



Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study Research

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The authors situate the origins of self-study in four developments within education: the growing prominence of naturalistic inquiry methods, the rise of the Reconceptualist movement in curriculum studies, the increased involvement of international scholars in teacher education research, and the re-emergence of action research and its variations. They focus on autobiography and correspondence (e-mail, letters, recorded conversations) not only because these are the dominant forms of self-study but because of the demands they present for producers and consumers. The work of C. Wright Mills (1959) is used to provide a framework for determining what makes a piece of self-study writing research. Mills argues that personal troubles cannot be solved as merely troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues and history (p. 226). Insights are drawn from literary conventions. A set of guidelines are provided for consideration by self-study researchers in their quest for greater quality.

In the Beginning

When the Self-Study Special Interest Group (or SIG) of the American Educational Research Association was formed in 1992, few members anticipated that it would grow as rapidly as it did. Currently it is one of the largest SIGs, boasting over 200 members, each concerned in one way or another with self-study. The origins of self-study in teacher education go deep into the transformation that has taken place in teacher education research over the past quarter century. As Lagemann and Shulman (1999) recently wrote, "Today the universe of discipline-trained and often discipline-based scholars has increased to include, among others, anthropologists, linguists, and economists, and the educationist camp has been increased by the addition of more and more practitioners, especially principals and teachers." Further, they note that the "keeping of journals in written or video formats, the writing of autobiographies, and the presentation of research in other narrative forms is now more and more commonplace" (p. xvi). Self-study represents this trend away from modernism and its assumptions about legitimate knowledge and knowledge production toward broadening what counts as research.

Drawing on our own experience and understanding, self-study emerged from the convergence of at least four developments within educational research. The order in which we discuss them is arbitrary. The first is the remarkable transformation that followed the introduction of naturalistic and qualitative research

methods into education, and the redefinition of validity as trustworthiness or accuracy (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although debate still rages, a radically different understanding of the nature of research and subject/object relations has emerged. Some argue that subjects can no longer be studied as if they are atemporal (outside of time), determinant (predictable), or static (unchanging). For those working within the "Fifth Moment" in educational research, questions of context, process, and relationship have moved toward the center of inquiry: "This center lies in the humanistic commitment of the qualitative researcher to study the world always from the perspective of the interacting individual" (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 575).

Many researchers now accept that they are not disinterested but are deeply invested in their studies, personally and profoundly. The general point was made within the education literature over four decades ago by Ross Mooney in a landmark piece, "The Researcher Himself" (1957). Addressing the "inner drama" of research, Mooney wrote:

Research is a personal venture which, quite aside from its social benefits, is worth doing for its direct contribution to one's own self-realization. It can be taken as a way of meeting life with the maximum of stops open to get out of experience its most poignant significance, its most full-throated song. (p. 155)

He went on to say: "We want a way of holding assumptions about research which makes it possible to integrate the pursuit of science and research with the acceptance and fruitful development of one's self" (p. 166). Who a researcher is, is central to what the researcher does.

The second is the influence of the Reconceptualist movement in curriculum studies (see Pinar, 1975). In the belief that one always teaches the self, Pinar (1980, 1981) engaged in a rigorous self-exploration through a method he labeled "currere," seeking the roots of his self-understanding and therefore achieving an understanding of education. Although highly controversial, the Reconceptualist movement engaged a generation of young, now middle-aged, academics in work that helped legitimate the study of self as a foundational practice. One need only briefly peruse early numbers of *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* to find ample support for this conclusion. As these educators have matured, their influence has grown, and with growing influence has come the power to shape the educational discourse.

Pinar drew on psychoanalysis and developments within Continental philosophy to ground his early inquiries. A third influence on the move toward self-study has been the growing involvement of international researchers in teacher education who bring with them diverse intellectual traditions, mostly tapping

the humanities rather than the social sciences. Van Manen (1980) brought from the Netherlands an interest in phenomenology and the nature of experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) heightened awareness of the narrative nature of knowing and the place of story in teachers' development and understanding of practice: "Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it" (p. 18).

Action research in its many variations represents a fourth influence. Originally situated firmly within the established empirical traditions of social science research (Corey, 1953), in recent years the focus has broadened and the boundaries between research and thoughtful practice have blurred. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), among others (e.g., Gitlin et al., 1992), have developed models of teacher research that make it impossible to maintain established researcher/practitioner distinctions. Each study requires a new negotiation of participant roles and relationships. Not surprisingly, many teacher educators have found that crossing the line between assisting teachers to study their practice and studying one's own comes easily, almost naturally (Miller, 1990).

These influences coalesced in the 1980s. Pockets of interest formed and connections between like-minded educators who often felt as though they were outsiders began to be made at conferences. Jack Whitehead and Pam Lomax in England, Jeff Northfield and John Loughran in Australia, Tom Russell and Ardra Cole in Canada, the Arizona Group composed of former graduate students who met at Arizona, and Gary Knowles, then a graduate student at Utah, among many others, found one another. Many of those who first worked in self-study were young scholars, mostly female, mostly experienced teachers then teacher educators, who were committed to improving teacher education and schooling while struggling to negotiate the pathway to tenure and promotion. This struggle took place just when many universities were increasing their demands for scholarship and publication to achieve tenure. The questions that grabbed hold of these teacher educators were quite different from those typically valued by the academy. The questions that inspired the imagination of those who engaged in self-study work revolved around how their practice as teacher educators could be improved. They anticipated a conclusion that is now commonplace: that teacher development is the essence of school reform (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). Thus, a small but growing movement was born and the struggle for legitimacy began.

Signs of Success, Questions of Direction and of Definition

In his 1998 Vice Presidential address, Ken Zeichner acknowledged self-study as one of five categories of "work in the new scholarship of teacher education" (1999, p. 11). The unique feature of self-study is that "the voices of teacher educators [are heard]" (p. 11). Former President of the British Educational Research Association, Jack Whitehead, adds: "The strength of this group is in its use of story and vivid metaphors in accounts of their own professional lives" (1995, p. 115). The future of self-study, as Zeichner observes, appears bright: "These studies represent a whole new genre of work by practitioners that we will be hearing a lot more about in the years to come" (p. 11). Signifying grow-

ing legitimacy, a few journals like *Teacher Education Quarterly* published self-studies, as did *Teaching Education* in its early years. The influence of the movement has touched more mainstream journals and one expects that over time self-study research will increasingly have an influence on teacher education undergraduate and graduate programs and program development efforts.

Yet even as the signs of success mount, debate internal to the movement rages. Each time the SIG meets, one topic invariably enters discussion: "What is self-study?" "How can we tell whether a study is a good one?" One hears beginning professors lament a rejection of a submitted self-study journal article. Often, an accusatory finger is pointed toward journal editors who are presumed to exist in a time warp of rigid standards and social science prejudices. The lament strikes an odd chord: Certainly something other than editor prejudice may explain rejection, particularly since self-study articles have been published in many of the major education journals.

Determining just what it means to be involved in self-study research has proven very difficult. Claims to "voice" are inadequate, perhaps even misleading. To be sure, "self-study" has a common sense appeal: Shouldn't teacher educators study their own practice, since one's practice is, as Charles Taylor (1981) suggests, who we are? For those who initially organized the SIG, part of the appeal of membership was the core belief and ethical commitment that if researchers in colleges of education are to study the development of teachers they should publicly declare their own role in that development. To point out the rigidity of preservice teachers' beliefs, for instance, without accounting for the lack of real ongoing long-term commitment to the development of beliefs about teaching on the part of teacher education generally and in one's own program specifically is to "blame" the student and to absolve oneself of responsibility. Self-study points to a simple truth, that to study a practice is simultaneously to study self: a study of self-in-relation to other.

For both good and ill, self-study's appeal is grounded in the postmodern university's preoccupation with identity formation and a Foucault-inspired (see Colin, 1977) recognition of the linkage of person and the play of power in self formation. Foucault offers a rationale for self-study work: "if one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question" (p. 64). Self-study is explicitly interested research. But beyond this, what is it? What makes a piece of self-writing research?

When Does Self-Study Become Research?

We begin with a quote from C. Wright Mills:

Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues and in terms of the problems of history-making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles and to the problems of the individual life. Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations. (1959, p. 226)

Mills argues that "Every man [is] his own methodologist!" (p. 123) and, further, that methods must not prescribe problems; rather, problems must prescribe methods (p. 72).

Mills's conception of research provides helpful guidance as we consider what is self-study research and what it ought to accomplish. Mills suggests that there is an important relationship between personal growth and understanding and public discourse about that understanding. He articulates clearly something we mention in conversation but often ignore in our practice (both teaching and research) in education: that for public theory to influence educational practice it must be translated through the personal. Only when a theory can be seen to have efficacy in a practical arena will that theory have life. However, as Mills warns, articulation of the personal trouble or issue never really becomes research until it is connected through evidence and analysis to the issues and troubles of a time and place. It is our view that biography and history must be joined not only in social science but also in self-study research. When biography and history are joined, when the issue confronted by the self is shown to have relationship to and bearing on the context and ethos of a time, then self-study moves to research. It is the balance between the way in which private experience can provide insight and solution for public issues and troubles and the way in which public theory can provide insight and solution for private trial that forms the nexus of self-study and simultaneously presents the central challenge to those who would work in this emerging area.

Quality self-study research requires that the researcher negotiate a particularly sensitive balance between biography and history. While self-study researchers acknowledge the role of the self in the research project, echoing Mooney (1957), such study does not focus on the self *per se* but on the space between self and the practice engaged in. There is always a tension between those two elements, self and the arena of practice, between self in relation to practice and the others who share the practice setting. Each self-study researcher must negotiate that balance, but it must be a balance—tipping too far toward the self side produces solipsism or a confessional, and tipping too far the other way turns self-study into traditional research. The balance can be struck at many times during the self-study process, but when a study is reported, the balance must be in evidence not only in what data have been gathered (from self and other) and presented, but in how they have been analyzed, in how they have been brought together in conversation. Otherwise, there is no possibility of answering the “so what” question, the question of significance, that wise readers ask and require be answered. This was the charge against Pinar’s (1980, 1981) early work. For the researcher, the issue is what end of the scale a study will occupy, what sort of study—from confessional to traditional research—will be most fruitful for moving scholarship on and practice in teacher education forward and not merely assisting one’s own practice. It is the question that is asked that determines what sort of study is conducted.

Self-study researchers stand at the intersection of biography and history. The questions self-study researchers ask arise from concern about and interest in the interaction of the self-as-teacher educator, in context, over time, with others whose interests represent a shared commitment to the development and nurturance of the young and the impact of that interaction on self and other (Hamilton, 1998). Ultimately, the aim of self-study research is moral, to gain understanding necessary to make that interaction increasingly educative.

Problems of Publication and Questions of Quality

One possible explanation for the problem of publication in self-study discussed above is that the work may lack significance and quality. Put differently, perhaps the questions asked lack significance and fail to engage reviewer imagination and the questions answered are not found compelling, are purely personal, or are not answered in compelling ways. There is another and more far-reaching possibility: that an adequate grounding and authority for this work have yet to be formed. The loss of methodological innocence in educational research and the increasingly polyglot nature of the research community noted earlier certainly opened a space for self-study inquiry. However, criteria for making a case for quality have yet to be identified. More established forms of research find grounding in methodological traditions and preferred forms of scholarly reporting. If a researcher can show that she has followed conventions with care, including recognized methods of inquiry, then she can assert the authority of her claims. Self-study is a mongrel: The study is always of practice, but at the intersection of self and other, and its methods are borrowed. Thus in order to assert authority the study must do so from the frame or frames of the borrowed methodology as well as from the virtuosity of scholarship established in the piece of writing itself (Pinnegar, 1998).

Scholarly integrity requires that where methods are borrowed, established research practices be respected. Although the label “self-study” makes evident the centrality of the researcher self in the article and in the methodology, the standards of scholarship of the embraced tradition still must be met. A claim to be studying oneself does not bring with it an excuse from rigor. Nevertheless, hybridization of methods and the subjectivity introduced by the acknowledgment of the researcher “self” may sometimes cause difficulty in evaluating quality.

Standing between biography and history and relying on borrowed methods, self-study researchers face unique methodological challenges. Methods blend, and with blending comes difficulty in establishing authority grounded in methodological traditions. Moreover, what counts as data expands greatly, and researchers face the difficulty of representing, presenting, legitimating, analyzing, and reporting one’s own experience as data—and of doing so in honest, not self-serving, ways. Seeking to establish authority on the basis of borrowed and mixed methods demands much of the researcher. Thus, self-study researchers inevitably face the added burden of establishing the virtuosity of their scholarship within and through the writing itself; lacking established authority each researcher must prove herself as a methodologist and writer. The challenge of virtuosity is not only a matter of skillfully employing established research methods. It also involves the form in which the study is organized and the skill with which an argument is made and a story told.

Biography and Self-Study Research

Because of the prominence in self-study work of narratives, we focus on the intersection of narrative methods, those most connected to literature, that seem to hold particular promise for richly representing the self. But, an even greater reduction in our area of concern is necessary. Narrative research traditions are diverse and encompass methods developed in folklore, psychology, literature, history, anthropology, and education. Differences

arise in data collection, analysis, and presentation among these approaches. Given such diversity it is not surprising that there is no clear definition of what counts as narrative, nor are the lines between narrative methods and the results of social science and historical inquiry clearly drawn. In an article, "On Narrative," Fenstermacher (1997) reviewed a collection of papers on narrative and narrative inquiry. Even after reading the collection, he found himself wondering, what is a narrative and how would he judge whether one was good or not? Thus, in this article our especial concern is with biographical research and writing, of which autobiography is a form (Kridel, 1998). Biography, Edel (1984) citing Nicolson argues, is "the history of lives as a branch of literature" (p. 38).

Despite the growing importance of narratives in education generally, literary traditions have seldom found a place in the work of those who engage in self-study and seek to publish the results of their inquiries. While promising, these traditions are more elusive than their social science counterparts. What, after all, makes a story worth reading or a portrayal powerful? We are reminded of a quip by W. Somerset Maugham that underscores the difficulty of establishing quality standards for narrative self-study and the importance of virtuosity: "There are three rules to writing the novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are" (quoted in Brodie, 1997, p. 15). The same question ought to be asked of self-studies: What makes a self-study worth reading? Even as we pose this question we know our answer will not be fully satisfactory.

Guidelines: Autobiographical Self-Study Forms

We write in full recognition of the difficulty of our task, hoping that we can illuminate the challenge of doing quality self-study research particularly of those forms that rely on narrative and, even more specifically, on biographical data. In our attempt to shed light on potential pathways to quality, we will draw primarily on recognized literary traditions that are used to discuss what makes for an effective narrative. We focus on autobiography and correspondence, e-mail, and recorded conversation. These forms of narrative clearly dominate the work of those who claim to be doing self-study research; they capture the concern with "self" that distinguishes this body of research. Correspondence in self-study represents a kind of intellectual autobiography of the moment where the foreground frequently is a person grappling with a set of ideas that participants care deeply about. Additionally, correspondence nicely illustrates how much of the data for self-study prove slippery and are fraught with danger. Much of what we say in the autobiography section will apply to studies using correspondence because in self-study the researcher is one of the voices in the conversation. We will identify what we think are useful *guidelines* for establishing quality, guidelines that we believe point toward virtuosity in scholarship. Each guideline is italicized and followed by a brief discussion of its value and importance. At the outset it is important to note that the guidelines are closely interrelated.

Autobiography

Guideline 1: Autobiographical self-studies should ring true and enable connection. Part of what makes education-related biographical writing attractive to readers is the promise of recognition and

connection. A space is formed for readers' experience that throws light on one's self and one's connections to others. Annie Dillard (1989) articulates the goal for readers that biography and self-study writers both seek:

Why are we reading if not in hope that the writer will magnify and dramatize our days, will illuminate and inspire us with wisdom and courage, and the possibility of meaningfulness will press upon our minds the deepest mysteries, so we may feel again their majesty and power. What do we ever know that is higher than that power which, from time to time, seizes our lives, and reveals us startlingly to ourselves as creatures set down here bewildered? We still and always want waking. (pp. 72–73)

Guideline 2: Self-studies should promote insight and interpretation. Exploring autobiography from an interest in education and as a genre, Graham (1989) illuminates the challenge of autobiographical writing:

Augustine to Rousseau, Vico to Goethe, all experienced some point of crisis at which time their lives underwent a wrenching. At this nodal moment, the course of life is seen to have connecting lines that were previously hidden, a new direction becomes clear where only wandering existed before. . . . [T]he writer's retrospective view discerns a pattern in experience, otherwise the autobiographic function becomes mere self-orientation. . . . Where self-discovery or self-orientation predominates, the genuine autobiographical act of seeing the essential wholeness of life is missing. . . . Past life is therefore being rearranged . . . retrospectively interpreted, in terms of the meaning that life is now seen to hold. (pp. 98–99)

Thus, as self-narrative, autobiography has a great deal in common with fiction. But as Graham argues, for autobiography to be powerful it must contain and articulate "nodal moment(s)." For self-study researchers these moments are those central to teaching and learning to teach. Autobiography, like fiction, reveals to the reader a "pattern in experience" and allows a reinterpretation of the lives and experience of both the writer and the reader. To be powerful this pattern must be portrayed in a way that engages readers in a genuine act of seeing the essential wholeness of life, the connection of nodal moments. In seeing, the reader is enabled to see self and other more fully.

Polkinghorne (1988) articulates three levels of narrative: experience, telling, and interpreting. But he asserts that the purpose of the telling and interpreting is to enable the reader to experience the narrative as if they lived it with the insight of the interpretation. As Graham observes, "the untruth of fiction may be more powerful and more significant than truth" (1989, p. 101). Thus, the truth of a well-rendered autobiography is deeper than the life itself. This deeper truth is found when Mills's challenge to link biography and history is successfully met: the connection of the particular finding or moment to the larger frame of shared experience. As a result the reader experiences or re-experiences and better understands the influence of institutional restraint on teachers, for instance, or perhaps the effects of narrow norms of publishing on teacher educator priorities.

Guideline 3: Autobiographical self-study research must engage history forthrightly and the author must take an honest stand. Lopate's (1995) discussion of the art of the personal essay sheds further light on the aesthetic standard for powerful self-study research and adds an additional guideline. A successful personal essay must

have a “pleasurable literary style,” be an example of “formal shapeliness,” provide “intellectual sustenance,” and be “honest” (p. xxv). For Lopate a quality personal essay should have a conscience that

arises from the author’s examination of his or her prejudices. Essayists must be able to pass judgment, or else their work will be toothless. . . . The idea is to implicate first oneself and then the reader in a fault that seems initially to belong safely elsewhere. (p. xxxi)

Guideline 4: Biographical and autobiographical self-studies in teacher education are about the problems and issues that make someone an educator. Considering plot reveals an additional guideline, one that is more than formal or academic. When reading an autobiography, readers seek an answer to the question, “What kind of story is this?” In self-study, the story takes multiple forms, usually a story of becoming a teacher educator. Tom Russell (1997) writes such a story. The narrative form, “a setting-complication-resolution structure” (Nespor & Barylske, 1991, p. 810), is constructed around Russell’s struggle to learn to teach, to understand just what teaching is, and his confrontation with the complexity of his task. It is a journey of personal development and of occasional disappointment wherein Russell reveals his prejudices and engages history. We found the story interesting first because we know and respect Tom Russell and second because his journey has paralleled ours at critical points—nodal moments—from encountering action research to confronting robust and seeming impervious beginning teacher assumptions about teaching and learning, what he dubs “barriers to learning to teach” (p. 41): teaching is telling; learning to teach is passive; discussion and opinion are irrelevant.

Guideline 5: Authentic voice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the scholarly standing of a biographical self-study. While arguing for a “person-centered history” of education some years ago, one of us wrote, drawing on an insight gained from Erik Erikson’s *Young Man Luther*, “that individuals are victims, vehicles and, in a sense, ultimately resolutions to the cultural dilemmas they experience, dilemmas which run through and around them” (Bullough, 1979/1989). Part of the appeal and value of autobiography comes when a life is recognized as a form of resolution, for either good or evil, of life’s dilemmas. The dilemmas are human dilemmas, but the narrative is a teacher’s or a teacher educator’s story. The self-study researcher, as Edel tells us of biographers, “must analyze his materials to discover certain keys to the deeper truth of his subject—keys as I have said to the private mythology of the Individual. These belong to the truths of human behavior” (1984, p. 29).

As we engage the text we reason narratively (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). We recognize Russell’s story and his dilemmas as in some ways our own, the plot resonates and we read on. Quickly we recognize what sort of story he tells, and know that in some ways our life story and his interconnect and illuminate one another, story against story. Without the admission of prejudice, without the “nodal moments” Graham discusses, the story would not be worth reading by teacher educators let alone be worthy of publication.

Now that increasingly larger numbers of stories of learning to teach are being written—stories that are thematically alike, overlapping in content and form—the question arises: Why should

one story or another be written and shared? William Faulkner once commented that he never knew what he thought about something until he read what he’d written on it. To be sure there is value in autobiography to the writer; autobiography is a means for personal development, whether teacher educator or teacher education student (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). Those engaged in self-study recognize this value: “We engage in self-study work because we believe in its inherent value as a form of professional development” (Cole & Knowles, 1995, p. 147). But this does not mean that a particular piece of autobiographic writing ought to be published.

Guideline 6: The autobiographical self-study researcher has an ineluctable obligation to seek to improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other. As we read teacher educator autobiographies, our own included, we find ourselves asking: “If we didn’t know this person, would we care, would we read on?” It is, as Graham suggests, when self-discovery or self-orientation

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predominates, when, as we have suggested, balance is lost and the writer slips into confession or worse, egoism, that the answer is most likely to be “no.” At such times, aesthetic value might keep us reading, but still we expect more: We expect to find evidence of honestly engaging issues we recognize as central to teaching and teacher education.

Guideline 7: Powerful autobiographical self-studies portray character development and include dramatic action: Something genuine is at stake in the story. As we have said, we might choose to continue to read an autobiography simply because it is a delight. We need to say an additional word about the aesthetic standard applied to self-study. Standards of good fiction are apt here. From our reading, it appears that most self-studies that rely on autobiography embrace the story form rather than the plot lines of fiction. “A story is a series of events recorded in their chronological order. A plot is a series of events deliberately arranged so as to reveal their dramatic, thematic, and emotional significance” (Burroway, 1987, p. 13). The linearity and simplicity of the story form undoubtedly appeals to the training of teacher educators, particularly for those grounded in the sciences, psychology, teaching methods, and history. Mostly, it’s chronology: “I finished. . . . Then I . . .” The preference among teacher educators for story over plot does not nec-

essarily bring with it emotional flatness, however. Generally speaking, fiction “tries to reproduce the emotional impact of experience” to move the reader (Burroway, p. 78) and so should life writing and the published autobiographical self-study. Given how emotionally and intellectually challenging learning to teach is, whether emplotted or storied, high adventure ought not be out of reach. Like several of the tales of the first year of teaching told in *The Roller Coaster Year* (Ryan, 1992), teacher educator self-studies might be read less for their story line than for their emotional impact (“I see that I am not alone”) and for pleasure.

The difference between the story form and the plot lines of fiction may be under-appreciated in narrative self-study research. It is our belief that the neglected plot line literary form may enable special insight into learning to teach and teaching. In particular, the desire to portray critical incidents in life by writing about teacher education practice may be best expressed in this form, where linearity gives way to a different sense of time, where emotion drives action. This form is especially sensitive to the unpredictability and volatility of teaching and learning to teach.

In either form, a good narrative grips the reader, who loses in language her sense of time, place, and sometimes even of separation: form and content blend. However, we suspect that to read self-studies in this way, as aesthetic and as emotionally charged objects, is unfortunately rare. The reader’s first intent when approaching a self-study is to learn something from it; if aesthetic pleasure follows, all the better. Seldom is it expected, only hoped for.

Character development is part of effective narratives. McConnell gives a piece of advice when writing fiction: “Dramatic action should appear lifelike and natural to the character. Focus on certain critical moments that reveal characters’ moods and anxieties” (1986, p. 216). Action takes place in a series of scenes, where the character confronts a problem or a situation within a setting:

[A] character is well described, is a really living character, when readers are made to feel that they know him well and still want to know more about him. This may sound like a paradox, but the moment readers feel that they know him sufficiently, that they know him well enough, that they don’t need or want to know anything more about him, then that character becomes uninteresting and dead in life and in fiction. (Vivante, 1980, p. 25)

Guideline 8: Quality autobiographical self-studies attend carefully to persons in context or setting. The character in a narrative invites reader connection or distance, as does the scene, situation, and action. If the reader is to connect with the story, it is through these four elements. In many self-studies, scene and situation are taken for granted when they ought not to be—departments, schools, universities, colleges, and cultures vary, as do characters and their actions. Like actors, scene and situation carry history. Within the scholarly discourse, understandings of scene and situation may be the most important contribution of a particular story. Thus, if we use a literary framework to judge autobiography, we should expect the author to appropriately explore the dimensions of literature that are most likely to provide insight into the wholeness of the autobiography of teacher education being told as well as insight into the context within which the teacher educator lives and works. Without attention to context, the

reader will struggle to make connections and conclusions will inevitably lack grounding.

Guideline 9: Quality autobiographical self-studies offer fresh perspectives on established truths. In self-study autobiography there is always a tension between the self and the self in action in relation to the other. The account itself will not contain all of the autobiography; it is censored with a purpose that must not be self-serving. Not surprisingly, many first-year teacher stories and autobiographies of teacher educators are hero-stories told from the framework of the “romantic hero.” Frye’s (1957) discussion of the four heroic modes attends to the tension between the obligations between the self and the other in the development of a society. The narrative of the romantic hero is the story of a person who is more capable than their society and who resolves the conflicts of that society by being victorious on a quest. Escalante’s story in *Stand and Deliver* is an example. While such romantic quest stories can be intensely interesting, their sameness may make them emotionally flat and intellectually uninteresting.

In contrast, consider the work of Loughran and Northfield (1996). Northfield provides an account and analysis of his experience as a university teacher educator returning to teach in a junior high math/science class. He purposely set forth to reveal the “typical and troubling” in teaching. Furthermore, after his analysis, he turned the work over to his colleague and collaborator for further critique. Upon publication, pained by the ways in which the book revealed his idiosyncrasies and inadequacies, Northfield said, “I really am a pretty good teacher even if you can’t tell it in the book” (personal communication, 1995).

The point here is to suggest that the themes, characters, and plot lines (and story forms) of the tragic, ironic, and comedic hero are promising and powerful means for telling educators’ tales; they frame and direct character development in fresh ways. A major theme of the tragic hero is the isolation of the hero from society and the ways in which the dynamics of something greater and more powerful than the hero lead to her isolation and demise (for example institutional and societal demands). Tragic heroes usually end up leaving teaching. For teacher educators the tale is one of flaws becoming history and tradition.

The ironic hero story is a valuable mode for teacher educators, because it is a narrative form which allows a focus on the failed, the difficult, and the problematic and which does not require the tragic end or the heroic romantic return (Campbell, 1968). Placier provides such a self-study, titling segments of her piece “Fiasco #1” and “Fiasco #2” (Placier, 1995). Ironic heroes, like Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, represent the common person who may in fact be overwhelmed by society. In such stories we learn much about the difficulties of a society, but the hero may at the end remain trapped in society’s troubles and woes.

The mode of the comedic hero is a tale of transformation well-suited for the plot line of successful stories of teacher education reform and also student teaching, since in these stories the hero uses the forces of society to transform, reunite, and integrate society. Frye (1957, 1982) organizes these modes into phases which show promise for eliciting and promoting a more realistic, complex, and complete narrative of teacher education than the commonplace and simplistic romantic hero pattern embraced by many beginning teachers and teacher educators. This is suggested by Lopate (1995) when he writes,

Just as the personal essayist is able to make the small loom large, so he or she simultaneously contracts and expands the self. This is done by finding the borders, limits, defects, and disabilities of the particular human package one owns, then pointing them out, which implies at least a partial surmounting through detachment. . . . [T]he fulsome confession of the limit carries the secret promise of an almost infinite opening out. The harvesting of self-contradiction is an intrinsic part of the personal essay form. (p. xxviii)

He speaks further of the personal essayist as one who dives into the “volcano of the self and extracts a single hot coal to consider and shape” (p. xxix). In such writing the enemy is self-righteousness because it slows down and distorts the dialectic of self-questioning.

Like cowboy movies, often there is a sameness born of our shared time and place to the stories of learning to teach, which can dull interest. We are reminded that *Star Wars* came along and revitalized the traditional cowboy story line and an old story became new. Similarly, stories of learning to teach, representing different but similar scenes, situations, themes, and points of view, become fresh when told through new eyes. We still recognize the story, but we engage it differently.

In summary, although the final story of being or becoming a teacher educator never will be told, we believe that more powerful narrative self-studies will follow careful attention to the guidelines we have identified: A self-study is a good read, attends to the “nodal moments” of teaching and being a teacher educator and thereby enables reader insight or understanding into self, reveals a lively conscience and balanced sense of self-importance, tells a recognizable teacher or teacher educator story, portrays character development in the face of serious issues within a complex setting, gives place to the dynamic struggle of living life whole, and offers new perspective.

Correspondence, E-mail, and Recorded Conversations

For the most part, correspondence, e-mail conversations, and recorded conversations present the same set of difficulties to researchers we have noted above since in self-studies they are each a form of autobiography. We will attend to two issues in this section, both related rather closely to the standards for self-study autobiographical writing already presented. The first is that the self-study researcher has to edit the text and yet not present an interpretation that contradicts or that would be contradicted and repudiated by a complete reading of the data. This is an issue of conscience as well as of reliability and honesty. As Edel (1984) states, “The personages exist; the documents exist; they are givens to the writers of lives. They may not be altered. To alter is to disfigure” (p.15). The second issue is that what is produced should be at least an interesting if not a provocative read, thus the value of alternative perspectives. In part this relates to the guidelines noted above, but here, we are discussing a different form of presentation.

Guideline 10: Self-studies that rely on correspondence should provide the reader with an inside look at participants’ thinking and feeling. Several published self-studies have taken the form of correspondence (e.g., Arizona Group, 1994, 1997; Cole & Knowles, 1994). On the surface, like published and edited correspondence such as that of John Dewey and Arthur Bentley (Ratner & Altman, 1964), readers are invited into an intimate, intense exploration of ideas and issues. The promise to the reader is that access will

be given to the inside of an idea and its human grounding, how ideas unfold in interaction and how relationships and understanding change in unanticipated ways as a result. Moreover, when truth is told, pathways to program improvement that have proven false are revealed long before the sort of data social science researchers would recognize as legitimate are in. These are powerful promises, and point to a few of the reasons why the Dewey/Bentley correspondence among many others is interesting and worth reading. A correspondence that takes place over years brings additional advantages of depth and richness. The promise to readers is that something special will be revealed.

When considering self-studies of this sort, we find ourselves asking what advantage this format brings over the more traditional article form, which insists on logical organization, clear focus, and direct attention to the “so what” question. First we would assert that these articles should also possess and communicate to the reader organization, focus, and attention to the question of significance, as we have already stated. When they do not, editors take responsibility for providing readers the needed context, which includes careful attention to both characters and setting. Attention to these issues is complicated by a danger inherent in publishing correspondence. Dewey and Bentley may have anticipated that their letters would some day be published, but they certainly did not write as though they anticipated other readers. Neither man wrote looking over his shoulder. Points were made to and for one another, and the aim of pushing toward a greater clarity and shared understanding is ever present. Focus is maintained by the intensity of each man’s interest as well as the philosophical issues they shared, and the logic of their interactions is embedded in the problems they sought to solve, evade, or get over, as Dewey (1910) argued.

Unfortunately, we have learned from reading self-studies that take this conversational form that writing when looking over one’s shoulder produces odd and dishonest prose. Readers sense the functioning of impression management, self-censorship in the hope of portraying the romantic hero, perhaps, and sometimes posturing driven not by friendship but by anticipation of an unknown and perhaps unfriendly critic. The freshness of honest and lively interaction of people who care deeply for one another and about places and ideas tends to be replaced by stilted prose, in some respects almost indistinguishable from more traditional academic writing. By carefully attending to an unknown critic, the door is opened to criticism of another kind: that the correspondence fails to meet a standard we have not yet discussed, that of intimacy and openness. The form becomes more like an exchange of memos than of letters, and there is a tendency toward superficiality in argumentation—a scattering of thoughts that do not coalesce.

Guideline 11: To be scholarship, edited conversation or correspondence must not only have coherence and structure, but that coherence and structure should provide argumentation and convincing evidence. Our criticism of correspondence does not necessarily mean that this form of data presentation is flawed for self-study. It is not. However, this form is seductively simple and ought not be embraced unless its promise can be met in intimacy and interest and in demonstrating in compelling fashion how teacher educators struggle with ideas and practices as they seek to better understand teaching and teacher education. A further danger is

that the tilt toward self and a celebration of relationship will replace engagement with history. At such moments, the balance Mills sought for research is lost: Biography and history do not connect.

In defining what is story, Leitch (1986) describes how we live our lives in middles—somewhat like an unarranged soap opera. As researchers in self-study we designate and arrange data into the slots of middle, beginning, and end. It is relatively easy to present conversation or correspondence in linear fashion. However, drama may offer a better model for organizing recorded conversation or correspondence for readers. In either case, the reader of the study, like a member of an audience, needs to be able to deduce the storytelling elements from the conversation and context provided.

Guideline 12: Self-studies that rely on correspondence bring with them the necessity to select, frame, arrange, and footnote the correspondence in ways that demonstrate wholeness. It is important to remember that unlike the Arizona Group project (1994, 1997, 1998), the Dewey and Bentley correspondence became someone else's scholarship, the editors'. The editors demonstrated scholarly virtuosity through the selection and arrangement of the letters. It was the editors' actions that transformed what was data into research. When editing transcripts of conversation and correspondence what is absent or omitted can be as important as what is present. In order for a self-study of this kind to count as scholarship, the evidence for what the conversation reveals must be provided in the conversation and the description of the participants (characters) and setting.

Guideline 13: Interpretations made of self-study data should not only reveal but also interrogate the relationships, contradictions, and limits of the views presented. Articles that emerge from collections of letters and are presented as a collection of correspondence present significant problems for readers. One of the most serious is liveliness and interest—how readable is the collection and does it engage the reader's interest and attention? If the letters are not written by famous people and read because of who they are or what they accomplished or perhaps witnessed, does the collection make a significant contribution to understanding of the field of teacher education and the problems of teacher educators? Back to our standards for self-study autobiographies: Are readers enabled to gain new understanding of fundamental issues in teacher education or being a teacher educator? Do the letters, typically written by "ordinary" professors of teacher education, reveal something important about the profession or practice of teacher education? Is there evidence that while drawn from a larger collection, the letters have been appropriately—honestly and with good conscience—edited and arranged? Can the reader be certain that the major themes of the correspondence are represented completely and complexly and that elements of the letters which would have provided an alternate or contrasting view have not been eliminated? Do the letters reveal accurately the individual voices of the correspondents? Does the juxtaposition of the letters and any exposition from the arrangers present a sufficiently deep analysis of the correspondence? Are the letters sufficient as "evidence" for the pattern and truths the collection of letters as a whole is supposed to illuminate? For those who serve as editors of a set of letters, recorded conversations, or a collection of e-mail

correspondence, the interpretative task is formidable as they seek to join biography and history.

Guideline 14: Effective correspondence self-studies contain complication or tension. Finally, the voices in the correspondence should represent disagreement as well as agreement; the reader should expect that something important is represented, else the correspondence would not have been published. Powerful and engaging exchanges provide the reader an emotional and intellectual home in the writing of one of the correspondents or in the space between where the ideas are interrogated and the balance created between biography and history. When something of genuine importance is at issue, it is likely there is intellectual sustenance to be had. The converse is also probably true.

Conclusion

Self-study as an area of research in teacher education is in its infancy. Its endurance as a movement is grounded in the trustworthiness and meaningfulness of the findings both for informing practice to improve teacher education and also for moving the research conversation in teacher education forward. Like other forms of research, self-study invites the reader into the research process by asking that interpretations be checked, that themes be critically scrutinized, and that the "so what" question be vigorously pressed. In self-studies, conclusions are hard won, elusive, are generally more tentative than not. The aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle.

Self-study framed as autobiography or conversation places unique and perhaps unusual demands on readers; and it demands even more of those who seek to produce it. While the guidelines we have discussed are suggestive, clearly they are not definitive. We take them seriously both as readers and producers of self-studies and believe they offer direction for improving the quality of self-study work that relies heavily on biographical data. Like all research, the burden of proof is on those who would conduct and hope to publish autobiographical self-studies. As we have said, articles need to be readable and engaging, themes should be evident and identifiable across the conversation represented or the narrative presented, the connection between autobiography and history must be apparent, the issues attended to need to be central to teaching and teacher education, and sufficient evidence must be garnered that readers will have no difficulty recognizing the authority of the scholarly voice, not just its authenticity.

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