

Reflective Teaching

The Study of Your Constru

PEARLINS

SECOND EDITION

James B. Henderson

Foreword

Learning to Teach Through Telling Our Stories

What does it mean for each of us to learn to teach? It is this question this book asks each of us to consider. The book, designed for preservice teachers, asks questions that many of us who name ourselves teachers continue to ask as we learn to live and tell our stories as teachers. What stories do we live and tell of ourselves as teachers? On what personal and professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) were these stories constructed? On what personal knowledge landscapes will these stories of ourselves be lived out? What is the link between the personal, the practical, the professional? How do we, as teachers, link theory and practice in our personal practice and professional knowledge? What do we ask of the teacher education programs in which we learn to teach?

—These are questions that are too often set aside in teacher education programs as we find ourselves pushed to view teaching as a set of technical, expert skills separate from who we are as people, from the children with whom we work, and from the contexts within which we work. The authors in this book, through their rich teacher narratives of experience, make spaces for us to consider these questions.

While it is a book of ways to think, of processes through which to work, of scaffolding frameworks, it is the images, metaphors, and stories that stayed with me; images of children, of teachers, of schools, of theory. Let me share some of them here so that, as you read the book, you can find the stories that resonated for me and find others that resonate for you.

The text, for me, comes most alive in the stories. These are stories to live by. Many of them made me, as Hannah Arendt might say, “stop and think” about

what it means to live my teacher's life. For example, in a narrative written by Jon Secaur, he states that "meaning is found in the whole, not in the parts, and the meaning one draws from the parts is intimately tied to one's perspective." Had he left it at that I may not have remembered my own stories of teaching. But he did not, for he then introduced me to Diane, a student in a class he was teaching. She was a student who was not getting 'it' and he tells his story of that situation. As she struggled with his explanations, he realized that

I didn't understand her question, anymore than she understood my answer. . . . I wanted them to hold that same image, watching the work turn from that neutral and removed point of view. Instead, I felt that image crumble; she was seeing from a radically different perspective. But I had no idea what it was. I needed to see the problem from her point of view, and so I went looking for some parts from which we could reconstruct a new whole.

How many times has that happened to me in my teaching? How often has there not been a space to tell the story and to think through what happened? Jon, in his telling, makes that space for me.

As I read Janice Hutchison's narrative, I met Summer, a student in difficulty. In this story, Janice and Summer learn to create an environment in which Summer can learn. Summer's words are included to describe her experience. She writes in a journal entry to Janice

The reason I'm succeeding so well in your English class is because you don't act like you don't have time to know me as a person and not just a student. When a teacher who doesn't know me gives me some bad vibes, I give them right back; and that was the problem with Miss R. When I got into your class, you didn't do that for me. You gave me a chance, and I thank you for that.

Through Jennifer Waldbauer and Sharon Klimm, we meet three teachers working together, who introduce us to Melissa, "an ordinarily quiet student." Melissa, a student who "left her private thought-world to enter a discussion", asks a question that "could have led to a whole line of inquiry and learning". They describe the activity and watch Melissa

through much of the feelings/reflections activity. She seemed to have so many feelings, good and bad, jumbled inside. She fumbled with her feeling cards as she tried to sort through her emotions. Perhaps she could put her grieving process into hibernation so that others around her could heal. . . . In this small and safe setting, Melissa smiled and opened up a little.

I remembered, as I read, the children like Melissa I had known. Had I told their stories? Had anyone been there to listen and to give my story back so that I could learn to make more educative spaces for other children like Melissa? Waldbauer and Klimm made that space for all of us in their telling.

There are many other stories filling the pages of this book. The authors both tell us and show us how to pay close attention to the stories they live and tell. In this way, they tell and show us, as readers, how to live and tell our own stories and

to consider how they will be lived out with students in our schools. They give a framework that orients us to the study of ourselves as teachers which is, of course, what this book is about. There are references to theoretical resources such as John Dewey and Maxine Greene and connections that the authors make with such readings. These are important ways to make sense of our lived and told stories. But in telling their own stories, the authors begin to make a space that is safe enough for us to tell our own stories and to tell them in ways that will enable others to respond. For it is in the telling and in the response and then in the retelling that we awaken to and transform our lived teaching stories.

This book does not, as do so many books on learning to teach, encourage us to set our own stories aside and to become blank slates for what theory and research tell us teaching should be. Rather, this book challenges us to begin with ourselves, our own stories of what we know and to ask questions of those stories. Situated within the constructivist paradigm, all of the authors ask us to think about the relationships among what we think, how we think, who we are.

In the final two chapters, we learn about the importance of living in the community with other teachers on the landscape. In our terms (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) we learn about how important it is to construct safe places in out-of-the-classroom places in order to build community to engage with others. The challenge will be, for readers of this text, to find those safe places for the telling, retelling, living, and reliving of their own stories. It is a challenge that is important to all of us as we continue to learn to teach.

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4C Scaffolding: A Critical Examination of Constructivist Practices

In this chapter, you will have the opportunity to further refine your understanding of the study method in this book. In chapter 1, you read that this method involves three types of reflection: pragmatic reconsideration, critical reasoning, and critical engagement. The general protocols in chapters 3–6, which are applications of the decision-making cycle, are designed to facilitate your pragmatic reflection. The teacher-character commentary that follows each protocol is created to assist your critical reasoning and critical engagement. You will now learn how to reflect on your constructivist practices from a particular value-based or normative point of view: *constructivist teaching is a Calling and is Creative, Caring, and Centered work*. Since the four descriptors in this italicized statement all begin with the letter “C,” they are called the 4C virtues. The guide to professional inquiry that we present in this chapter based on these virtues is called **4C scaffolding**. In effect, this scaffolding provides a particular type of metacognitive guidance for the critical examination of constructivist practices.

This chapter’s metacognitive guidance will be presented in the following way. The rationale for creating the 4C scaffolding is presented first, followed by a general description of each normative referent. The teacher-characters will then comment on the four teaching virtues. After a brief introduction to autobiographical reflection, you will read the professional developmental stories of two

experienced teachers who have used the 4C scaffolding to study their evolving constructivist practices. Finally, you will receive advice on how you can use the scaffolding to reflect on your personal-professional development.

Why the 4C Scaffolding Was Created

The 4C virtues are important referents for the study of your constructivist practices. Think for a moment about this type of educational service. If teachers approach their work as just an “eight-to-three job with summers off,” will they be willing to assume the challenges associated with teaching for active understanding? Why should they bother with the cultivation of a constructivist repertoire? Why should they become accomplished at the four practices covered in chapters 3–6? After all, it is demanding work to solve complex problems in a constructivist way, create a constructivist curriculum design, enact constructivist transactions, and create a classroom learning community. To reflect on teaching as a **calling** is to contemplate the personal issues of motivation that are germane to the practice of educational constructivism.

Educational constructivism, however, requires more than dedicated work. This type of educational service challenges teachers to function as **caring** professionals. If teachers don’t care about their students as unique individuals, how can they understand them well enough to provide constructivist services? How can they discover links between their students’ prior knowledge and dispositions, their personal purposes, and the requirements for subject matter inquiry?

Educational constructivism also challenges teachers to be **creative** professionals. Reflect again on the four practices covered in chapters 3 through 6. They are not simple technical procedures; they can’t be followed in a step-by-step, paint-by-number fashion. They must be enacted with imagination.

Finally, consider what happens to teachers who consistently reflect on their work. By continuously engaging in the decision-making cycle, they become seasoned pragmatic learners. Through the consistent critical examination of their teaching decisions, they consolidate and refine the justifications and inspirations that guide their educational work. They come to know themselves as professional educators. In short, they become **centered** teachers.

A General Description of the 4C Referents

To facilitate your own personalized understanding of teaching as a Calling and as Caring, Creative, and Centered work, a general description of each value-laden term will now be presented. The four teacher-characters will then offer distinctive commentary on the 4Cs.

Calling

Many teachers approach their work as a calling, not as a job. Ayers (1993) notes that present and future teachers are often asked why they have chosen such a low-paying, low-status occupation: "Teachers are asked hundreds, perhaps thousands of times why they chose teaching. The question often means: 'Why teach, when you could do something more profitable?' 'Why teach, since teaching is beneath your skill and intelligence?'" (p. 5). He lists many practical reasons for such skeptical questions: teachers are poorly paid, they are disempowered, they work under stressful conditions. Ayers celebrates the fact that, despite these vocational drawbacks, many teachers persist in perceiving their work as a calling:

Teaching is still a powerful calling for many people, and powerful for the same reasons that it has always been so. There are still young people who need a thoughtful, caring adult in their lives; someone who can nurture and challenge them, who can coach and guide, understand and care about them. There are still injustices and deficiencies in society, in even more desperate need of repair. There are still worlds to change—including specific, individual worlds. (p. 8)

Garman (1986) adds to Ayers' list of inspirations for choosing to be a teacher with an eloquent description of the educational profession:

Teaching is the most venerable practice we have universally experienced. Beyond our experiential worlds we harbor mysterious remnants of mythic teachers (Plato, Socrates, Jesus, Buddha). There are aspects of teaching which can be thought of as consecrated—made hallow by the ancient belief that teaching embodies devotion to service. Those who serve are reverently dedicated to their charge, and are themselves to be regarded with reverence. (p. 10)

Teachers can feel inspired about their chosen profession in diverse ways. Whatever form it takes, teachers who possess a sense of calling about their chosen career are hard-working, dedicated professionals. Their work ethic is an important prerequisite for undertaking the challenges of educational constructivism.

Caring

To care as a teacher is to be ethically bound to understand one's students. Noddings (1984) writes that when a caring teacher "asks a question in class and a student responds, she [sic] receives not just the 'response' but the student. What he [sic] says matters, whether it is right or wrong, and she probes gently for clarification, interpretation, contribution" (p. 176).

Noddings (1984) presents three important features of an ethic of caring: confirmation, dialogue, and cooperative practice. She writes:

When we attribute the best possible motive consonant with reality to the cared-for, we confirm him [sic]; that is, we reveal to him an attainable image of himself that is lovelier than that manifested in his present acts. (p. 193)

Confirmation, the loveliest of human functions, depends upon and interacts with dialogue and practice. I cannot confirm a child unless I talk with him and engage in cooperative practice with him. (p. 196)

When confirming a student, the teacher sees "the cared-for as he is and as he might be—as he envisions his best self" (Noddings, 1984, p. 67). To become sensitive to the "best self" of each student, a teacher must take time to listen carefully to each student's innermost yearnings. One student may want to become a mathematician, another an auto mechanic, and a third a writer of Hollywood movie scripts. The caring teacher takes the time to help all students discover their individual inclinations and capitalize on them.

Dialogue is the second feature of an ethic of caring. Teachers can't confirm their students if they don't take time to talk to them. They must seek opportunities to engage in open and honest communication.

Caring teachers must also be cooperative educators. Teachers guided by an ethic of caring understand that they can't practice personal confirmation and honest dialogue unless they work cooperatively with their students as well as the students' parents. Caring teachers must think of themselves as facilitators of learning, as "counselors and advisors in their subject fields and not just as imparters of knowledge" (Noddings, 1984, p. 187).

Creativity

Creativity refers to a teacher's flexible, imaginative, and intuitive capabilities. Creative teachers constantly seek new ways to motivate their students. They want their lessons to be aesthetically enjoyable, provocative, and meaningful. Eisner (1994) writes:

Teaching can be done as badly as anything else. It can be wooden, mechanical, mindless, and wholly unimaginative. But when it is sensitive, intelligent, and creative—those qualities that confer upon it the status of an art—it should, in my view, not be regarded, as it so often is by some, as an expression of unfathomable talent or luck but as an example of humans exercising the highest levels of their intelligence. (p. 156)

Based on extensive interviews with teachers on the topic of creative teaching, Jagla (1994) stresses the importance of imagination and intuition in creative work:

The use of one's imagination and the use of one's intuition overlap to a great extent. However, I feel that it is . . . imagination that one uses to plan curriculum for the classroom, and it is . . . intuition that one uses to implement the curriculum. (p. 20)

[One of the teachers I interviewed stated:] "Intuition is what we use that enables us to trust what our imagination dishes up for us. Intuition is the enabler. Imagination is what is enabled." (p. 39)

Jagla (1994) refines this discussion by identifying a complex tapestry of themes woven into the fabric of imaginative and intuitive teaching. Creative teachers are

spontaneous, open, confident, empathetic, knowledgeable, resourceful, flexible, highly interactive, good storytellers, and emotive.

Centered


Centered teachers are not people who rigidly cling to beliefs. They operate instead on the basis of deliberate moral choice. They willingly question their own opinions. Through continuous pragmatic reflection and critical examination, they cultivate a solid framework for their actions. Their teaching decisions are carefully informed and thoughtfully enacted.

Centered teachers are authentic. They have learned “to love the questions, as they come to realize that there are no final agreements, no final commensurability” (Greene, 1988, p. 134). They welcome civil argument and debate, and they understand that people often possess conflicting opinions on a complex issue. Therefore, they are not interested in playing one-upmanship social games. They believe that no one has cornered the market on truth. They welcome clarification and reject obfuscation. They prefer open dialogue, and they find concealment and manipulation—qualities associated with all melodramas—to be distasteful.

Centered teachers strive for congruency between the justifications and inspirations for their actions. They are aware of the foundational sources of their practices. Because they continuously engage in the critical examination of their teaching, they are assertive individuals who invite others to be equally assertive.

Teacher-Character Commentary

Johnny Jackson



I feel that I do have a calling for teaching, and I am saddened by many of my colleagues who think of their work as an eight-to-three job. I love what I do, and I constantly strive to improve myself. I feel fortunate that I have chosen a profession that allows me to be idealistic, not money-grubbing. My mother had a calling for teaching, but she never became a teacher. This always frustrated her. She was a house maid for affluent families in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood, and I bet she knew more about the paintings and sculptures she dusted than did many of the owners of these art objects. Whenever I feel frustrated about some educational problem, I remember that I get paid for what my mother could only do voluntarily.

I think caring is an important developmental referent in teaching. However, this concept must be interpreted in the context of subject matter instruction. Teachers are hired to impart content to their students. Therefore, their caring practices must be linked to the specific academic disciplines that ground their

work. For high school teachers, these are the subjects they teach. From middle school on down, teachers should be focusing on the prerequisite understandings, skills, and attitudes that prepare their students for future discipline-based learning. A similar argument could be made for other types of professional work. Doctors and nurses care, but their caring must be linked to good health services. Lawyers care, but their caring must be linked to good legal services. And so on. I'm a subject-matter specialist, and I don't believe in child-centered learning that is not disciplined by the structure of academic traditions.

I think instructional creativity is quite important. Teachers confront a TV generation of children who have little exposure to significant intellectual artifacts. While Spanish and French children often take after-school and weekend field trips to learn more about their country's cultural heritage, many American children are "vegging out" in front of their home's omnipresent "tube." They are passive passengers on a trip through superficial television scripts. It takes imagination to find ways to reach them. While introducing myself, I mentioned the English teacher who taught *Julius Caesar* by relating it to a *Star Trek* episode. This is the type of imaginative teaching that I respect. I understand teacher creativity as the ability to establish meaningful links between students' everyday, prosaic worlds and the noble ideas and projects that sustain a civilized, cultured life. I want my students to realize that they can contribute to the creation of a great American civilization.

I strongly believe that teachers and their students should know themselves. They should understand their place as historical participants in Western civilization's Great Conversation. Their home, their "center," is their cultural heritage. Have you ever visited another culture? If you have, you know the feeling of "cultural shock" that comes from confronting alien ways of being. I struggle to be civilized—to not be alienated from the historical foundations of my being, and I do this by reading great books and by attending cultural events. This is the sense of centering that I try to pass on to my students.



Amy Nelson

I am strongly drawn to teaching, and I have discussed my sense of calling with several of our school district's athletic coaches. They derive great satisfaction from helping their athletes learn the value of self-discipline and the joy of personal accomplishment. This is how I approach my work. Just as I take pride in becoming an excellent teacher, I want my students to feel good about their achievements. I've promised myself that if I ever find myself counting down the minutes to the end of a school day, I'll seek out a new career. I'll look for new mountains to climb.

I am a skeptic when it comes to talk about teacher caring. Most teachers will say they care about their students, but what do they mean by that? How do they behave when they say they care? My father has a saying that goes with this skeptical question: "What you are doing is so loud, I can't hear what you're

ying!" I am particularly concerned about students' learning achievement. Therefore, when teachers say they care, I want to know how their talk translates into specific student accomplishments. In other words, how do they "walk the talk"? Are they helping their students become successful, hard-working Americans?

I'm a strong advocate of teacher creativity. It takes imagination to design lessons that motivate students to achieve. I don't believe in dull, boring skill workbooks, and I have worked hard to create hands-on activities that are linked to precise performance objectives. I am quite impressed with the ways personal computers can facilitate student achievement, and I continuously struggle to stay current with the new innovations in instructional technology. In fact, I wonder sometimes if I shouldn't take some graduate course work in this field at a local university.

I know myself as a competent professional, and I want my students to be similarly centered. I am at home in my achievements, and I am always proud to share—in a humble manner—what I have accomplished. I take pride in my teaching skill, which results from years of hard work. I feel that too many people have low self-esteem when it comes to what they can achieve. They live lives of quiet desperation because they are on the sidelines; they are mere spectators of others' success. These individuals didn't get the help they needed from caring parents, teachers, and others. I don't want to make a similar mistake, so I do whatever I can to support my students' proactive approach toward life.

Dennis Sage

I am "called" to be with my students—to be attuned to their educational needs. I'm inspired by Aoki's (1992) description of the caring teacher:

All of these scientific and technical understandings of teaching emerge from our interest in intellectual and manipulative grasp and control. But in so understanding, we must be attuned to the fact that while those understandings that can be grasped are uncannily correct, the essence of teaching still eludes our grasp. What we need to do is to break away from the attitude of grasping and seek to be more properly oriented to what teaching is, so we can attune ourselves to the call of what teaching is. . . . I find that teaching so understood is attuned to the place where care dwells, a place of ingathering and belonging, where the in-dwelling of teachers and students is made possible by the presence of care that each has for the other. (pp. 20–21)

As you can see, my understanding of caring teaching is linked to my sense of professional calling. I grow as a caring teacher as I cultivate empathy for my students. When I really feel my students' joys and pains, then I know that I am deepening myself as an educator. If they cry over some educational experience, and I feel their tears, then I know I am learning to care. If I don't have this sense of empathetic connection, I reflect on my lack of sensitivity. Why don't I have more rapport with a particular student? Am I taking the time to get to

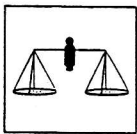
know this unique soul that is under my educational care? As the old saying goes, am I "walking a mile in that person's shoes"? Have I gotten too task-oriented, too caught up in the business of the day? If so, what can I do to re-center myself as one who cares?

To be connected with my students in a caring way requires a great deal of creativity. Not only must I continuously imagine what they are thinking and feeling, I must envision interesting ways to respond to their existential worlds. Think for a moment about what I just said. Have you ever had a teacher who helped you understand and actualize your educational passions—your purposes for growing as a human being? This is a challenging way to teach and requires flexibility and imagination.

I know myself through my connectedness to others and to the planet that we all call home. When I feel lost or alienated, it is because I have lost my sense of inner union, my sense of oneness. My feeling for being centered is so deep and silent that I don't know exactly how to discuss this quality. Perhaps the best way is to quote Henry David Thoreau. He expresses so poetically what I feel about centering:

But alone in distant woods or fields, in unpretending sproutlands or pastures tracked by rabbits, even in a bleak and, to most, cheerless day, like this, I once more feel myself grandly related. . . . (Sierra Club, 1962, p. 154)

This is the sense of centering that I try to share with my students and others.



Silvia Rivera

My calling as a teacher is to provide a liberating educational service. Greene (1988) evokes my sense of calling:

This is what we shall look for as we move: freedom developed by human beings who have acted to make a space for themselves in the presence of others, human beings become "challengers" ready for alternatives, alternatives that include caring and community. And we shall seek, as we go, implications for emancipatory education conducted by and for those willing to take responsibility for themselves and for each other. We want to discover how to open spaces for persons in the plurality, spaces where they can become different, where they can grow. (p. 56)

I am called to be an educator who promotes such open, pluralistic spaces in my classroom. My passion for social justice and equity is my passion for life, and I enthusiastically share this passion with my students.

I want to grow as a caring teacher—as someone who is concerned about her students' growing sense of empowerment. I want to understand all the ways that my students feel disempowered. If they are struggling with poor self-confidence or with alienation, I want them to know that I care about their situation and will try to help them. In the spirit of people like Dr. Martin Luther King, I want them to feel that no problem is too big to handle. I want them to understand that when people work together, they can handle incredible adversity.

I want to develop myself as a creative teacher—as someone who designs imaginative ways to practice Freire's (1970/1971) problem-posing education, which I discussed in chapter 2. To create interesting and inviting lessons around social problems requires my constant resourcefulness. I'm always looking for new, exciting ways to address pressing critical issues. I read newspapers and watch television news like a hawk, ready to pounce on any meaningful event! I have folders and folders filled with newspaper and magazine clippings. Whenever feasible, I try to design provocative field trips. I want my students to have face-to-face encounters with the social problems they are studying.

I center myself as a socially aware educator. I am at home when my educational practice is a praxis, that is, when my teaching is full of ethical and visionary thought. Because I want my students to discover the emancipatory possibilities in their lives, I want them to understand that centered people avoid false consciousness. They don't pursue goals that work against an agenda of social liberation. When young girls are raised to be meek, cute little housewives or cupcake beauty queens, their false consciousness is being fostered. No one is helping them become centered as proactive, responsible agents of their own destiny. I try to be a model of this type of agency. I am centered in my own sense of professional empowerment, and I want my students to discover how they are centered as empowered **historical agents**.

Teachers' Autobiographical Reflections

How did you decide to become a teacher? What factors and what people helped shape your decision? What challenges are you encountering along the way? How are you resolving these challenges? Why are you continuing this developmental journey in spite of these challenges? These are the types of questions that guide teachers' **autobiographical reflections**.

Numerous scholars are aware of the benefits of examining our lives and our choice to teach. Zeichner (1993) notes a relationship between the improvement of our craft and this type of examination: "The process of understanding and improving one's teaching must start with reflection upon one's experiences" (p. 14). Apple (1993) espouses similar sentiments in his belief that "thoughtful educators remind us that curriculum and teaching always end in a personal knowing" (p. 14). O'Loughlin (1992) relates the importance of giving students a voice and being active participants in their own learning: "The most fundamental building block in a pedagogy of learning is acknowledgment of life experiences and the voices of our students" (p. 338). Greene (1978) discusses the importance of personal centeredness. She observes that "it is my view that persons are more likely to ask their own questions and seek their own transcendence when they feel themselves grounded in their personal histories, their lived experiences" (p. 2).