SELF STUDY IN TEACHING ABOUT TEACHING*

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Abstract

Growing interest in the development of preservice teacher educators’ professional knowledge has been accompanied by increasing activity by teacher educators as researchers of their own professional practices. Self-study of teacher education practices has emerged as one important way of understanding this work, helping teacher educators explore questions about how knowledge of teaching about teaching develops, what informs approaches taken to examine and develop such knowledge, and how teacher educators’ choices affect their students’ learning about practice. This chapter addresses the motivations of teacher educators engaged in self-study of their own practices and the growth of knowledge of teaching about teaching that has developed through such work. The chapter illustrates how the nature of the knowledge developed by teacher educators about their practices is often rich in complexity and ambiguity. Within the problematic world of teaching about teaching, one way of conceptualizing this knowledge is as a series of tensions that influence teacher educators’ learning about practice developed through self-study.

Substantial research efforts in past decades have resulted in the accumulation of a considerable body of knowledge about teaching and teacher education. A good deal is known about the background and experience of teacher educators, the nature and purpose of teacher education, the status of teaching and teacher education and the work of faculties of education. Yet teacher educators turning to the research literature to locate knowledge that addresses the nature of teaching about teaching or to hear the voices of teacher educators themselves

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in education research will uncover comparatively little (Richardson, 1996; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). The paucity of such research is hardly surprising. Teacher educators, as a group, are often the least experienced writers and researchers amongst their academic colleagues, and there is a longstanding academic attitude towards teaching (and teaching teachers, in particular) as relatively simple, unimportant work. However, despite this initially depressing scenario, interest in better understanding the work of teacher educators is growing, particularly among teacher educators themselves (Zeichner, 1999).

This chapter explores the growth of knowledge of teaching about teaching that has developed through the self-study of teacher education practices. The knowledge that directs teacher educators’ practice through researching teacher preparation in concert with the needs and concerns of student teachers dramatically shapes that which is helpful and relevant to beginning teachers. The confluence of the knowledge and practice that can inform this relationship is important and is being better understood and articulated through self-study. One way of exploring this development is through consideration of a number of questions: How do teacher educators develop their knowledge of teaching teachers? What informs the approaches they take and how do their choices affect their student teachers’ learning about practice? What happens when teacher educators research their own teaching, and how does this influence their understanding of themselves, their students and the process of teacher education? Such questions comprise the essence of self-study that is described in this chapter.

This chapter has five sections. The first section presents a brief overview of research related to the practice of teacher education and explores various factors that have set the scene for the emergence of self-study. The second section examines the ways in which conceptions of knowledge have influenced the development of self-study as a field of research. The third section considers the motivations of teacher educators who have chosen to study their own practice and the ways in which they have approached the self-study of practice. The fourth section considers what teacher educators have learnt from the self-study of their practice, while the fifth section concludes the chapter by posing some challenges for the future of self-study.

**Why is There so Little Research about Teacher Educators’ Practice?**

For many years, there has been limited (published) research attention investigating the practice of teacher educators, particularly by teacher educators. Reasons include perceptions of teacher educators within the university, stereotypic views of teacher preparation, and the ways in which traditional research paradigms have influenced teacher education. This section suggests an explanation that helps to account for the lack of research on teacher educators’ practice.

**Roles and Status of Teacher Educators**

Typically, teaching in preservice teacher preparation has not been a field for those wishing to advance their status within academia. Higher-status teaching