Book Review

Just Who Do We Think We Are?
Methodologies for Autobiography and Self-Study in Teaching

Edited by Claudia Mitchell, Sandra Weber, & Kathleen O'Reilly-Scanlon
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Co-edited by three teacher educators, the main focus of *Just Who Do We Think We Are? Methodologies for Autobiography and Self-Study in Teaching* is the critical reflective practice of self-study and the autobiography of one's teaching practices. Co-editors Mitchell, Weber, and O'Reilly-Scanlon (2005) bring together:

> a wide range of self-studies in teacher education, each of which grapples in a different way with issues of method and methodology, and in doing so addresses some of the gaps in the existing professional literature, where the focus has been more 'about' self-study and less about the range of possibilities for doing self-study or determining a critical framework within which to examine self. (pp. 1-2)

The contributors represent diverse countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa, as well as the United States. Each author writes about his or her work in elementary, secondary, adult education, and university classrooms. From beginning to experienced classroom teachers, as well as university professors teaching and/or mentoring graduate students, they share their practice of self-study and critical reflection. Eight basic questions, designed by the editors, guided the contributors' work:

1. How do you go about engaging in studying your own teaching?

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2. What was particular about the way that you went about doing self-study?

3. What studies formed your work, and/or served as a kind of methodological foreshadowing?

4. What aspects of your teaching were you involved in studying (or assisting others to study)?

5. What challenges in terms of method did you encounter?

6. [What] ethical concerns [emerged during your work]?

7. [Did you encounter questions of] acceptability [of critical reflection and self-study] as a legitimate form of research?

8. [What materialized as] unexpected [in your work]? (p. 6)

Self-study is the focal point of this volume, with each of the four main sections focusing on self-study through a qualitative framework. Each section uses a different methodological lens. In contrast to similar texts in which the reader moves sequentially through the work, the editors deliberately arranged this text in such a way that alternative groupings are viable, enhancing the use of the text in qualitative courses at the university.

The first section, "Self-study through memory and body," positions the combination of memory work and embodiment as a means of deconstructing reflective practice through self-study. For example, Weber unpacks the "pedagogical possibilities of exploring issues related to clothing and footwear," and she illustrates "how working within the space of memory, material culture and performance" (p. 6) contributes to the critical reflective self-study of her teaching practices. In a similar fashion, two chapter authors, Perselli and Deery, discuss the practice of self-study through fictional memories and drawings to enable beginning teachers to engage in self-study of their teaching practices. Weber's, Perselli's, and Deery's exploration of everyday phenomena encountered in our classrooms, such as bullying, emotionally engage the reader through the use of "uncomfortable conversations" contextualized within the critical reflective lens.

The second section, "Self-study through literary and artistic inquiry," locates inquiry in the "emerging scholarship on arts-based methodologies and self-study" (p. 6). The first three chapter authors, Biddulph, Hamilton, and Szabad-Smyth, explore the use of artistic representations as part of the process of critical self-reflection and/or autobiography of their teacher identities. For example, Biddulph presents his "developing a visual methodology to review 'self'" as he unpacks how "identity" as a gay/bisexual male "is managed in educational environments" (p. 49). Given the dominant discourse demonizing gays and lesbians, par-

ticularly in education, his willingness to confront and understand his own positionality as a teacher is critical to the discourses pertaining to homophobia as they occur in the classroom.

Hamilton, in comparison, approaches the "ways in which methodologies used in self-study can support the development of teachers' ideas about teaching" (p. 66). Within the framework of self-study is the idea of a colleague or "critical friend"[1] with whom to discuss one's approach in "the thoughtful process of self-study" (p. 60). She notes the absence of a "critical friend" at her university, thus she takes a unique approach to solve this problem. She evokes as a "critical friend" the spirit of Winslow Homer through journaling, elaborate lesson plans and rationales, records of student work, student conversations, and evidence of classroom engagement to demonstrate the ways in which he served as "the other," "as a point of departure to explore the effects" (p. 63) of his art on her reflecting about her teaching and her self-study. Hamilton's processes actively engaged her students in her self-study of her teaching practices. Despite my initial impression that using Homer as a critical friend was farfetched, by the conclusion of her chapter, not only was I convinced of the utility of defining him as such, I also began thinking of ways to imagine a critical friend apart from my colleagues.

Using the life history inquiry method, Szabad-Smith probes the interconnectedness of "art and story from childhood" through collaborative research with elementary art teachers currently teaching the visual arts. Her study focused on the "meaning of art throughout one's lifetime, from a variety of perspectives: the teacher as child, the teacher as student, and the teacher as teacher" (p. 70). Her work provides an understanding of the methodology using life history research as part of critical self-study.

The last three sets of authors in this section, Diamond and Halen-Faber, Butler-Kisber, and Kelly, approach self-study through literary inquiry. Diamond and Halen-Faber present a metaphorical and figurative methodology to "illustrate how the humanities, literature, and arts help further our inquiries, particularly into the complex matter of self- and other-change" (p. 83). Through the use of "art-inspired poetic writing and visual strategies . . . to describe and promote shifting forms," and specifically through the image of an apple as an "evocative metaphor of artful method," (p. 86) the authors stretch one's thinking of self-study as applied to a range of teachers, from preservice/beginning teachers to experienced and university teachers. Diamond and Halen-Faber describe an intriguing process of metaphorical self-reflection of one's teaching into a visual representation of the self-reflection as a batik apple[2] changing as the metaphors change. This approach is provocative, inspiring me to consider how I might integrate this approach of critical self-reflection into my graduate courses.

Butler-Kisber's work speaks directly to "found poetry," or the transformation of narrative text into poetic representation. She notes that "creating found poetry is a process that moves from the linear thinking . . . evident in transcripts to a more embodied form of text that represents feelings and essences expressed in the poetic form" (p. 97). Found poetry facilitates the "unconscious connections and themes" emerging through critical reflections of self-study for educators.

The authors in section three, "Reflection, life history and self-study," analyze the relationship between reflexivity and collaboration. Long engages in a self-study of her teaching practices in undergraduate drama education courses. Long's goal is to make "my own planning transparent to my own students, to practice what I preach" (p. 125). She unpacks the popular notion of one's "belief in one's rightness," revealing her need to apprise her students of her questioning of her personal approach to teaching drama. In other words, Long describes how her own reflective self-study has transformed her teaching practice.

Continuing the theme of critical reflection, LaBoskey examines the effectiveness of self-study practices by college supervisors in enabling growth and learning in their student teachers. LaBoskey seeks to "identify and document the key components of successful student teacher mentoring" (p. 132). Moving from an individual reflective process, as discussed by Long, LaBoskey and her colleagues utilized a meta-reflective process, contextualized by a "community based in trust," with the goal of "collaborative critical reflection" (p. 134). Using "critical reflection as both a practice and a method in self-study" LaBoskey discusses "how dialogue, journaling, and story writing can aid in that [self-study] process" (p. 139). LaBoskey contends that this strategic approach offers a valuable alternative to the dominant discourse calling for "simplistic formulas" (p. 139) in assessment of effective teacher education practices.

Similar to LaBoskey's approach with college supervisors, Childs views the practice of self-study in teaching as a process of developing reflective practitioners. She works with young adults best described as "marginalized and generally disaffected" (p. 142), most of whom had been unsuccessful in the traditional school environment. Believing that students are not mature enough to engage in the practice of critical reflection, several of Childs' colleagues have questioned her use of self-study with young adult learners. They acknowledge some of her students produce thoughtful narratives, yet contend these same students are "the exception and not the rule" (p. 144). Childs recognizes their concerns and adds that "self-study may not be right for everyone" (p. 144), including experienced practitioners.

Within this context, Childs shares her work with a particular young adult learner in her Senior English class, who had entered her class in

mid-year. Using the concepts of self-study, narrative, and general modes of inquiry, Childs describes eloquently the total engagement of a student in self-study as seen in a critical reflective research paper. Similar to Hamilton's use of "critical friend," Childs engages her students as "critical friends" with her and with each other, thus demonstrating that she values students as producers of research, not merely consumers. Through the practice of self-study, both teachers and students gain respect for learning from each other. Childs concludes "self-study is a powerful tool . . . a wonderful vehicle for authentic self-development and enhancing new understandings about teaching and learning" (p. 153).

Mullen and Kealy's work provides a guide for conducting teacher research. Although they focus on the methods used by teacher researchers in the university setting, their case study could be applied to young adult learners. Using the metaphor of "pathlamps," which illuminate garden paths, Mullen and Kealy share strategies developed as an outcome of their research to serve as "guiding steps for doing teacher research" (p. 155). Although this is a fairly specific guide, it is not prescriptive; rather, it is a thoughtful handbook inviting a diversity of approaches to the practice of teacher research. Because I am teaching a qualitative methods course in a new doctoral program, I plan to adapt Mullen and Kealy's approach to encourage the students' understanding of qualitative inquiry methods.

The concluding chapter in this section explores the area of self-study of one's teaching practices. Berry and Loughran describe a contentious topic in education, namely "teacher educators require little specialized expertise . . . teaching itself is an under-theorized field" (p. 169). Through their self-study of their own teaching practices, they identify tensions, or competing goals and needs that shape the practice of teaching about teaching. These tensions include "making explicit the complexities and messiness of teaching and helping student teachers to feel confident to proceed, and exposing one's vulnerability as a teacher educator and maintaining student teachers' confidence in the teacher educator as leader" (p. 171). Using these identified tensions, the authors highlight the problems of practice through the self-study of educational classes which they teach as a team. Deconstructing the difficulties associated with "researching" their own teaching practices affords the reader an opportunity to reflect critically on one's practices, the complexity of the self-study of teaching practices, the manner in which students are asked to provide honest feedback, what we do with that feedback, and the emergent uncomfortable conversations engendered by these practices. Berry and Loughran conclude that the practice of self-study enables teacher educators to examine critically the existing practices in meaningful ways.

Section four, "(Re)positioning the self in and through self-study,"

brings us back, in a circular fashion, to the idea of rethinking ourselves through and in self-study. From both a personal and a political lens, Gamelin invites the reader to participate in her autobiographical narrative of "lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and academic ways of knowing" (p.184). Her narratives, rich with "thick descriptions," envelop the reader, even though these very descriptive experiences were discounted by her adult teachers during her early school experiences. As a feminist of Greek and Turkish ethnicity, the marginalization continued into her university studies. Gamelan apprises the reader, how she has moved from a position of marginality to her transformation as a teacher educator with young Saudi Arabian women. Most importantly, through the use of self-study, she articulates the powerful ways in which she effectively "transgresses the traditional boundaries of expression in academia" (p. 191).

Continuing the strand of ways of knowing through self-study, Manke shares her identity as a self-study researcher and as queer. She uses the concept of marginalization in her practice of self-study to question her practices as a queer teacher educator. Manke contends "you can't go back after you have opened yourself to the inner understandings that self-study brings, or that choosing to be queer brings" (p. 201). Her critical reflective practice deeply involves the reader in her thoughtful reflection on the role(s) of self-study in one's personal and professional lives. She notes that, once we begin the journey of self-study, we cannot, nor do we want to, return to our unknowing selves.

From a perspective counter to that of Manke, Pithouse delves into her "lived experience of educational privilege" (p. 206). While the two previous authors spoke of marginalization, Pithouse described her privilege as white, middle-class, high achiever in apartheid South Africa. Her narrative is quite similar to the experiences related by many of our teacher education students, in that they were not aware of their privilege until they reached adulthood and, even then, some resisted this knowledge. She depicted a self-study method that involves co-constructing a community of authors with her students in order to "bear witness to the dynamic encounter of the learner-writers" (p. 214) through the Teen Stories project. Whereas her "community of authors" took place in high school, I immediately began to think of how to modify her approach in my courses. As with many of her fellow writers, Pithouse notes the vulnerability one must be willing to experience in the process of self-study. Indeed, this vulnerability enhances the process both for the teacher and the learner as they co-construct their community.

Strong-Wilson narrates her experiences as a "traveling White teacher" in indigenous communities. We are reminded this practice of "traveling teacher" is one of colonization and "formal education is a civilizing force" (p. 221). Colonizing practices stand in direct contrast to thoughtful,

critical, and reflective rituals advocated by the author. Strong-Wilson notes that colonizing practices refute the concept of knowledge held as worthy by First Peoples. Her narrative recounts her own understanding, through her self-study practice, to encourage and to value her teacher education students' critical self-study practices, as constructed outside the colonizing frame of formal education.

Kirk, in the last chapter of the text, foregrounds the practice of reflexivity as a "crucial look for connecting self-study with study of 'the other' . . . of the researcher and researched . . . within a larger context can be probed and problematized" (p. 239). She begins a journey of working with women teachers in areas other than industrialized countries. During her journey, she focuses on teacher research rather than on teacher education, as see in a vignette from her work with women teachers in Pakistan. Kirk embeds questions of gender, education, and development within the complexity of reflexivity both for herself and for her community of female teacher education practitioners. She invites the reader to "unpack" the relational complexities of women as teacher educators in developing and industrialized nation states.

I have effectively used this text in two ways—selectively reading chapters specific to my writing and reading the volume as presented. As I read, consumed, thought, and reflected on this text, I realized the extent to which the authors have influenced my thinking about critical reflective practice in my current courses in teacher education. The authors also have influenced my thinking about future courses, both in the credential and doctoral programs. This is a text I recommend for thoughtful self-reading, as well as for use in graduate classes, particularly in courses dealing with action research and qualitative inquiry courses.

Notes

[1] The Critical Friends process focuses on developing collegial relationships, encouraging reflective practice, and rethinking leadership. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University first developed the Critical Friends model for collegial dialogue (1998). http://www.annenberginstitute.org/

[2] Diamond and Halen-Faber portray an intriguing account of metaphysical self-reflections and representations of the teaching process using the art form of batik. They and their students chose an apple to represent teaching. Each student drew an apple and then they were asked to change the drawing of the apple to represent her/his experience in student teaching. One student chose to represent her experience through multiple changes of the apple, in both color and actual representation, using batik. The apple metamorphosed from a typical red apple into an apple of many colors with distortion of the shape. Students were then asked to write a short narrative of their representation of their teaching experiences metaphorically through batik.