

Pedagogical Reflection: Demonstrating the Value of Introspection **Emily E. Virtue, Western Carolina University, evirtue@wcu.edu**

Abstract. Instructors in higher education are often asked to reflect on their pedagogical choices in formulaic, detached, rote ways such as end of the year faculty evaluations or in response to peer review of teaching. Yet, because of the parameters for these reflections, they often lack depth or much consideration. Particularly because higher education institutions, especially in the United States, are focused on assessment, outcomes, student performance, and retention, little time is focused on particular pedagogical choices or interaction with students. Numerous studies demonstrate that faculty-student interaction has a remarkable impact on student success. This paper, a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), explores the value of sustained pedagogical reflection and how such reflection can benefit instructors and their students.

Keywords: pedagogy, reflection, higher education, scholarly personal narrative (SPN)

Conversations about teaching in higher education often center on assessment, outcomes, and student performance (Fook & Sidhu, 2010). Each of these factors can be linked to teacher preparation and pedagogical practices (Henard & Roseveare, 2012). Numerous studies demonstrate that faculty interaction with students can have a major impact on student success (Maestas et al., 2007; Mayhew et al., 2016; Schreiner et al., 2011; Strayhorn, 2012). Yet, those who teach undergraduate students often do not share their experiences beyond personal conversations. Further, many may not take the time to reflect on their own mindsets and dispositions related to teaching. Instructors and researchers have been conditioned to address our teaching in a detached, analytical manner devoid of emotion, even though many instructors consider teaching an incredibly personal and emotional process. It is time to reimagine the value that personal reflection and writing have on teacher preparation and pedagogical practice. In this Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), I explore the role of sustained reflection on teaching and how such reflection was a benefit to both me and my students.

Scholarly Personal Narrative

Seventeen years ago, Robert Nash (2004) published his first book on Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), a form of qualitative inquiry that is similar to, yet distinct from, traditional forms of educational inquiry such as autoethnography and phenomenology. SPN allows for creativity and voice to shine through in its composition. In contrast to the rigid nature of academic writing, in SPN the author's voice is considered vital to knowledge delivery. Such writing is highly accessible and readable. The narrative form invites readers in to experience the life of the author/narrator. Bruner (1987) suggested that narratives, particularly those that

are autobiographical, “reflect prevailing theories” (p. 15) about one’s culture thus making such a form useful to narrator and reader alike, similar to Nash’s conception of universalizability.

SPN calls for universalizability in the findings: a way to take one’s specific experience and appropriately broaden the ideas to other related contexts (Nash, 2004; Nash & Bradley, 2011). Through sustained critical reflection, I share my experiences demonstrating both the unique nature of being in a classroom with students while at the same time pointing to the commonalities many teachers share. Narrative writing, more broadly speaking, allows authors to “character[ize] culture” by using “narrative models” (Bruner, 1987, p. 15).

This SPN highlights my own experiences engaging in reflection guided by *phronesis* and utilizes my voice as essential to the argument. Researchers, teachers, and stakeholders should reimagine what it means to engage in the hard work of preparing students for undergraduate study—particularly what it means for the teachers themselves. As teachers, our stories have merit and can serve to encourage and prepare new teachers and shed light on the realities of undergraduate teaching.

Reflection and Teaching

While the literature on pedagogy and reflection is vast and dates back as early as Dewey (1933), scholars disagree on the best approach to take for reflection. Brookfield (2017) argued that teachers must be critically reflective of their teaching experience because one can never be sure of the effect one has on a student’s learning experience. Critical reflection “is the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions” (p. 3). When teachers critically reflect, they can ascertain what and how the student is learning and if any content has affected students in an unexpected or unintentional way. Moreover, reflection forces teachers to identify any underlying assumptions they might have about teaching methods or students (Brookfield, 2017).

Like other scholars (Birmingham, 2004; Brookfield, 2017), Mankey (2014) suggested that reflection must occur continually to be effective. The benefits of reflection are difficult to summarize as outcomes are dependent on goals and context. Fook and Gardner (2007) noted, however, that critical reflection can lead to informed choice, “more enlivened teaching” (p. 130), emotional grounding, and improved professional practice. Mankey (2014) argued that “reflection serves us best when we look inward to our own intentions, emotions, and actions in order to compare them with what we espouse our beliefs to be” (p. 86). Palmer (2007) noted the importance of being “inward bound” so that teachers might eventually be “outward bound” and able to influence others. In recent years, teacher preparation programs have maintained a strong emphasis on self-reflection (Blanchard et al., 2018; Civitillo et al., 2019; Hozebin, 2018; McCoy & Lynam, 2020; Sahli & Benaissi, 2019; Snead & Frieberg, 2019), yet that expectation is not as common or studied as acutely in instructors in higher education.

Phronesis as Reflection

My approach to reflection builds on Birmingham's (2004) theory of pedagogical reflection based on phronesis—a virtue presented by Aristotle that is a “unifying and essential habit of the mind” (p. 314). I was drawn to this model of reflection because the concept of phronesis suggests a practice that becomes regular and holistic, rather than a one-off attempt at reflection. Birmingham (2004) argued that reflective instructors must critically reflect on pedagogical choices so that they might best serve students. Reflection, therefore, must be sustained, critical, and address specific questions or areas of concern for the instructor. Further, what an instructor finds as a result of reflection must be shared with teaching peers and institutional stakeholders. Traditional forms of scholarly work (for example a five-chapter dissertation or five section article), however, do not align with knowledge dissemination of personal experience. I argue that personal experiences and knowledge should appear more consistently in academic work and that the formatting of knowledge sharing should allow for creativity. As humans, we are drawn to stories; it is how we first make meaning of our world and as Sarte (Bruner, 1987) points out, we are surrounded by stories. Therefore, storytelling as a means of knowledge production is the very essence of who we are. Bruner (1987) extends this to mean that we expect to learn of lives through storytelling.

In my previous years of teaching, the English department would require instructors to write a yearly reflection of their teaching. With very little direction, we were asked to explain what it is we do in the classroom and how effective we think we are. I despised this practice and, in all honesty, largely copied and pasted what I wrote the previous year in an attempt to simply complete the task and call it a day. Because of my inconsiderate approach to the task, I did not benefit from the practice. It merely seemed like a hoop I had to jump through. While the intent of the exercise might have been for instructors to reflect on their work, I found it difficult to summarize in one page all the ways I interacted with and taught my students over the course of a year. I knew what I did in the class, but I did not often think about the big picture—what it meant for my overall teaching practice or for my students.

Phronesis, on the other hand, invites the teacher to be personal, consider the community, to avoid reducing the work into a few simple phrases, and provide new opportunities to construct knowledge (Birmingham, 2004). Clandinin (1992) explained how practical knowledge (identified by reflection) is “carved out of and shaped by situations; knowledge that is constructed and reconstructed as we live out our stories and retell and relive them through processes of reflection” (p. 125). The iterative process of reflection that I engaged in served to acknowledge the context of my classroom and the situations therein. Moreover, as Clandinin (1992) and Birmingham (2004) suggested, my reflection of these experiences serve to create new knowledge.

"I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means." — Joan Didion

The Challenge with Bridges

The basis of my reflective practice was teaching in a Summer Bridge (SB) program. Many institutions of higher education are committed to creating better access to a college degree (Garcia & Paz, 2009; Nemelka et al., 2017). Bridge programs exist as one way institutional leaders increase access and are so named because they bridge the gap between high school and college, particularly when students are thought to be underprepared for collegiate study. Henry and Stahl (2017) noted the "effects of being underprepared and/or misprepared for the next step grow exponentially" (p. 612) and argued that bridge programs can help align students to the rigors of college-level academics.

Students who enter bridge programs, regardless of their level of academic preparation, must transition to life on a college campus including rigorous academics and new social dynamics. Developmentally and emotionally, the college transition is difficult for most students, perhaps more so for students in bridge programs who have been conditionally-enrolled and will only continue in college pending their success in the program (Covarrubias et al., 2018). Yet, in terms of bridge program implementation, university time and energy are spent primarily on supporting students. Less time is spent on preparing faculty to work with underprepared student populations. In my first summer of teaching, I felt as though I was thrown to the wolves. I'd taught English to first year students for many years, but the SB program dynamics made me feel as if I was a brand new teacher and highlighted issues bridge programs might present.

Over the next few years, I began to purposefully plan my curriculum for SB students; I practiced adapting to the needs of my students as the summer progressed. Finally, I thought I had a solid curriculum around which my class would run, but I wanted to be intentional about understanding my teaching. As such, I developed a protocol for sustained, critical reflection about my SB teaching.

Methods

SPN researchers connote data differently than traditional qualitative researchers. Whereas qualitative data traditionally relies on interview transcripts, document analysis, and the like, SPN researchers rely on their personal experience and perspectives. Nash and Bradley (2011) explained:

SPN researchers think of what they do as giving personal testimony to make their points rather than accumulating empirical *evidence* [author emphasis] to prove something beyond a shadow of a doubt [...] For SPN researchers, scholarship is *credible* [author emphasis] when it flows from what writers believe and love [...] with all their hearts. This meaning of credible (L. *credo*) comes very close to the notion of personal creed. (p. 83)

Content for this SPN was based on my personal experiences teaching, informed by voice and video reflection conducted each day after teaching. Extensive journaling of my reactions to daily interactions with students, case management meetings¹, and class content allowed me to reflect on experiences in a deep, critical way.

Journaling practices allowed me to write about the “subjective experience” defined by Nash and Bradley (2011) as the main design objective of SPN, which seeks to “investigate, present, and analyze the inner life of the writer in order to draw insights that might be *universalizable* [author emphasis] for readers” (p. 83). SPN’s notion of universalizability answers Shenton’s (2004) call for transferability in qualitative work in that the author must give enough contextual information about the study so the reader might be able to make a transfer to their own context.

Throughout the writing process, I utilized members from the case-management staff (the two other teachers in our cohort, the Residence Life Case Manager², and staff who run the SB program) to check my recollection or details about particular students. By utilizing feedback from my peers, I “overlap[ped]” methods and increased dependability (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).

Collecting Perspectives

The data I collected in the form of journals, voice, and video recordings are traditional methods of data collection. SPN researchers, however, eschew the term data in favor of perspectives because of its constructivist leanings (in that it allows the author to give meaning to observation) (Nash & Bradley, 2011). In each of the daily reflections I collected, I utilized the same set of questions to guide my reflection (similar to following an interview protocol):

1. Summarize the day’s lesson (what I did, how I felt, and how students responded).
2. Describe my mindset and the perspectives I anticipated addressing in the lesson (behavioral, psychological, socio-cultural, and holistic).
3. Discuss my insights for adapting/changing my instruction based on the day’s lesson.

While I have data on which I heavily relied, I also used introspective questions as I reviewed my previously recorded perspectives.

¹ Case management meetings are attended by all instructors in the cohort, a residential life case manager, the program coordinator for the SB program, and a student intern. The weekly, hour-long meetings consist of conversations about students who may be struggling both in and out of class and explore how to address the issues and support the students to complete the program.

² The primary responsibility of a Residential Life Case Manager is to engage with first-year residents outside of class and make sure they are adapting socially and academically to college life. The case manager connects with students when behavior or other concerns arise and advises the student on how to handle any problems they may have.

The introspective questions came about as I identified themes that emerged in my teaching and reflection (a necessary step in the SPN process that allowed me to work toward universalizability). Such introspective questions required further writing and reflecting on the teaching experience. This continued reflection deviated from traditional data collection in that it was ongoing and allowed for prolonged reflection and change in viewpoint given the difference in time between initial reflection and review.

Further, my reflection on reflection was key because while my summer course was complete, I was an instructor to the same students the following fall. My reflection about teaching them changed as I continued to learn more about my students, their struggles, and how they developed over the summer. Because of my continued interaction with these students, I came to better understand what I saw in the summer classroom with new information presented after the course was complete. While traditional forms of data collection may not allow for a constant flow of data collection, SPN welcomes the changing, real-time variables that equipped me to better understand pedagogical choices I made in previous months.

Many SPN pieces are written without formal data collection, hence the use of the term perspectives rather than data (Nash & Bradley, 2011), yet I chose to be methodical in my approach to collecting my perspectives. My decision to follow a specific protocol was made so I might ensure a rigorous method of perspective collecting that would still allow me to share the information in narrative form. It may also serve as a guide for teachers dedicated to doing similar self-reflective work.

What Good am I Doing? The Purpose of Self-exploration in Teaching

Teachers often get bogged down in the tasks that need to be done: prep a class, grade a quiz, complete an IRB application so that data collection can begin. As a teacher and researcher, I can get so enmeshed in the day to day business of teaching, I often forget the purpose of teaching and even the people I'm hoping to teach. So many of my teacher-friends have said the same. As a result, sometimes I can lose sight of my goals: to help students understand new ideas and think in different, challenging ways. I try to equip students with the skills to solve hard problems and prepare them to interact with one another beyond the walls of our classroom. But I can forget that teaching is more than presenting information to students with their eyes and ears open. Teaching is personal, relational, and can be intimate. At the same time, teaching can be guided by clear parameters: learning outcomes, time in the classroom, the classroom environment itself.

When we approach the task of teaching in a personal way (building relationships with students, allowing the students to explore their own values, ideas, and perceptions in class) learning goals are met without feeling as stringent. Students learn better when teachers build relationships with students in the classroom, and to do that, we (teachers and students) must share a part of ourselves. To share ourselves, we tell stories—embarrassing ones about sitting on a tack in class or difficult ones about how hard it was to focus in high school when medication ran

short. As we tell these stories, we learn about one another, about our community, and about ourselves both as people and as academics who have something important to share.

Both radical pedagogy (hooks, 1994) and liberatory pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2003) call for teachers to welcome their students into the classroom and share their own experiences and beliefs. Sharing stories not only allows others to better understand one's perspective, it provides a way to make sense of one's life and to understand how one keeps striving even when life is difficult. Joan Didion (1979) is famous for writing, "we tell ourselves stories in order to live." Like Didion asserts, the stories I will share of my teaching have helped me understand what it means to teach new college students and, just as importantly, what it means to me to live as a teacher. The stories of triumph give me comfort when I am struggling to reach a student and help them grow. The stories of failure remind me that teaching is a craft that can always be practiced and adapted. Importantly, regardless of the subject matter, stories are vital. The narrative nature of this study will convey to the reader the personal, intimate nature of teaching and the influence reflection can have on one's pedagogy.

"The institution hires you for competencies, but the whole self comes to work." – Jim Gould

What You Do is Part of Who You Are

There are aspects of life that a teacher should not bring to her classroom, yet to act as if we are not people serves as a barrier to creating relationships with students. If we as teachers want to help students better understand themselves as learners, better engage with their education, and consider the hard questions about who they are and how they see themselves, then we must also ask those same questions of ourselves. We must share a part of ourselves with our students. What and how we decide to share is up to us, but we must bring a sense of vulnerability to the classroom if we expect our students to do the same (hooks, 1994; Rademacher, 2017).

I have always been drawn to storytellers. The faculty members I gravitated toward in undergrad were the ones who offered up a piece of themselves in class. Though I had plenty of wonderful educators who helped me understand, apply, and use course material in class, I was more engaged in class and ready to learn with the professors who showed something of themselves in the classroom.

For three years of undergraduate study, I took a number of courses taught by Dr. Kelly Lowe. He was the first professor I had who allowed us to call him by his first name, and that alone was proof to me that professors are real human beings. I had a tendency to view professors as B-list celebrities: even if I did not know exactly why they were important, I knew a lot of people really liked them, and I should give them deference. I considered professors to be the keepers of knowledge. As a first-generation student, I was not familiar with the "ivory tower" conceptions of

higher education, nonetheless I imagined my professors sitting in their cozy, book-cluttered offices doing the hard work of thinking.

Dr. Lowe was incredibly intelligent and challenged his students to work at his level. His sardonic wit and dry sense of humor were a stark contrast to some of the other faculty members in the English and Writing departments. Over the course of many semesters, I learned more about Kelly—his involvement in local theater, his love of Frank Zappa, and the fact that we could tell his mood based on the socks he was wearing. Because Kelly offered a piece of himself to the class, I found it easier to be real with him.

When I considered attending graduate school, Kelly was the first person I asked for advice. Even after he changed institutions, he kept in touch and counseled me in my transition to graduate school. Fifteen years later, if I had to choose one faculty member who most influenced my education and career trajectory, Kelly would be at the top of my list. Scanlon et al. (2009) found first-year students in particular seek relationships with their professors. My own experience (starting my freshman year and continuing through subsequent years) reflects these findings. Each summer I taught in the SB program, I built relationships with students, and Scanlon and associates' assertions were made real. Relationships matter—they matter to the student and the teacher.

As I conducted my daily reflections, I realized that, having never left higher education once I began as a college freshman, my perspective on college life had changed. I had forgotten my earlier fears, because I had become a part of university life—of it, not just in it. My students (and some of their families) however, were new to it. So, I began to add lessons about what it means to be a college student into our class time. I taught them how to actively read texts, how to find help on campus for common first-year problems (study skills, homesickness, etc.), and centralized our discussions on literature including content that would resonate with them. In one scene from *I am Charlotte Simmons*, for example, students read about the title character's overall awe at starting college; she's overcome by the landscape and the people, and she's painfully aware that she and her family do not fit this mold. While the lesson was on language, close reading, and discerning dense text, students also noted that their own experiences were similar. They even applied those feelings of inferiority to preparing for the lesson (see Virtue, 2019, for more on student response to this instruction). Reflecting on these experiences showed me the dual purpose of the SB program and how I could change my curriculum and pedagogical choices to meet the learning outcome and social and emotional needs of students. While I had a number of successful moments, there were times when I lacked confidence in my teaching.

Reflecting on teaching leads to many "what if" questions. After class I would journal or record my reflection and find that I merely asked myself a battery of questions. A few times, an idea would take shape, and I would ramble on or scribble a few notes down to use the next day or to table the thought for the next time I taught the course. (That list of "what to do next time" is ever-changing and never-ending.) I found myself wrestling with the questions I asked of myself. It was straight up

tiring to reflect on my work every day. Worse, on the days when the lesson did not go as planned, or my students had twenty side conversations that distracted me and everyone else in the room, I started to feel like a failure.

The “what if” questions are only one component of teaching. Before I could reflect on the work of the day, I first had to complete a number of other tasks: reread the text I had assigned, prep activities, create assignments, add informational links in Blackboard, grade assignments (with helpful and timely feedback), and correspond with students, staff, and colleagues in my teaching cohort. This list only reflects the demands of one class; it does not include any other responsibilities I had on any given day while also being a wife and mother. Even in the moments when teaching was going well, I was tired. My exhaustion was mental and physical. While my fatigue did not always feel as though it was a direct result of teaching, teaching certainly wore on me.

My questions about how to improve shifted to questions about my ability to teach at all. Was I helping students? Were they learning or gaining academic skills they did not have before? I did not know and felt like there was no way to tell. The only thing I knew on those days was reflecting was the pits and I hated it. Birmingham (2004) would probably say to me, *that’s the whole point*. The fact that I felt so emotionally involved in the work, that I was willing to reflect even on the days I knew I would not be pleased with the outcome, that’s what reflecting is all about. That’s *phronesis* in action. Being able to share this experience with others has considerable value. If stakeholders are to value the work teachers do, they must first understand the daily giving-of-oneself that goes into teaching. Teachers must continue the practice of reflecting on their experience and sharing their stories with those who influence change.

Implications for Teachers and Practitioners

While the format of SPN requires the author to share the “subjective experience” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 83), the goal is to take that experience and make it *universalizable* to others. My experiences teaching in SB were certainly context dependent, and no other teacher will have the same experiences as me. However, some of my experiences may be mirrored in classes for first-year or conditionally-enrolled students. Many students struggle with issues related to the student transition including struggling to see themselves as academics and adjusting to a new environment while encountering different cultures and perspectives for the first time. Thus, my recommendations below, though guided by personal experience, may inform those who encounter similar situations and contexts. As Shenton (2004) argued, the reader must consider the similarities and differences in their own practices and apply the information from this research as it fits to their own circumstance.

The Value of Reflection

As teachers work toward improving their practices, they should also engage in reflection of these practices and their interactions with their students. Teaching is

more than disseminating information, it is a personal practice that should engage the whole classroom—each student—in ways that are meaningful and developmentally appropriate. Birmingham (2004) reminds us, however, that making sense of reflection will not be easy and will likely not be succinct. Reflection is not meant to quantify our abilities, rather it is meant to help us understand the work we are doing and, ideally, improve upon it. Sahli and Benaissi (2019) noted change comes from reflection because it allows teachers, especially those focused on teaching methods, teacher-student relationships, and “the human conditions of teaching” (p. 48), to identify weaknesses and seek out support in developing quality instruction.

When I first started thinking about the process of intentional reflection on my teaching, I thought about it in this sort of lofty ah yes, the life of the mind! kind of way. I imagined I would sit and think, then write—long-hand—all the encounters and conversations I had in the given day. I soon realized that was no way to research or reflect in a meaningful way. With the help of my dissertation chair and many teacher friends who are far wiser than me, I began to do what many gifted teachers do: I wrote a brief lesson plan for reflection. Through a number of drafts, I whittled down a reflection protocol that guided my reflection and kept me focused. As such, I was able to maintain focus on the issues that were most salient to my daily teaching: thinking about how I designed each lesson and to what extent these lessons “worked.”

The lessons that worked the best were, not surprisingly, the ones that were student focused. When students engaged with material that was reminiscent of aspects of their own lives, their conversation flourished and their writing improved (Virtue, 2019). For example, as students read various fictional pieces that took place on college campuses, they were able to discuss how aspects of the story were crucial to their understanding of theme, but also how it informed their new lives as college students. Such findings were incredibly helpful to me as I continued to design my curriculum and reading lists; I added more excerpts and stories of students who struggled academically (e.g., *The Art of Fielding*) or socially (i.e., *Fangirl*; *I am Charlotte Simmons*)—my students, after all, consistently commented on these characters and wrote about identifying with them.

In order for teachers to learn from their students and the work they are doing in the classroom, I suggest teachers frame reflection in a style similar to their lesson plans. Regardless of the specific goal, reflection should be intentional, prolonged (i.e., over a sustained period of time), and structured enough that when the teacher engages in a second round of reflection, the perspectives before them seem to be connected. Without such structure, reflections may meander through various topics and, while cathartic, may not guide one toward the goal of better understanding one’s teaching. I began my reflections in written form and later found that video recording reflection was ultimately a more productive choice. I found that video recording meant I could reflect quickly and with more detail. Other researchers (McCoy & Lynam, 2020; Snead & Frieberg, 2019) noted the success pre-service teachers had with video self-reflection, particularly when followed up with additional feedback (Weber et al., 2018).

The structure one creates should be focused on the goal of reflection (what do you want to learn about yourself as a teacher?) and the practicality of accomplishing the goal. I started with a long list of questions to consider each day and eventually narrowed the list down to three items on which to focus my attention. For reflection to work, it need not be a chore or, at the risk of sounding blasé, a total time-suck. Reflecting on teaching is likely one of the most important work tasks you'll do each day, but it should not take the whole day. Following a guide of three to four prompts will foster precise and quick summaries of the day. Providing structure gives additional rigor to data collection. Brookfield (2017) noted, "the lens of personal experience is probably the lens of critical reflection that's taken least seriously" (p. 170). While Brookfield's observation may be true, if the intent of reflection is to share personal experience with others, then thoroughly attending to personal experience is essential and worthy of the time and effort required.

The second-pass on reflection (phronesis) will be invaluable. Reflection on reflection allows the teacher to take time to think about what the teaching experience meant. Such reflection works best when it does not happen during the semester in which one is teaching. The time and space to think and rethink about teaching will likely lead to a better understanding of teaching practices and what those practices mean for you and your students. Further, maintaining such focus during one semester of teaching might lead to teaching fatigue or burnout.

Scholars note that faculty burnout is common and comparable to those who serve in school (Sabagh et al., 2018, p. 12) and healthcare settings (Watts & Robertson, 2011). The demands of teaching are intense and emotionally stimulating. Though I have always been an early-to-bed-early-to-rise individual, I found myself going to bed promptly after my kids were asleep, sometimes before 8:00 pm. One night, I fell asleep in my son's bed waiting for him to nod off for the night.

While tiring, reflection about teaching practices and how those practices are affected by other life obligations plays a vital role in an instructor's ability to reach their students. As a teacher takes stock of their daily interactions, they may realize, as I did, that taking on too many responsibilities prevents teachers from giving students the focus they deserved. Birmingham (2004) noted the importance of validating "the personal elements of teaching" and that teaching is often "more akin to personal development than professional development" (p. 321). Teaching demands a lot of the instructor: social engagement and awareness of students, attention to how students are learning, and encouraging students to work independently and with others.

Godsey (2016) explained that for many K-12 teachers, the fatigue associated with the socially demanding requirements of teachers has led many to change careers altogether. The need to consider teaching obligations and recharge is vital to avoid burnout, especially in teachers who are introverts (Godsey, 2016). Though Godsey's article focused on secondary educators, much of what he found can apply to college educators as well. Reflection is key, but so too is the time away from prolonged interaction that would allow for rejuvenation and a return to focus. As we reflect on our teaching practices, we are also reflecting on our personal lives, and

as Bruner (1987) might have suggested, the culture of teaching. Indeed, reflection and autobiographical writing provides a framework for how we change and “how these accounts come to take control of our ways of life” (p. 15). Not only does reflection and the writing about it reveal new learning, it also allows us to use this knowledge to change our teaching lives for the better.

Thinking about Teaching

At the end of a long day of teaching, I have a hard time getting my mind to settle into sleep. I recount what happened in class: from the short conversations with students before class starts when we sing our favorite musicals to our difficult conversations about what is happening in the world around us. I consider how I shared a bit of myself with my students and hope that they know I work hard each day to see them, listen to their needs, and find ways to support them. Sometimes, I fall short. Many nights, however, I lie awake thinking about getting to class in the following days, so we can continue to engage with and learn from one another. I look forward to my time with my students, I love to see them come into their own. Even though for most of them their development as academics is just beginning, little glimmers of the students and academics they will someday be peek through each day. As I try to get to sleep, I remind myself that every day, I have a chance to do important work.

As access to higher education increases, faculty and institutional leaders must address the changing needs of students in their classrooms. These changes can only be addressed if, like my work in this study shows, teachers take the time to think about their teaching practices and how such practices might inhibit or encourage student growth. My own work on pedagogical reflection allowed me to better understand not only my students, but my role as an instructor and mentor to students. Faculty members who are willing to do the hard work of sustained and critical reflection may find opportunities to better support their students and find more enjoyment in their roles as teachers.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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