

Physician educators engage in professional development activities including small-group discussions, peer coaching, and journal clubs. These activities ask educators to reflect on their teaching practice and are considered to be of greater value to adult learners than activities like conferences or courses.¹ While professional development activities do encourage reflective practice, they stop short of asking physician educators to study their teaching.

One approach to professional development is self-study. Like reflective practice, self-study is an intentional examination of teaching practice. However, self-study is grounded in the idea that the quality of one's teaching is directly impacted by a willingness to actively study their own teaching practice.² Self-study can be especially helpful in medical education where teaching practice directly impacts patient care.

A living contradiction is the gap between who one believes themselves to be as an educator and who they truly are in practice.

Five Reasons to Engage in Self-Study^{3,4}

Improves Understanding	Helps practitioners better understand themselves, their learners, and their attitudes about and approaches to teaching.
Allows for Self-Correction	Illuminates living contradictions and generates new knowledge that can lead to improvements in teaching practice.
Considers Contexts	Considers teaching in various contexts including cultural, interdisciplinary, and situational contexts.
Requires Vulnerability	Moves beyond reflection by engaging with members of one's personal and professional network and inviting critique.
Normalizes Continual Growth	Encourages growth and "begins to build the muscle for professional development as a life-long process."



Self-study goes beyond the study of self to include the study of self in relation to others, highlighting the **living contradictions** in one's desired and actual practice.^{3,4} Practitioners seek data from sources other than themselves, including learners, administrators, and colleagues. While there is no single formula for conducting a self-study,⁵ there are several steps you can take to conduct a self-study.

- Write your teaching philosophy and teaching goals in a teacher biography
- Review teaching evaluations and other previously documented feedback
- Ask peers to observe your teaching
- View recordings of teaching
- Conduct interviews or round table sessions with learners
- Participate in paired reflections with learners
- Review notes from educator staff meetings and/or teacher trainings

These are often called "mirror data" because they serve to mirror the educator's practice.

These mostly qualitative methods result in **mirror data** that are then compared, and gaps between intention and practice are exposed. Collecting this data can be difficult. Recordings or interviews may be unattainable and finding time for paired reflections with learners can be challenging. Practitioners are encouraged to use any methods that will provide the evidence needed to understand their teaching practice. It is also important to continually collect this data as self-study can be time-consuming. Collecting evidence while teaching, communicating with potential collaborators, and immediately reviewing and documenting responses to learner feedback will save time when beginning a self-study. These efforts help ensure that practitioners can complete self-studies more easily and more frequently. Self-study is a form of continual professional development that should occur regularly throughout one's teaching career rather than only at important career milestones.

Self-study requires time, a willingness to be vulnerable, and a commitment to uncovering the **living contradictions** of one's practice. However, self-study is an effective approach to professional development that should be considered alongside traditional educational approaches.

References:

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