ADVANCING SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION THROUGH SELF-STUDY METHODOLOGY
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The Power, Promise, and Use of Self-Study in Social Studies Education

Edited by

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Over the past two decades, self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) has become a well-accepted approach to developing insights into teaching and learning about teaching as teacher educators have sought productive ways of researching their practice. The early work of the American Education Research Association’s (AERA) S-STEP Special Interest Group (SIG) emerged from teacher educators interested in fields such as reflective practice, action research, and teacher research. These teacher educators were concerned not with simply studying these fields but in using them as a basis for studies of their own teaching about teaching and their students’ learning about teaching. As a consequence, S-STEP became a well-established methodology for researching teaching and learning about teaching as teacher educators sought to find new ways of enhancing teacher education at both a personal and institutional level (Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004).

As the value of S-STEP has become more apparent to teacher educators more generally, so the field has grown. However, to date, consolidated accounts of self-studies have not been organized in concerted ways around particular teaching areas. Rather, consolidated accounts have tended to focus on such things as methodology (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Tidwell, Heston, & Fitzgerald, 2009), teacher education reform/renewal (Aubusson & Schuck, 2006; Darling-Farr, Clarke, & Erickson, 2007; Hoban, 2005; Kosnick, Beck, Freese, & Samaras, 2006), or extended personal accounts of teacher educators’ efforts to better understand their own practice (Berry, 2007; Brandenburg, 2008; Schulte, 2009). All of this work has been important in building a strong base for self-study but an obvious gap in the literature has been that of studies focused on particular subject areas. Alicia Crowe and her colleagues have stepped up to the mark and begun to address this situation through this book focused on teaching about the teaching of social studies.

In responding to this need for focused studies in a subject area, Crowe has brought together a strong team of contributors with a range of experiences as social studies teacher educators. As the list of authors clearly demonstrates, Crowe has not only had an influence on the nature of researching teacher education in her own institution, but she has also been heavily involved with the leaders of self-study in social studies internationally.
As Crowe makes clear at the outset, self-study is an approach to inquiry and research that allows teacher education professionals to make sense of, and learn from, their practice and experience. Working from this position, she has developed a book that offers other social studies teacher educators a well-structured, thoughtfully organized, and coherent set of accounts of researching the teaching of social studies in teacher education programs. As each of the chapters makes abundantly clear, self-study can help to advance social studies education in very positive ways. As Dinkleman asserts, “self-study offers great potential to promote more coherent social studies teacher education programs – [a position that is] neither complex nor controversial. . . . [because there is] so much ‘common sense’ to the idea.”

As this book unfolds we are offered interesting perspectives on the intersection of self-study and social studies. However, at the heart of all of this work is the concern that research and practice come together in important ways to enhance the learning opportunities for those involved in teaching and learning about teaching social studies. These opportunities are offered through a number of different lenses, each of which creates a way of peering into the world of teaching about teaching social studies which includes the lenses of pragmatism; individual and collaborative self-study approaches; modeling; field-based and supervisory approaches; internationalization; and program coherence. Each of the authors offer well-developed and thoughtful cases that encourage deeper thinking about the ways in which social studies and self-study interact in the development of new knowledge of practice. It is also interesting how the work of Dewey continues to influence those who have a deep concern for their teaching and their students’ learning.

Dewey’s (1929) view that educational practices themselves must be the source of the ultimate problems to be investigated in order to build a science of education seems to ring true with the stance taken by the authors of this book. In fact, Ritter notes that “Because Dewey theorized that education and society were interactive and interdependent, he stressed that schooling must be understood as ‘a process of living and not a preparation for future living’ (Dewey, 1897/2006, p. 24).” This need to be responsive to the times in which we live is a helpful way of thinking about what these authors are advocating for the teaching of social studies through each of their chapters individually, but also collectively.

Obviously a great deal of time, energy, thought, and co-operation has been associated with bringing a book together that illustrates quality and coherence in the way that this book does and the editor and authors need to be congratulated for so doing. Through their serious focus on the teaching of social studies these authors have transformed their thinking around that which is possible in teacher education by raising the expectations for that which should be. I see this book as a catalyst for those in other subject areas to take seriously the need to offer strong and clear models of collaboration and co-operation in developing self-study research that further advances our knowledge of teaching and learning about teaching in new and exciting ways. For Crowe and her colleagues, this project has no doubt been a rewarding experience, I trust the same will be the case for all those who read this fine addition to the self-study literature.
References


J. John Loughran
# Contents

1 Self-Study and Social Studies: Framing the Conversation  
Alicia R. Crowe and Todd Dinkelman  

2 Join, or Die! A Pragmatic Case for Reflective Self-Study in Social Studies  
Dave Powell  

Linda Farr Darling  

4 Self-Study Methodology as a Means Toward Ongoing Rationale Development and Refinement  
Todd S. Hawley  

5 Diversity, Democracy, and Documentation: A Self-Study Path to Sharing Social Realities and Challenges in a Field-Based Social Studies Curriculum Methods Course  
Diane E. Lang  

6 Modeling Self-Study in Social Studies Teacher Education: Facilitating Learning About Teaching for Democratic Citizenship  
Jason K. Ritter  

7 Internationalising Social Studies Programmes Through Self-Study  
Libby Tudball  

8 Social Skills in Action: An Ethic of Care in Social Studies Student Teaching Supervision  
Muffet Trout  

9 Self-Study’s Influence on Graduate Studies and Social Studies Teaching: Bridging Intent and Action  
Andy L. Hostetler  

10 Complicating Coherence: Self-Study Research and Social Studies Teacher Education Programs and Practices  
Todd Dinkelman
Contents

11 I Love It When a Plan Comes Together: Collaborative Self-Study in Graduate School as a Space to Reframe Thinking About Social Studies Teaching and Teacher Education .................................. 177
   Todd S. Hawley, Alicia R. Crowe, Katie Anderson Knapp, Andrew L. Hostetler, Bryan Ashkettle, and Michael Levicky

12 Looking Across and Moving Forward: Shared Connections and Future Questions ................................. 197
   Alicia R. Crowe

Name Index ......................................................................................................................... 209
Subject Index ....................................................................................................................... 215
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An introductory chapter seems like a good place to do something often present in self-study – the introduction of self and the explanation of the context for the study. For this introduction, that means introducing who I am and where this idea came from.

**Who Am I?**

I am a social studies teacher educator. I love social studies – the content, the skills, the attitudes, the values, the issues – all of it. I am confident that the teaching of social studies is an important way to sustain a healthy, robust democracy and help our young citizens grow into active, thoughtful, respectful, open-minded, and tolerant members of that democracy. Although I see mathematics, science, language, and the arts as equally important to the democratic project, social studies is my subject area home.

I love to teach teachers and this process fascinates me. Teaching and studying teaching are exciting and intriguing to me. A little over 10 years ago my advisor, Charles B. Myers, introduced me to the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) community and I was welcomed with open arms. I found conversations about teaching that problematized aspects of teacher education that other research did not. I found conversations that were intensely personal, theoretical, philosophical, and practical all at the same time. I found conversations that talked about ethics, morality, justice, passion, and intellect. Conversations open to even the newest academic, conversations that kept me coming back for more. Through my first introduction, I knew I had found an academic home full of members with similar interests. But wait, didn’t I already have a home as a social studies teacher educator? I wondered: Can I have two homes? Of course, when I looked around, many of us lived in two or more worlds – I periodically venture into the academic world of technology myself. And many of our esteemed colleagues in social studies education balance more than one line of inquiry or bring together more than one academic world on a frequent basis. But, for me, for many years of my academic life, these two particular academic homes have not come together well. And that, for me, is where this story begins.
From Idea to Fruition

I am someone who always wanted my research and my teaching to be so intertwined that untangling them would prove nearly impossible. I find, like I am sure many of my colleagues find, that one directly influences the other and the more connected they are for me, the better it is for my students. But these two realms in my academic life were not as closely aligned in my public life as I would have liked. As I began my career, I would frequent S-STEP sessions at AERA\(^1\) and not meet a CUFA/NCSS\(^2\) colleague or read or hear a paper specifically focused on the teaching of social studies and would go to sessions for or by CUFA/NCSS colleagues and not see any of my S-STEP colleagues or hear of self-study.

As I grew in my two academic homes, I eventually came to learn that Todd Dinkelman and Marilyn Johnston were two other social studies academics who frequented CUFA/NCSS and who also thought about and engaged in self-study (e.g., Dinkelman, 2003; Johnston, 2006; Johnston, Summers-Eskridge, Thomas, & Lee, 2002). But even after learning of their work, it seemed we were a small group and the gap that remained between these two worlds still seemed more like a chasm. The connections have been growing over the last few years as new social studies education scholars have been adding their voices by beginning to bring social studies education to self-study (e.g., Dinkelman, Havick, & Hawley 2006; Ritter, Powell, & Hawley, 2008) and presenting and publishing self-study research in social studies education venues (e.g., Ritter, Powell, & Hawley, 2007). This project is my humble attempt to continue to pull together these two worlds to make each field stronger and to help others who, like me, would like to bring their two worlds together to make their teaching and research even better.

Conversations Begin

Besides understanding a little about me, a second method to contextualize the ideas and studies in this book is to introduce you to the conversation that helped move this project along. At the College and University Faculty Assembly (CUFA) of the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) annual meeting in 2007, Todd Dinkelman et al. (2007) led a group of us in a “non-traditional” session called Self-study in social studies teacher education: Worthwhile attraction or attractive distraction? This beginning conversation about self-study in social studies education at the major conference for social studies teacher educators and researchers was fairly well attended. I was excited to have been asked to be a part of the “panel” and to meet social studies educators in the session who were at least intrigued by the concept of self-study. Over the next year, ideas continued to percolate in my mind. After conversations with a new colleague at Kent State, the idea began to move forward. Eventually the email below was sent.

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1 American Education Research Association

2 College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies, the professional organization for social studies education researchers and teacher educators.
Hello all,
I really enjoyed the opportunity to talk about self-study in social studies education last year at CUFA. Since Todd has been here at Kent we’ve been talking more and more about this. I was wondering if we could all get together for a few minutes at this year’s conference to discuss the prospects of a book that pulls together those in social studies teacher education and self-study to formalize these conversations. I was thinking maybe Wednesday evening during/after the reception or Thursday morning.
Talk to you soon,
Alicia
(Text of an email to those who presented about Self-Study at the Annual Meeting of the College and University Faculty Assembly in November 2007)

The Idea Comes to Life

Within the day, everyone replied and we set a time to meet at the 2008 conference. We met and agreed that indeed we might have something worthwhile to say. Clearly we all saw the power and promise of self-study with a specific social studies education focus, but, I wondered, what exactly were we all thinking and what would this look like in the end. So, I set out to gain a solid understanding of just that. I emailed my four colleagues who participated in the panel again to see if everyone could share their ideas in written form. With these sampled excerpts, you can begin to see the essence of what this book is about – self-study and the democratic nature of social studies.

Jason Ritter shared:

As i might have alluded to in our talk... i am most interested right now in the idea of process as it relates to self-study and its intersection with social studies. in particular, as someone who embraces the idea that social studies is about democratic citizenship education, it makes sense to me that our understanding of our teaching of teachers must follow a similar trajectory. this is where and how self-study becomes essential. so, basically, i am interested in the messages we convey to our students through our selection of content, pedagogical methods, and classroom management; and how this compliments or works against the stated goal of democratic citizenship. equally important then is how our understandings of these “messages” evolve with each class we teach. again, this is where i see the value of self-study. i am curious if you all see these same connections as i do. (Excerpt of email from Jason Ritter to the group)

Dave Powell replied:

like you, ritter, i find myself drawn to the idea of self-study intersecting with social studies at democracy, or, rather, maybe at the corner of democracy and pragmatism. i am working on adding another layer to your idea: part of what i’m trying to do right now is work up an article that makes the argument that there can be no democracy without pragmatism, or at least that a pragmatic epistemology helps make democracy make sense – not as a form of government but as that “conjoint communicated experience” dewey used to talk about. and if the purpose of social studies is to promote democracy it seems that pragmatism might be important. (Excerpt of email from Dave Powell to the group)

3 All three individuals agreed to printing these excerpts and agreed that keeping the text as it was typed in the original emails was important.
Todd Hawley joined in:

Dave your argument about the interaction between the democracy and pragmatism is an interesting one. I wonder how you are thinking about the “type” of democracy that draws on a pragmatic epistemology. I guess what I am getting at is the idea that democracy is an idea that is created and maintained and that pragmatic thinking can help lead us to a certain type of democratic living/experience that might enable a certain type of society to exist and be maintained. This would be compared to other types of epistemologies. Not sure what to call them but they would enable a type of democracy where gay marriage rights can be granted and taken away or where the people would agree to allow the government to pay billions on war, or to bail out corporations rather than give each citizen a million dollars. Your challenge seems to be how do we convince teacher candidates to push pragmatic, democratic citizenship. Make sense?

Again, one of the problems I am fighting with is the idea that we, as social studies teacher educators, have ideas of the type of citizens we want our teachers to produce but we do so with competing conceptions of what these citizens would look like and how to best prepare our teacher candidates. I hear much of this in what Jason wrote and like the angle that we could be (and probably are) working against a certain conception of democracy in the way we go about teaching our classes and working with student teachers. Having said all of that, I see self-study as a productive way of examining how our own rationales for teaching social studies teacher education play out in our practice and how our rationales change/adjust with the differing courses and groups of students we teach. (Excerpt of email from Todd Hawley to the group)

From these simple beginnings, emerged a book with varied offerings to allow multiple access points to this larger conversation. I offer to you a collection of high-quality chapters that each uses self-study to advance social studies education and deepens the self-study conversation by focusing on self-study in subject matter specific ways. Through example studies and philosophical arguments I hope this book begins to convey the power and promise of self-study for social studies education that the authors of these chapters and others in self-study have seen through experience with this genre of research. I hope that with this piece, we are able to ground self-study in the field we are dedicated to making great, social studies education.

What is Included in this Book to Think About?

As you read this book, please contemplate two overarching questions: What can self-study do to advance social studies education? And, How can social studies focused self-studies add to larger conversations in self-study about teacher education?


Specifically, in chapter “Self-Study and Social Studies: Framing the Conversation,” Dinkelman and I provide an overview of the field of self-study, three ways in which the two fields, social studies education and self-study, share a common history and interests, and how we see self-study offering promise and possibilities for social studies teaching and teacher education. These two fields, self-study and social studies education share a similar history of discussion, debate, and dialogue over the definition of the field itself, both have a commitment to equity and social justice, and both include a long history of members holding a high regard and deep connection to John Dewey (especially his ideas about reflective thinking). In this chapter, we propose that self-study can help us look into the mystery of the social studies teacher education process to expose and begin to understand the messiness of these teaching and learning processes as well as improve social studies teacher education. We also offer that self-study can bring another type of community to social studies education, one that adds to the strength we already have as a field.

In “Join or Die” Powell pulls together ideas and positions from Dewey, pragmatism, reflective thinking/teaching, and social studies education and argues for the usefulness of self-study as a way to bring all these areas together. Powell explains that social studies educators have long argued, lobbied, and hoped for reflective teaching to be a ubiquitous characteristic or way of being for social studies teachers but despite years of conversations about its importance this has not come to be. In later chapters, we see examples of Powell’s argument come to life. Trout’s chapter (“Social Skills in Action: An Ethic of Care in Social Studies Student Teaching Supervision”), for example, shows a teacher educator as she attempts to balance three things, (1) her own ideas about what her student teacher should be doing, (2) where she knows this prospective teacher is in his development, and (3) her desire to both model and encourage reflective thinking. Hostetler’s chapter (“Self-Study’s Influence on Graduate Studies and Social Studies Teaching: Bridging Intent and Action”) is another example, in this case of a teacher using self-study to align intention and action in his teaching.

shift into examples of teacher educators’ use of self-study to understand and improve their practice. Farr Darling, in “Looking Glass on the Dresser: Finding Florence Fisher Farr,” graciously shares with us the beginnings of her self-study across generations. Through her narrative she weaves aspects of her grandmother’s life, her life, and the historical and philosophical landscape around her. As you read this piece, a picture of two lives emerges that helps you begin to question your own personal and familial history and how it has influenced who you are as a person and as a social studies educator.

In, “Self-Study Methodology as a Means Toward On-Going Rationale Development and Refinement”, Hawley begins by sharing an argument for using self-study as a means for social studies teachers and teacher educators to develop and refine their rationale for what, why, and how they teach social studies. Then he presents his experience with and his findings from his own self-study on rationale development. In his self-study he examined his teaching of both undergraduate pre-service and graduate in-service social studies teachers to better understand his own rationale. In this chapter, he specifically shares what he learned from his electronic communications with students (emails with the undergraduates and blog postings with the graduates). Hawley’s self-study exemplifies his own argument that self-study can be a useful tool to further a teacher’s rationale development. It also gives another concrete example of Powell’s argument relating to the connection between self-study, Dewey’s pragmatism, and reflective teaching.

Together, Lang (chapter “Diversity, Democracy, and Documentation: A Self-Study Path to Sharing Social Realities and Challenges in a Field-Based Social Studies Curriculum Methods Course”) and Ritter (chapter “Modeling Self-Study in Social Studies Teacher Education: Facilitating Learning About Teaching for Democratic Citizenship”) provide explicit examples of social studies teacher educators, one teaching elementary level prospective teachers (Lang) and one teaching secondary prospective teachers (Ritter), using self-study to explicitly examine their teaching to better prepare their students to teach their K–12 students to become members of a democratic citizenry. Lang’s chapter, “Diversity, Democracy, and Documentation: A Self-Study Path to Sharing Social Realities and Challenges in a Field-Based Social Studies Curriculum Methods Course,” provides readers with insights into how a teacher of elementary social studies preservice teachers worked with her students, learned from the experience, and helped refine her practice to better help her students be attuned to and consider diverse views, diverse student needs, and social studies as the three come together. While Ritter’s study, “Modeling Self-Study in Social Studies Teacher Education: Facilitating Learning About Teaching for Democratic Citizenship,” provides a glimpse into how a social studies teacher educator grapples with making sure that his practice supports what he wants his
novice teachers to learn about teaching for democratic citizenship, as well as how he struggles to make his practice reflect democratic values.

Tudball provides an international voice to this conversation about self-study and democratic education with her chapter “Internationalising Social Studies Programs Through Self-Study.” Tudball’s self-study adds depth to the conversation for teacher educators by allowing us into the practice and thinking of a teacher educator thinking about these topics. Tudball grants us access to her struggle as a teacher educator internationalizing her curriculum and teaching. We see the interactive process of listening to students, thinking about literature, reflecting on her teaching, and making changes. Her study provides her with a disciplined and systematic way to learn form her experience and to share her knowledge and experience with others.

In the next chapter, “Social Skills in Action: An Ethic of Care in Social Studies Student Teaching Supervision,” Trout demonstrates for readers how Nel Noddings’ Ethic of Care can be combined with social studies teacher education practices. Her self-study showed her, and lets us all in on, how a teacher educator in a supervisory role enacts a pedagogy of care as a social studies educator. It gives us a chance to see the ways in which self-study helped her to enact this pedagogy, examine it, and learn from the experience. Her piece gives an example of a self-study in action at the university level in supervision and shows another example of what can be learned about ones’ practice through self-study and how it connects with her student’s learning (in this case a preservice teacher).

Hostetler’s chapter shifts the focus slightly, from social studies teacher educators to a social studies teacher. Hostetler’s chapter, “Self-Study’s Influence on Graduate Studies and Social Studies Teaching: Bridging Intent and Action,” provides an example of a social studies teacher using self-study to help himself take what he was learning in graduate school and make it a part of his everyday life as a social studies teacher. In this chapter you will read the story of how he came to understand self-study, his role as a social studies teacher, and his practice as a social studies teacher in a deeper and more profound way while engaging in a self-study as a part of a collaborative self-study group from graduate school. This chapter also provides a concrete example of some of the concepts Powell argues for in chapter “Join, or Die!: A Pragmatic Case for Reflective Self-Study in Social Studies.”

Chapters “Complicating Coherence: Self-Study Research and Social Studies Teacher Education Programs and Practices” and “I Love It When a Plan Comes Together: Collaborative Self-Study in Graduate School as a Space to Reframe Thinking About Social Studies Teaching and Teacher Education” shift the vantage point yet again, from the standpoint of an individual to that of a teacher education program. Dinkelman, in “Complicating Coherence: Self-Study Research and Social Studies Teacher Education Programs and Practices”, helps readers move from the micro lens of an individual teacher or teacher educator as seen in the earlier chapters to the macro lens of the role of self-study at a program level. In this chapter, he makes a strong argument for the power and promise that self-study holds for understanding the inner workings of teacher education programs as well as how students experience our programs. He argues that self-study can help us add to our knowledge of social studies teacher education, an area in which calls for more research
have continually been made. As part of Dinkelman’s argument that self-study holds promise for understanding social studies teacher education he shares an example of it from his own program. In his example, we are privy to conversations among social studies teacher educators as they grapple, together, over ideas important in their program, specifically the authenticity and honesty of student voices within the program.

Hawley, Crowe, Knapp, Ashkettle, Hostetler, and Levicky provide an example in “I Love It When a Plan Comes Together” of a self-study collaborative in graduate school to help improve social studies teachers’ learning. This chapter includes four teachers’ self-studies and highlights the power of collaborative self-study for their learning as social studies teachers. The authors share an example of how their collaborative group focusing on the self-study of social studies teaching practices helped set the stage for them to engage in self-studies of their practice to help them understand and transform their practice. Their example also provides an example of a different way to think about graduate level teacher education for experienced teachers.

In 2007, Zeichner, positioning himself and his writing as a self-study insider, offered advice for the field of self-study to move conversations and the field forward. Part of this advice included better situating self-studies “within existing and newly emerging research programs” (p. 38). Part of this call means explaining how the current self-study research builds on previous self-study or other research. Each of the authors has attempted to do this in their individual pieces. He also specifically pointed out that, “There is also very little evidence of efforts in the opening or closing chapters of book-length collections of studies to look across a set of studies to discuss how a set of studies informs the field as a whole on particular substantive issues” (p. 39). In “Looking Across and Moving Forward: Shared Connections and Future Questions,” I attempt to change this situation, at least for this book. So, in the end, I return to share how I see the theoretical and empirical works presented in this book fitting together by exploring selected themes across the writings, sharing my answers to the two questions posed earlier in this introduction (What can self-study do to advance social studies education? And, how can social studies focused self-studies add to larger conversations in self-study about teacher education?), and providing questions that social studies educators could pose when beginning explorations of themselves and their social studies practice.

References


Over the past two decades, self-study has secured its place on the map of approaches to better understanding teacher education. Self-study has attracted interest from researchers and teacher educators representing diverse content areas. Curiously, however, social studies has remained largely on the sidelines as an under-represented participant in the growth of this new genre of educational research. Self-study can be a valuable way for social studies educators—both teachers and teacher educators—to learn about teaching, learn from their practice, and become better at what they do. Uniquely grounded in practice and its surrounding contexts, self-study represents a means of investigation that provides insights into some of the more elusive, and persistent questions in our field. How do social studies teachers develop their practice over time? In what ways does the quality of relationships among teacher educators and their students affect what is learned in teacher education? How do teacher educators develop competence? How are ideas such as education for democracy, disciplined inquiry, and “against the grain” teaching taken up by those first learning to teach social studies? Such complex questions call for diverse approaches to finding answers. Yet social studies teacher educators have been somewhat behind the curve in the adoption of self-study methods.

The contributors to this volume hope their work will serve as an invitation to others in the field to catch up with researchers from other fields who have used self-study research to better understand teacher education practices, programs, and processes. We hope other social studies educators might be drawn to the same features of self-study research that have caught the attention of science educators, early childhood educators, and researchers across the broad span of teacher education. Self-study has helped many explore how powerful educational reform ideas promoted in schools and colleges of education are translated and played out in school classrooms. Self-study has prompted careful consideration of the ways in which our own values and commitments are lived in our work as teacher educators. Self-study has provided a kind of research that makes visible the connections between
scholarship and improved practice. Self-study has emerged as a genre of inquiry that not only provides different kinds of insights into teacher education than available through other educational research approaches, but it also represents a theoretical and philosophical argument for the integration of research and teaching as an integrated whole. Beyond merely an approach to researching teacher education, some see self-study as a stance taken in relation to academic traditions that draw clear lines between scholarship and instruction.

To extend the invitation, this chapter introduces the social studies education community to that of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices. It is designed to offer the reader first glimpses into several different aspects of the self-study enterprise. We begin with an exploration of self-study in two different senses, self-study as a community and as a research genre. We then explain some of the aspects of what makes self-study self-study. In this overview, we address features that have drawn attention and interest to this genre of research more generally and highlight some of the tensions, issues, and questions that continue to shape the emerging field of self-study research. After this introduction to the field as a whole, we discuss ways we believe self-study might serve social studies education research and teaching.

We hope the chapter and the book as a whole are read with some of the same questions we held in mind as we thought about the intersections of self-study research, social studies teaching and learning, and social studies teacher education. Do the same sorts of interests, tensions, and questions that frame conversations about self-study also apply to conversations about research in social studies education? In what ways does self-study research fit with distinguishing features of the nature and practice in social studies education? How might self-study work for me in my institutional context and how might it contribute to the larger community of social studies researchers? If our work leads to more informed consideration of these questions, we will have accomplished a lot. The remainder of the book provides insights into these questions by illuminating the kinds of self-study work done by social studies education researchers, their motivations, and their experiences with the genre. In the end, we will leave you, the reader to make a hopefully more informed decision about self-study as an approach to knowing and doing in social studies teaching and teacher education.

**Understanding Self-Study**

A simple definition or explanation of self-study would serve as a natural entry point to the ideas and research in this book. However, much like the field of social studies, self-study has grappled with its identity, and continues to do so today. Also like social studies, the very conversation around the definitions, organizing questions, and processes of self-study has been so persistent, rich, and deep that it has become something of a signature feature of what self-study means to those who work and research within the community. Therefore, we organized this introduction by addressing what some of the voices are saying in the conversation about key
features of self-study. In some ways, the discussion around “who we are” and “what we do” should resonate among those who have been part of similar conversations in social studies education. In other cases, the discussion is different. Either way, we believe the following are helpful guideposts for those seeking to develop their own understanding of self-study.

The Community

One way of answering the question of what is self-study is to look at the people and activities of those who have worked under the banner of self-study. Self-study of teaching and teacher education practices is a community of educators and educational researchers dedicated to studying their own practice. Compared to other more established fields of educational inquiry, the self-study community has a relatively short formal history dating back only a couple of decades. Yet the community draws on educational research and reform traditions with much longer histories (e.g., action research, teacher inquiry, reflective practice) for its intellectual frames and approaches to studying educational problems. Many self-study researchers find a professional home in the American Educational Research Association (AERA) through the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) Special Interest Group. Formed in 1993, S-STEP currently claims a membership of 272 members (B. Acharya, personal communication, July 16, 2009), making it the one of the largest AERA SIGs. A series of biannual meetings also serves as an important forum that draws together self-study researchers. There have been seven International Conferences on the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices, with an eighth planned for 2010. The proceedings of these conferences serve as an important repository for the history of the self-study community.¹

As a recent and still emerging field, self-study research has witnessed the development of numerous venues for published research. In 2004, self-study scholars published an impressive handbook (Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2007) that helps those new to self-study learn more about the field and helps those of us who are not so new to continue to learn more about ourselves. In 2005, the field launched a new peer-reviewed journal, Studying Teacher Education, to foster and communicate research and thinking about self-study of teaching and teacher education.² Altogether members of the self-study community—teachers, teacher educators, and other educational researchers—have presented their work at professional conferences spanning the map of educational studies and published hundreds of articles and books. For those interested, Loughran (2007) offers an elaborated overview of the history of self-study and Russell (2007b) shares a summary of the development of self-study research and practice in teacher education.

¹All are accessible online at http://sites.google.com/site/castleconference2010/
²The journal can be accessed from the Taylor and Francis website at http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/17425964.asp