

Robyn Brandenburg

# Powerful Pedagogy

Self-Study of a Teacher Educator's Practice

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# Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices

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Volume 6

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Robyn Brandenburg

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Self-Study of a Teacher Educator's Practice

 Springer

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*To Ruth and Reg*

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to:

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to the way that I now understand pedagogy.

## Series Editor's Foreword

Springer has instituted this series in Teacher Education: Self-study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) in order to offer strong examples of quality research in the field of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices. The series highlights the work of teachers and teacher educators seriously working to facilitate personal changes in their pedagogy, but more so, as a consequence of their efforts, also brings to the fore the ways in which institutional change in teaching and teacher education might be catalysed. This book by Brandenburg does exactly that in the manner in which it lays out for the reader an extensive methodological approach to “unpacking” the intricacies of a teacher educator’s practice.

As has been noted by others, self-study of teaching and teacher education practices is derived of the questions, issues and concerns, of teacher educators (most commonly) in regard to their own practice (Berry, 2007; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Dinkelman et al., 2006; Hamilton et al., 1998). However, as Brandenburg makes clear, self-study is not intended to remain a solely personal endeavour. Self-study is also designed to invite others to consider their own pedagogic experiences and to question their taken for granted assumptions about teaching and learning.

In this volume, Brandenburg takes the principles of self-study and rigorously applies them to her own work. She illustrates well how questioning one’s taken for granted assumptions can lead to powerful insights into teaching, learning and teacher education practices in ways that can dramatically reshape the nature of teacher education; both in conceptualisation and structure.

Brandenburg examines her work in careful detail in order to develop new ways of uncovering and then sharing the resultant knowledge; an essential element of quality in self-study.

Like the other books in this series, Brandenburg’s also serves to complement the International Handbook of Self-study of Teaching and Teacher Education practices (Loughran et al., 2004). It offers another exemplar of the diversity of research within the field and is another fine example of the complex nature of self-study. Her book adds another dimension to the developing store of knowledge about the ways in which teaching and learning about teaching are intertwined, interactive and central to the “real” work of teacher educators.



I find the learning inherent in Brandenburg's self-study engaging, informative and insightful. It highlights the importance of seeing into one's practice with new eyes, I have no doubt it will do the same for you.

John Loughran

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# Preface

As a teacher, have you ever been curious about why you teach the way you do? Have you considered actually questioning your beliefs and practices in order to seek out the core of who you are as a teacher, and then explore what that means not only for yourself but for those you teach? *Powerful Pedagogy* is the outcome of questioning my assumptions about teaching and in various ways, gives voice to the many individuals who have had an impact on the development of my pedagogy as a teacher educator. In doing so, *Powerful Pedagogy* also illustrates the ways in which examining the ordinariness of everyday interactions through assumption hunting (Brookfield, 1995) can lead to extraordinary learning outcomes. Simple personal and professional interactions can result in profound learning; reflecting on critical moments and events can lead to challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning; and by constantly asking about the ‘why’ of teaching and learning, new and multiple perspectives emerge. However, as I discovered, researching practice from an insider perspective brings with it multiple challenges for in seeking to understand more about my developing identity as a teacher educator, it was inevitable that in hunting my learning and teaching assumptions, unanticipated outcomes might be revealed.

This book is an account of how I sought to understand my practice as an educator, and through systematic investigation, unravel the *underbelly* of my thinking. This unravelling proved to be challenging yet rewarding and, as many other researchers of teaching also reveal, enabled me to move my professional thinking and practice forward in my work of teaching teachers. As Berry (2007) so eloquently suggests, the process of teacher educator self-renewal is imprecise and never completely achieved, but self-study researchers aspire to closing the space as it were between accepting challenges and working towards new knowledge and deeper understanding of practice.

For me, one key impetus for studying my practice was to be able to more deeply understand the ways in which my knowledge as a teacher educator was developing. I wanted to be able to name knowledge in a way that became meaningful for me and I wanted to find answers to questions I had about developing pedagogical knowledge. I chose self-study as a framework to research practice as it provided me with both a methodology and a lens through which I could systematically examine my practice as a mathematics teacher educator. As an approach to studying practice,

self-study research has gained considerable momentum during the past decade, to the point now where individual and collaborative self-studies are beginning to reveal new and exciting knowledge about teaching, and learning about teaching in teacher education (Berry, 2007; Loughran, 2004b; Pereira, 2000; Russell, 2004). Self-study researchers often identify a lens through which their practice is systematically examined (Berry (2004b, 2007) refers to tension; Loughran (2002, 2006) anecdotes; Loughran & Northfield (1996) assertions; and, Senese (2002) and Austin & Senese (2004) axioms). The lens I used to examine my practice was assumptions.

Assumption hunting led me to uncover paradigmatic assumptions (i.e., those that direct how we see the world) which then led me to understand my teaching at a deeper level than before. The process involved identifying assumptions and exploring the influence of these assumptions on my practice. What has become clearer for me is that the teacher educator is not the only voice of expertise when learning about teaching (despite the perception that the authority of position (Munby & Russell, 1994) would traditionally suggest that this was the case). What I came to more vividly recognise was that pre-service teachers when provided with structured opportunities to examine their own practice and learning over time, contribute in significant ways to learning about teaching dialogue, and hence, meaningfully refine their own pedagogy. As such, pathways to understanding the development of the pedagogic situations I experienced with my pre-service teachers was not so linear as in the past, but rather, required us (pre-service teachers and teacher educator together) to have “faith in indirection” (Finkel, 2000) and to (re)consider our learning and practice such that we were all learners in and through teaching.

This book chronicles three years of my teacher educator journey and as such offers insights into ordinary and idiosyncratic classroom practices. In doing so, I do not propose a blueprint for practicing teacher education, for social, contextual, political, curricula, emotional, and gender issues combine to create intricate (and contextual) learning interplays way too entwined to suggest a blueprint would be possible, much less useful. As such, this is not a *how to do teacher education* book, it is a *how to see teaching differently* book; one which identifies and raises for scrutiny and critique, the markers which helped me in my learning and which continue to influence how I attempt to “enact my pedagogy of teacher education” (Loughran, 2006).

*Powerful* moves some way towards describing the impact on my beliefs, skills and practices, and the ways in which through understanding more about the intricacies and taken-for granted assumptions of teaching, I have moved towards a deeper understanding of what it means to teach and learn in a university environment. *Pedagogy*, in simple terms in this context, refers to the synergistic relationship which exists between learning and teaching - one informs and is impacted by the other. For me then, *Powerful Pedagogy* is a statement about the need to see teaching in new ways and to do so by placing inquiry at the centre of learning about the intricacies of teaching about teaching.

# Overview of the Contents

The book is organised into three sections and each section serves a specific purpose. In Section I, *Researching Teaching in Teacher Education*, I briefly describe the context against which this research was undertaken. Identifying the learning and teaching context is important, for as teachers and teacher educators' work continues to be scrutinised, it is even more crucial for those involved in that venture to understand more about how and why challenging the status-quo might lead to the establishment of a new professionalism in education. Some key factors in challenging my own assumptions are revealed in the first chapter where in exploring a new professionalism, I initially examine the role of theory in understanding my approach to teaching practice and the development of knowledge and then move on to describe self-study which I used as both a methodology and a lens through which I examined my practice. To close the first section of the book I elaborate on the design of my research and the ways in which selfstudy helped me to focus on the process of research.

Section II, *Learners Learning*, comprises four chapters, and focuses on the how and what of the changes I introduced in my practice as a teacher educator. Each of the chapters in this section is prefaced by one of my learning and teaching assumptions. As you read, you will frequently encounter the term 'assumption'; these encounters are intentional. In fore-grounding my assumptions as an educator and exploring the manner in which these assumptions impacted my practice, I was challenged to see the ways in which they implicitly directed my beliefs and practices. Section III, *Powerful Pedagogy*, returns to my initial proposition that by using self-study as a methodological guide through which to examine my practice over time, I was able to see the power in that which I perhaps previously considered ordinary in the day-to-day aspects of my teaching.

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