey of Unlearning and Relearning from using Blackout Poetry in a Literature Didactics Module.’ This arts-based self-study, set in a TESOL context in Mauritius, ‘emanated from a critical incident during the COVID pandemic when [she] used blackout poetry during an online synchronous session with in-service teachers.’ Blackout poetry is combined with ‘dialogic discussion with the in-service teachers who served as critical friends’ in a methodological approach that balances hybridity and creativity with academic rigor (LaBoskey, 2004) to demonstrate poetic inquiry and practices lead to teaching that is respectful of and attuned to the experiences of adult learners.

Interactivity is critical to self-study design, Kitchen observes, quoting LaBoskey’s (2004) seminal work on methodological rigor. The most common means of achieving interactivity is through collaboration with others in critical friendships characterized by practitioners interacting personally and professionally to make sense of individual or shared experiences as revealed in research data and analysis. In ‘Using Collaborative Self-Study to Examine Writing Teacher Educators’ Career Continuums,’ a team of four writing teacher educators served as critical friends in each other’s exploration of developing scholarly expertise and enacting their identities as writing teacher educators. Joy Myers, Danielle Defauw, Jenn Sanders and Sarah Donovan’s data analysis revealed three common themes related to ‘developing writer identities across the lifespan, exploring problems of practice within writer teacher educator learning communities, and expanding possibilities of writing teacher educator practice to broader spaces.’ Their conclusion is a testament to self-study as a professional development process: ‘Making a choice to engage in collaborative self-study allows teacher educators to incorporate reflective inquiry into one’s regular body of scholarship.’

While many S-STEP articles focus on teacher educator identity, Kitchen observes that many others begin with a problem of practice or a strategy for more effectively delivering content or skills. Celina Salvador-Garcia, in ‘Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn: A Self-Study to Promote Gender Awareness through Debates in Teacher Education,’ explores employing debates to discuss gender inequalities through critical pedagogy. The author describes her first experience using debates to discuss gender inequalities through critical pedagogy. Drawing on rich data, including her teacher diary, students’ surveys,

exit slips and a group interview, she applied a variety of analytical processes to analyse how structured debates can be used to help pre-service teachers frame and develop personal and professional views on gender issues. Salvador-Garcia invites readers to consider debating as a pedagogy that can improve teacher education by raising awareness about critical issues.

It is also important to look beyond teacher education to possibilities for self-study in schools and higher education. While noting that self-study has always been concerned with teaching, Kitchen identifies a need for more published self-studies by elementary and secondary educators. Colette Rabin's 'I Intend Not to Roll My Eyes When I Don't Like My Partner': Fourth-Graders' Intentions to Care' in this issue is a lovely and thoughtfully designed year-long investigation by an elementary teacher. Through an introspective and dialogic pedagogy of intention-setting, she cultivated caring community in an explicit repose to a critical incident involving a lack of care for a student by her peers. Rabin describes how introspection over intentions to practice caring and a moral ecology led to a range of pedagogical innovations that led to this student being welcomed into a caring space. Rabin's efforts, thoroughly documented and subjected to deep critical reflection, demonstrate the possibilities for self-study in any elementary or secondary or tertiary educational context.

While the 'work of the self-study community has validated and enriched the individual and collective work of teacher educators' (p. 494), Kitchen (2023) reminds S-STEP practitioners of earlier calls for research projects that help identify program structures that are particularly effective in preparing teachers (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005), build from improving one's own practice to helping improve teacher education within one's institution (Korthagen & Lunenberg, 2004) and go beyond course-based inquiry to improving key program elements and 'continuous self-study with an entire program' (Clift, 2004, p. 1360). 'Universal Design for Learning in a Teacher Residency: Re-Framing Tensions Through Collaborative Self-Study,' by Beth S. Fornauf, Emilie Mitescu Reagan, Kathryn McCurdy, Bryan Mascio, and Marie Collins, epitomizes self-study research that is program-wide and, potentially transferable. The purpose of this self-study was to analyze tensions that emerged when a team of teacher educators attempted to apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to their rural teacher residency program. They closely examined the two major tensions that emerged as they enacted UDL and the ways they responded to shift mindsets while confronting cognitive dissonance in the learning and implementation process. They conclude:

The findings of this study and resulting transformation in our own work, while still (and always) in process, gives us hope for UDL's potential as a force for positive change in teacher education more broadly. The tensions discussed have compelled us to complicate and broaden the notion of barriers in and beyond P12 and higher education. We urge the teacher education community, as well as researchers interested in UDL, to join us in this necessary work.

The self-studies in this issue continue S-STEP's tradition of being focused on the improvement of practice. Each is very different in the themes explored, methods employed and relative emphasis placed on teacher educator, practice, community and context. These six articles all contribute to the rich S-STEP tradition and expand the now considerable body of self-study scholarship in books and journals.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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