

SELF-STUDY OF PRACTICE AS A GENRE
OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices

Volume 8

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SELF-STUDY OF PRACTICE
AS A GENRE
OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

THEORY, METHODOLOGY,
AND PRACTICE

by

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Preface

Self-study is a stance toward understanding the world. Scholarship in the social sciences has as its basis human interaction and when one person studies another, the self in relation to the other becomes a primary focus. As researchers write biography, collect narrative, study history, employ an action research cycle, or even investigate economic issues, the questions raised and the interpretations proposed emerge from within the researcher's head as do understandings of the data, the literature, and the document sources. In other words, in the social sciences we study ourselves in relationship to others and we seek to gain understanding in order to move ideas forward in specific settings like classrooms or more general settings like education. Researchers engaged in self-study methodology do not reject other research paradigms, strategies, or methods. Rather we use those methods rigorously taking into account the researchers' position as both the researcher and researched and as having a central role in the practice being studied. When we label the work we do as self-study, we do so because in the collection of the data and the presentation of the work, we make the relationship of self to the other a central part of the focus of the work. This book attempts to make the self-study of teaching and teacher education practices (S-STTEP¹) methodology transparent for those researchers and practitioners interested in the work.

We organized this book with attention to what we perceive as the next steps for the S-STTEP community. Looking back on previous conferences, including the American Educational Research Association and the Castle Conference (focused specifically on research done by self-study scholars), we see a multitude of definitions, standpoints, and understandings about the work in self-study. More importantly, we see many levels of experience. Consequently, we bring our perspectives on

¹ Commonly, self-study is captured through the work of the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices SIG of AERA, and so S-STEP is the most common acronym associated with this work. As the *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices* illustrates, the acronym for self-study work should be S-STTEP as it is meant to be inclusive of teachers beyond those teachers in teacher education. However, the acronym has tended to remain unchanged in general use as a consequence of the naming of the SIG. We therefore use the full acronym in this book to ensure that the "teaching" is not considered restricted to teacher educators only, despite the fact that they have been the pioneers of this work.

theory and practice into this text in a variety of ways. Since we believe in the strong interrelationship of theory-experience-practice, we begin by introducing theoretical issues about self and practice and then take PAUSES throughout the text to invite consideration of the ways we might move theory to experience to practice and back again.

First, however, we have certain chapter routines. Before every chapter we present questions around which we organized the text. Then after each chapter we make *connections* using relevant quotes from a variety of scholars to underscore critical points in the chapter. We also offer a brief discussion or interpretation of the quote along with possibilities and wonderings to consider. We have also included activities designed to deepen understandings about dialogue, the characteristics of self-study, and the issues of knowledge in-of-for practice.

We organized the text in this way. In Chapter 1 we frame our plan for the exploration of S-STTEP research methodology. In Chapter 2 we consider practice and why it might be a worthwhile focus for research.

At this point we PAUSE, to introduce frameworks for inquiry and analysis that can guide research design and analysis as well as help consider the success of your potential research efforts. We also introduce an example from our work to illustrate how one of us used these frameworks.

In Chapter 3 we begin a discussion of ontology, a focus on what is real, as a grounding for an S-STTEP research. To complement our words and ideas we PAUSE this time to include a pertinent discussion that situates self-study within the larger context of qualitative research. Here we offer a useful graphic that places S-STTEP research alongside other qualitative research methodologies.

In Chapter 4 we explore dialogue and its value within S-STTEP research. At the end of this chapter we present an activity that calls for definitions and practical applications of the ideas presented about dialogue.

At this point in the text we PAUSE again. This time we offer an activity to help identify S-STTEP research. This activity explores characteristics of self-study proposed by LaBoskey (2004) and requires application of ideas presented in previous chapters. The next two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) focus more on the dailiness of conducting and completing S-STTEP research. Those who conduct these kinds of studies realize fairly quickly that data collection strategies and analytic processes are not unique to S-STTEP research. In fact, S-STTEP researchers make adjustments to typical strategies for data collection since the data must capture evidence of practice from the perspective of the self and the other as well as the space between those two. As a result of the tension between self and the other, the common *us* of collaborators and dialogue as the basis of knowing, there are special issues in data analysis and interpretation. We define and explain data analysis techniques generally and then articulate the additional concerns of S-STTEP researchers attending to how these concerns are met. Here we reinforce understandings about *dialogue* and examine how dialogue informs our research process.

Between Chapters 5 and 6 we PAUSE again to reconsider the framework for inquiry and analytic charts. Once researchers progress in their thinking about selected

issues, it becomes appropriate to reconsider what, where, how, and so on in a deeper fashion. Again we extend a discussion of how one of us progressed in her work using these tools.

Issues of ethics and value become part of our discussion in Chapter 7. Here we address the tensions regarding these terms and related meanings. For example, we explore relationships (if they exist) between validity and trustworthiness along with the spaces between authority of experience and authority of reason. Another PAUSE finds us reexamining our frameworks and analysis. We revisit points within the frameworks and include the final public documentation of our example. We present it, not as a perfect example, but as one example of the development from inception to published work. Finally, we examine how the two frameworks that guided this S-STTEP informed this work.

In our concluding chapter, Chapter 8, we return to points raised throughout the text to draw together our ideas. Then, in a final PAUSE we offer a comparison of general qualitative research and self-study methodologies. In particular we address the ways in which S-STTEP research extends general qualitative research strategies to enhance this work.

In appendices we include three items that we find important. First, we have selected Castle Proceedings readings that connect with the knowledge in-of-for activity after Chapter 5. Second, we include a short case regarding Institutional Research Boards (IRBs). In our experience as S-STTEP researchers we notice more and more colleagues concerned about how to approach IRB expectations and felt it important to include relevant information. To that end we offer a case from one institution as one representation of working with an IRB. Third, we include a glossary for quick reference. Here we offer brief definitions of terms used through the text.

Given our desire to address our community we grappled with pronoun use, specifically the use of “you,” in our text. Since we imagined our community alongside us in conversation – beginner and veteran – we sometimes used the pronoun “you” not as a prerogative “you” or a parental “you” but as a collegial you – as in “you might consider this, colleague.” Sometimes in our text we simply present ideas to be considered. Other times we invite *you*, the reader, to join in our exploration.

As researchers and colleagues, we have worked together for many years. In this text we share the ways we have come to think about the work involved in S-STTEP. With our community of scholars in mind we offer this text not as the answer to questions or the way to pursue research. Rather, we offer our text as a way to continue grappling with the ideas around self-study to forward the conversation. Whether a novice or a veteran in self-study, we hope you will find our ideas provocative in ways that beneficially push forward your work.

Note: As self-study researchers we are committed to improvement of practice. Although in this text we may simply state – improvement of practice – let us make clear from the outset of this text that we mean improvement of practice for the benefit of *all* people in a way that is just and treats each person with dignity, humanity,

and honesty. Further, improvement of practice includes a commitment to an elimination of domination, exploitation, and discrimination of any one over another and a sensitivity to the many facets of diversity. As LaBoskey admonished

[If] we take this [claim for the improvement of practice] seriously – of caring for *all* of our student and our students’ students – then . . . we necessarily need to acknowledge the current inequities that exist in our classrooms, our institutions, and our societies. This in turn will require use to actively engage – in ways guided by a social justice agenda – in the transformation of these contexts and the individuals, including ourselves, who support and sustain them. (p. 1181)

We add to that – taking seriously also the care of teacher educators and others so that when we address improvement of practice we begin that “explicit intentionality” (p. 1181) called for by LaBoskey (2004a).

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Making Connections

... inquiry is not a search “behind the veil” of appearances that ends in the identification of appearances that ends in the indication of an unchanging transcendent reality. Instead, inquiry is an act within a stream of experience that generates new relationship that then becomes a part of future experience. It also problematizes the boundaries of inquiry. If experience is continuous, then the initial parameters we set up for our inquiry are themselves a form of relation that can and should be questioned in the course of ongoing research. (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41)

Connections to Consider

S-STTEP inquiry is situated in the midst of context, content, and process. This kind of inquiry involves questioning all three of these aspects from our perspectives while simultaneously accounting for the experience of the other(s) within our practice. As this quote reminds us, understanding our practice is not about seeking to unmask an unchanging reality. Instead we seek to make sense of the stream of experience we act within, knowing that our action generates new relationships, new practices, and new understandings of our reality. The way we stand in that stream defines its boundaries, and the way we move through it forms our practice and our inquiry into it. Our dialogue with the fluid and colliding parameters of our study within our experience leads us to know that we know, how we know, and what we know. Our preface has positioned us within an historical stream of experience and provides our account of how we come to be here at this place and time.

Wonderings and Questions

Here we wonder, if experience is continuous, how do we come to make sense of it? We ask you to ask yourself:

- What impact does being in the midst of constructing practice have on self-study of practice? Inquiry?

- How is inquiry an act within the stream of experience? And how do the two influence each other?
- How do the relationships I create and come to understand lead to new inquiry?

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