

Is Self-Study the Right Journey for This Puzzle?

A non-prescriptive orientation map for educators who are curious about self-study research

This is an orientation tool, not a self-study recipe.

Use it to decide whether a professional puzzle may be worth exploring through self-study and to identify what you would need to learn, discuss, or establish before moving forward. It intentionally does not prescribe data-collection activities or duplicate a methods workbook.

Start with the puzzle, not the method

What keeps returning in your practice - a tension, contradiction, uncertainty, surprise, or pattern that you cannot fully explain?

Why does this matter to your practice, to the people you teach/support, or to the larger work of teacher education?

Six orientation questions

Orientation	Why it matters	Your notes
1. WILLINGNESS - Am I open to being changed by the inquiry?	Self-study is not only about documenting what I already believe. What assumption, routine, identity, or commitment might I have to hold open for examination?	
2. REFLECTION - Can I make my reasoning visible?	What part of this puzzle usually stays inside my head? What would I need to articulate so that I - and others - could examine how I am interpreting practice?	
3. COLLABORATION - Who could help me see what I cannot see alone?	Who could question my interpretation without merely agreeing with me? What kind of trust and boundaries would make that relationship educative?	

Orientation	Why it matters	Your notes
4. CHANGE - What would count as learning in practice?	If this inquiry mattered, what might become different in how I notice, decide, teach, mentor, supervise, facilitate, or relate to others?	
5. IDENTITY - What is this puzzle revealing about who I am becoming?	How is this issue connected to the kind of educator, teacher educator, leader, or scholar I am trying to become?	
6. PUBLIC VALUE - Why might anyone beyond me care?	What larger problem, tension, or professional question might this local inquiry illuminate? What could others examine, debate, adapt, or learn from?	

A fit check

The puzzle may be a promising fit for self-study if several of these statements feel true:

- ☐ My own practice is genuinely implicated in the problem.
- ☐ I am interested in understanding and improving practice, not proving that my current approach is correct.
- ☐ My biography, beliefs, identity, or professional commitments may be shaping what I see.
- ☐ I am willing to make my reasoning and evidence open to challenge.
- ☐ Another person's perspective would strengthen the inquiry.
- ☐ I expect the inquiry to influence future practice.
- ☐ The local problem connects to a broader question that could matter to other educators.
- ☐ I am willing to make developed understandings public and available for critique.

Pause before calling it self-study

These are not automatic disqualifiers, but each deserves attention before moving forward:

If I am mainly thinking...	I may need to ask...
I already know what the study will show.	Am I investigating, or documenting a conclusion I have already reached?
I want to reflect privately on my experience.	What would make this systematic, evidence-informed, collaborative, and public?
I do not want anyone to question my interpretation.	What kind of critique is necessary for the inquiry to move beyond self-confirmation?
I want to study other people's practice more than my own.	Is self-study actually the best methodological fit for the question?

If I am mainly thinking...	I may need to ask...
I am comfortable describing the problem but not changing my practice.	How does improvement function in the inquiry?
My story is important because it happened to me.	What professional understanding might the story help develop beyond the particular event?

Build your support around the inquiry

Self-study is often learned with and through others. Identify the people or communities that could support different parts of your journey.

Need	Who might help?	What would I ask of them?
Methodological guidance		
Critical friendship / alternative perspective		
Contextual knowledge		
Emotional / relational support		
Scholarly community		
Public audience / feedback		

Your next step is not necessarily a study

Based on this orientation, what is the next most useful move?

- ☐ Read several published self-studies connected to my professional puzzle.
- ☐ Talk with an experienced self-study researcher about methodological fit.
- ☐ Invite a potential critical friend into an exploratory conversation.
- ☐ Clarify the professional puzzle before deciding on methodology.
- ☐ Identify what evidence already exists in my practice.
- ☐ Join or build a self-study learning community.
- ☐ Learn more about rigor, ethics, collaboration, and public representation in self-study.
- ☐ Decide that another methodology better fits the question.

The next conversation or action I will take:

A final orientation

You do not need to see yourself as a self-study researcher before you begin learning self-study. But you do need to be willing to treat your own practice as problematic, invite other perspectives, learn from evidence, revise what you do, and make what you learn available for others to examine.

To cite: Butler, B. M., Diacopoulos, M. M., & Gregory, K. H. (2026). *Is self-study the right journal for this puzzle?* The Teacher Educator Exchange.