Dialogic Reflection: An Exploration of Its Embodied, Imaginative, and Reflexive Dynamic

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We began this project to explore a critical question in practitioner preparation: what are innovative practices of reflection in professional education intended to expand approaches for professionals to work with diverse others? Dewey (1938) is generally credited with bringing reflection into the field of education. He distinguished between habitual action and reflective action. Schön (1983) expanded upon Dewey's notion of reflection by looking at reflection both on-action and in-action. Both theorists supported the idea of practitioners reconceptualizing problems through reflection.

In this project, we draw from the work of Schön and Dewey to include reflexivity—often a desired but elusive practice—as an additional goal of reflection. Reflexivity is the acknowledgment of an individual situated within a personal history within the real world. Hence, self-reflexivity is the act of personal change within a real-world context. The following

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chapters present creative ways to (self) reflexively navigate through professional educational situations. In each contribution, what became apparent was that as practitioners expanded their approaches to work with diverse others, they created contexts for dialogic imagination, self-examination, and reflexivity. Central to their creation of these was, for each contributor, a deep sense of care.

Working in a caring profession such as education (higher education, middle school, and high school) or nursing education presupposes that professionals should assume a responsibility of care for the people they work alongside, which includes both students and colleagues. According to the Oxford dictionary, care is described as to "look after and provide for the needs of" ("Care," 2015). It would seem reasonable then that as caring professionals we should exercise care in this manner within our professional workplace environment. However, what care looks like and feels like in practice for one person often takes on a different complexion for another professional even in the same field. Noddings (1984) notes that an individual's "position or attitude of caring activates a complex structure of memories, feelings, and capacities" (p. 8); hence, examining one's history becomes essential when determining how care is lived in the field when looking after and providing for the needs of our students. Because this nebulous notion of care is determined by the individual, we believe it is prudent for caring professionals to both examine and become aware of the biases and assumptions they hold when working with diverse others. This theme organically emerged throughout each chapter, regardless of whether the reflective approach was solitary (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006), dialogic (Norris & Sawyer, 2012), an ongoing inquiry (Larrivee & Cooper), or perpetual problem-solving method (Larrivee & Cooper). In each installment/chapter, the author(s) has invariably embodied an ethic of care, and this is why perhaps each contributor deeply reflected on themself before sharing their innovation methods of reflection; they simply cared for themselves, and in turn this created a space to care for diverse others.

Much of the literature on reflection considers the growth of reflection to be the goal of certain forms of practice, such as problem solving or inquiry. As a goal, the promotion of reflection within practitioners who follow professional routines frozen within unexamined self-narratives, often, unfortunately, located within closed and mutually reinforcing institutional structures, is valuable indeed. What we wish to highlight in this

volume is how practitioners can expand this view of reflection to become a new pedagogy of imagination and reconceptualization of practice.

Motivated by a deep sense of care, each contributor shifted his or her perceptions of their own story to become at times counterintuitive, dynamic, and generative. Each contributor threaded reflection into his or her practice as a pedagogy of self/collaborative improvement. As a pedagogy of improvement, reflection was not the product but rather the generator of further reflection and new ways to perceive and imagine practice. As the practitioners in this volume demonstrate, reflection begets reflection.

Practices for Becoming Deeply Reflective

Larrivee and Cooper (2006) highlight three essential practices for becoming a reflective practitioner. They are solitary reflection, ongoing inquiry, and perpetual problem solving. We add dialogic practice (richly and diversely exemplified by our contributors) to this list as a fourth reflective practice. After we briefly describe these reflective practices, we highlight how the contributing chapters fit into and oftentimes overlap between these essential practices.

Solitary reflection is described as "making time for thoughtful consideration of your actions and critical inquiry into the impact of your own behavior…negotiating feelings of frustration and insecurity" (Larrivee & Cooper, p. 10). Solitary reflection creates a space for discovering, honoring, and expressing one's authentic voice. According to Brookfield (1995):

> As a counter hegemonic moment – one in which we reject the common-sense explanations and injunctions that tell us "This is the way it is and has to be" – the moment of finding our voice leads us to withdraw our consent to our own servitude. What we heard formerly as objective truth…now rings hollow. (p. 46)

In short, solitary reflection can be transformative (Mezirow, 1991).

Ongoing inquiry and perpetual problem solving are integrated differently in practice, yet both "allow for a way of developing a practice that accepts uncertainty, recognizes contextual bounds and considers multiple plausible explanations for events and circumstance" (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006, p. 10). Ongoing inquiry is a "practice [that] involves unending questioning of the status quo and conventional wisdom by seeking [one's]

own truth" (p. 10). It requires an individual to examine the assumptions that underlie both classroom and school practices. On the other hand, perpetual problem solvers constantly seek new information and in doing so they "find better solutions, build relationships, and teach students new coping strategies" (pp. 10–11). Within this setting, problem solvers:

- Do not enforce a preset standard of operation
- Set up the classroom to serve as a laboratory for purposeful experimentation
- Recognize that a practice or procedure is never permanent
- Understand that new insights, understandings, and perspectives can bring previous decisions up for reevaluation at any time (Larrivee)

Dialogic Reflection

Dialogic practice, a poststructuralist form of reflection, engenders a practitioner's critical thinking and meaning making in relation to new images and narratives. Key to dialogic reflection is the promotion of structures that stimulate new perspectives and, in reference to a famous text by Bakhtin, a "dialogic imagination" (Bakhtin, 1981). Referring to literature as text, Bakhtin stated that as one reads a novel, the reader creates generative spaces in which different images and ideas transact, situating the reader within heteroglossic in-between spaces. These in-between spaces are dialogic spaces in which the text—as generated by the reader/participant—is never stable, but rather representative of multiple shifting meanings.

Bakhtin maintains that dialogue leads to a shattering—and subsequent reformation—of meaning. In true dialogue (as opposed to authoritative discourse), the act of utterance creates a context in which a word "becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things" (Holquist, 1981, 427). Holquist, reviewing Bakhtin, states that "dialogue may be external (between two different people) or internal (between an earlier and a later self), as well as spatial (A to B) or temporal (A to A) (1981, p. 427)." As with other forms of reflection, the goal of dialogic reflection is the promotion of self-critique and change in practice. In contrast to other forms of reflection, however, dialogic reflection takes a more embodied approach to reflection. As a form of embodied reflection, the participant involves himself or herself in a process in which he or she disrupts and reconceptualizes their views in relation to their narrative. This process creates the first step to meaningful reflexivity.

Duoethnography, for example, represents an example of embodied reflection. In duoethnography, the text is not a printed page; rather, it is the curriculum of one's life, one's currere (Pinar, 1975, 1994). With this form of personal inquiry, two researchers investigate a topic of interest using their own life as the curriculum that drives the dialogue and the subsequent research. In this inquiry, dialogue as the methodology is the means for the generation of new insights and understandings. Duoethnographers emphasis difference of perspective to generate new perspectives about a topic: "Rather than reaching a consensus, duoethnographers make their disparate opinion explicit" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 14) and in doing so attempt to disrupt the metanarrative "by questioning held beliefs" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 15). In duoethnography, the dialectical situation—the heteroglossia—is fluid and dynamic and layered, including one's reading/transacting with a variety of media (e.g., Skype calls), artifacts (e.g., high school yearbooks), and art objects (childhood photography).

The act of transacting with these media involves a process of visual phenomenology for the participant. Visual phenomenology emphasizes the unstable transaction (Eisner, 1991) that takes place between a viewer and art. This transaction promotes an intertextual construction of meaning, as the meaning of the art is not contained within the form itself (Sullivan, 2005), but rather emerges through a transaction between the viewer and the artwork (Eisner, 1991). Sullivan describes this process: "Meaning is not within a form itself, say a person, painting, or a poem, but exists within a network of social relations and discourse. This interpretive landscape of 'intertextuality' serves as the means by which meanings become distributed and debated" (Sullivan, 2005, p. 43).

This intertextuality facilitates practitioners' development of new relationships with themselves and their patterns of perception—or even imagination—to specific topics and situations. As practitioners code and double-code held meanings with contrasting dialogic meanings, they are engaging in a reflective process that builds a capacity for increased imagination and a changed viewpoint. The result is an embodied change that creates sites of cyclical meaning making—sites of re/generation.

In this collection, each chapter extends one or more of the essential reflection practices. In the next section, we will highlight each chapter's contribution based on their approach: arts-based, disciplinary, and/or critical, as well as the essential reflective practices they extend as forms of dialogic reflection.

ARTS-BASED APPROACHES

An arts-based approach to reflection allows for multiple representations. It allows researchers to express understandings not always accessible or re-presentable through other means. In their perpetual problem solving, *Photography as Reflexive Practice*: *Containing Pedagogical Complexity in the Learning Encounter*, Garrett and Matthews use photography to assist their postsecondary students to make sense of global violence as they learn to teach social studies. What is interesting is that learning with or through photography created a complexity of learning that was foreign to most of their students. Hence, the medium itself created more dissonance than global violence and learning to teach social studies. They end their chapter with a discussion on the relationship between containment and pedagogical complexity as theorized through their findings.

In Rasmor's hybrid solitary reflection, *Digital Storytelling in Nurse Practitioner Education*: *A Beginning of Reflective Clinical Practice*, she uses digital storytelling to both guide and create the space for nurse practitioners to reflect upon their new identity as they evolve as registered nurses. Thus, it is Rasmor's students who undergo the solitary reflection with Rasmor acting as their guide. Digital storytelling creates a new media pathway for literacy, learning, creativity, and reflexivity to flourish. Arts-based approaches to reflection are particularly suited to human inquiry where human experience and interaction are valued. It allows for personal, emotional, experiential, and embodied expressions of knowledge. What emerged from the process of digital storytelling reflected that kind of depth through the hidden curriculum of classroom safety, disclosure, and the importance of deeper reflection when deconstructing and reconstructing one's own culture and identity. In the end, the digital story as an educational approach that encompasses both the thousand-year-old tradition of storytelling with the digital technology of the twenty-first century, emerged as a powerful elixir for deep reflection to blossom.

Arts-based activities allow people to connect thoughts and feelings and come to a better understanding of the issue they are researching. In Woods and Sebok's *Promoting Professional Conversations and Reflective Practice Among Educators*: *Unpacking Portfolio Assessment using Duoethnography*, they explore the use of electronic and blended methods for engaging in professional conversations around the perpetual problem-solving issue of assessment. The inherent juxtaposition of the online conversation was interrupted by the time and space that was naturally built-in between their

online communications. This liminal space implicitly called for a more deeply informed reflection. This improved their ability to connect their thoughts and feelings and brought an articulation of embodied knowledge that helped situate a reconceptualization around what they now believe about portfolio assessment. They rightly conclude that often when individuals are working there is not enough time for reflection and professional development; therefore, using this creative approach allowed them to foster meaningful conversation and promote a sustained reflexivity between them.

CRITICAL APPROACHES

Examining the ethical, social, and political consequences of one's professional practice requires a critical approach. Questioning one's underlying assumptions, biases, and values is a critical dimension (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006). According to Brookfield (1995) "we *are* our assumptions"; consequently, "becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how we think and act is one of the most challenging intellectual puzzles we face in our lives" (p. 2). The authors that took a critical approach pursued a reflective process at the level of the self. Through a reflexive inquiry stance, a deep examination of their values and beliefs were excavated and through the writing process both their personal and professional identities shifted.

Lida Dekker, a nurse educator with 30 years of clinical experience, used story, poetry, and formal literature to illuminate cultural safety. In her work entitled *Cultural Safety and Critical Race Theory: Education Frameworks to Promote Reflective Nursing Practice*, she unearths her roots and through a questioning of her own family cultural values she is determined to learn about the various values held by her clients so that she could provide the most culturally aligned care possible. In doing so, she transfers her knowledge and experience into the classroom where she provide a framework to guide her nursing students through a deeply critically reflective course specifically focused on their practice. This ongoing inquiry has spanned her entire life and has allowed her to question from where she speaks.

In *Shifting Personalities: A Critical Discussion of a Duoethnographic Inquiry of a Personal Curriculum of Post/Colonialism*, Rick Sawyer uses duoethnography as a method to promote a process of curriculum "decolonialism." As an educator committed to teaching in postcolonial ways that do not privilege one particular group over another, he was challenged to construct curriculum that respects the voice and democratic inclusion

of different cultures and people. Teacher educators, like Sawyer, "extend their considerations to issues beyond the classroom to include democratic ideals" (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006). He knows that at the local, and more systemic, and global levels curriculum cannot be separated from the larger social and political realities; yet, through an example of "good" postcolonial teaching he examines and critiques a lesson he taught leaving no stone unturned.

The final chapter in the critical approaches grouping is *Feminine Identity and the Academy* by Deirdre Le Fevre and Sandy Farquhar. This exemplary collaborative reflective piece flows beautifully between the dialogic conversation of the two researchers and the interspersing of the formal literature that corroborates how women experience their positions within the academy. While reading, the seamless connection between conversation and the literature illuminates how both women live their values and beliefs within the patriarchal institutional backbone of the academy. The many perceived norms that interrupt a sense of continuity for women between self and identity in the academy are unveiled, which mires the potential for women in leadership positions. However, a hopeful conclusion prevails. By invoking Dalli's (2008) ground-up approach, along with Meyerson's (2001) idea of the tempered radical, they hope to provide a springboard for what they consider to be a more creative ethic of leadership practice (Gibbons & Farquhar, 2013). Le Fevre and Farquhar end by pondering how they, as tempered radicals, can facilitate a ground-up approach within their own organizations. This is truly a grassroots approach.

INTEGRATIVE RESPONSIVENESS APPROACHES

The sharing of personal constructions in order to reach a shared understanding is the focus of the next group of chapters. The issues that are considered are understood in terms of the ways they are socially constructed between the teacher and the student. M. Taylor Wallace, in the chapter *Reflexivity from the Third Space: A Hybrid Educator's Approach to Improving Education*, has been able to engage in the connectivity between the epistemic knowledge of the university and the phronesis of the secondary school site. His perpetual problem solving has allowed him to contribute to the relatively unstudied population of the hybrid educator, one whose professional practice has the potential to simultaneously merge the theoretical realm of higher education with the practical realm of a high school classroom. The immediate integrative responsiveness Wallace

experienced allowed him to teach similar content at the same time. For example, after engaging with instructional texts that explain the driving theories behind literature circles with his preservice teachers, Wallace would bring crates of books from the school to the university and have preservice teachers engage in the same literature assignments as his secondary students—reading aloud, journaling, and creating presentations— so they could engage in the whole literature experience. This integrative approach created a collaborative community of practice, which created space for understanding to emerge. By utilizing the expertise of practicing teachers, both the preservice teachers alongside their hybrid educator have the potential to deepen their understanding of what it means to teach and learn in a complex educational environment.

In the next installment, Hilary Brown and Henny Hamilton use duoethnography to deeply reflect and examine their own values and beliefs about what it means to teach for diversity in the chapter *Going Beneath the Surface*: *What is Teaching for Diversity Anyway*? This dialogic inquiry was the perfect catalyst for them to disrupt the status quo of the standardized educational reform that predominates today's educational system. They do this by taking the reader on a Hero's Journey (Campbell, 1949) as they describe their communal adventure to overcome the inherent obstacles that were present in both their personal as well as professional lives. This deeply metareflective chapter is transformative in the sense that transformation and freedom to teach for diversity occurred through learning and action. What is teaching for diversity? According to Brown and Hamilton, you start in your classrooms with your students. Through an integrative responsive you take time to listen, be with each other, and learn from each other in ways that encourage deep self-reflection. It would seem that once again it begins at the grassroots level.

In the next chapter *Shape Shifting in the Classroom*: *Masks and Credibility in Teaching*, Rick Breault uses an intensive solitary reflective approach as he examines his professional identity in relation to the masks he has worn. His honest appraisal exposes conflicted identities that were at times hidden from view behind a mask along with the circumstances that determined which mask he would don. For two prolonged time periods in Breault's life, he experienced flow behind a mask that allowed him to flourish in all areas of his life. However, it is impossible to maintain a constant state of flow and in those less than optimal junctures in one's life and during these tumultuous times Breault struggled with personas that were not as stimulating or fulfilling. Through an integrative responsive approach between

his professional, personal, cognitive, and emotional identities he found his way to realize that an authentic mask is one that can be as evasive as the less than desirable masks. As he came to this conclusion another mask unveiled itself. Today, he has settled on a mask that personifies a teacher in transition in the context of a profession that is evolving. He is not the same man he was. He is a different person and with difference comes growth. He has moved to thinking beyond the self and, in the spirit of Erik Erikson's generativity, he is applying himself toward establishing and guiding the next generation as a direct result from his new sense of optimism about humanity.

In the final chapter, integrative responsiveness is observed through the experience of the Teaching Assistants (TAs) who examined their own unique responses to academic integrity, assessment, and the professor/teaching assistant/student triadic relationship through a theatrical form of representation. Through the work of Mirror Theatre, A/R/Tors (actor/research/teachers) create participatory dramas that they dialogically play out with audience members. This integrative approach invites all participants to pre-live possible scenarios and through reflection and collaborative critical conversations on the dramas they cocreated they begin to imagine other ways of being. This culminating chapter reminds us that reflecting on possibilities through "role play" and employing "what if" scenarios can guide us toward new forms of learning and hence new ways of being in the world. These new ways that have the potential for us, and more specifically in this chapter the TAs, to navigate new avenues of thought to work with diverse others.

Conclusion

Our goal was to unveil innovative dialogic methods of reflection in professional education, which were intended to expand approaches for professionals to work with diverse others. As professionals working in a caring profession such as teacher preparation, the contributing authors took it upon themselves to ensure that they looked after and provided for the needs of their students, teacher candidates, and/or teaching assistants and in doing so looked after themselves in the process. When a person has deeply examined his or her biases, values, and assumptions, the likelihood that he or she will be open to working with diverse others expands. The essential reflective processes utilized by the contributors—perpetual problem solving, duoethnography, solitary reflection, or

ongoing inquiry—allowed the contributors to reframe and reconceptualize their position and in turn guide their students to do the same and we believe this process prepares teachers to work with diverse others. It did not matter whether they used an arts-based, critical, or an integrative responsive approach. All three approaches alongside the chosen reflective process allowed both the teacher and the student to break through familiar cycles of thought. They each extended the three central reflection processes by creating and exploiting dialogic spaces for themselves. In doing so they created new pathways by seeing new ways of interpreting a situation, which allowed the authors to reposition themselves within the context of their issue.

In closing, guiding students to become critically reflective at the level of the self was revealed as the most valuable way to prepare teachers to work with diverse others. According to Larrivee and Cooper (2006), it has been stated that teachers who develop as reflective practitioners are more likely to continue to challenge the underlying beliefs that drive their behavior. However, they also mention that our ability to change our beliefs is not immediate nor is it direct but rather it is through critically examining assumptions, interpretations, and expectations. Therefore, as we grow in our reflective practice and develop methods and strategies to guide our students we must understand that "the end goal is constantly changing and illusive even as we continue to expand our knowledge and understanding of our differences" (Samuels, 2014, p. 1).

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