Inspired College Teaching

A Career-Long Resource for

Professional Growth

Maryellen Weimer

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Reflection for Growth and Change

Most teachers don't know their teaching in intimate and detailed ways. Part of that is a result of little or no training about how to teach, and part of it comes from not being terribly reflective about what we do when we teach. In our defense, it is difficult to be objective, reasoned, and dispassionate about an activity so entangled with personal identity. As a consequence, though, most faculty have impressions of themselves as teachers that are not very specific and are frequently skewed by the emotional perspective through which teaching is viewed. Should we want to know more? Yes! When teachers make changes that affect how much and how well students learn, the success of those efforts is linked to how much teachers know about what they do in the classroom and why. When realizing our potential as teachers, success relies on having discovered one's instructional identity.

This chapter is about coming to know ourselves as teachers. We need to start with a complete and detailed understanding of what we do when we teach. Then we need to explore why—what justifies the policies, practices, and behaviors we have chosen to use. And finally, we need to make discoveries about instructional identity. Who am I, and what can I become, as a teacher and in the classroom? Complete self-knowledge will always elude us, but we can gain a significantly more detailed and accurate understanding of what we do when we teach and how those actions affect

student efforts to learn. We can also discover the assumptions and beliefs on which those practices rest and assess the effectiveness of their efforts to help students learn.

These are discoveries we must seek out. They do not accrue automatically just because we spend time in the classroom or think it might be nice to know ourselves as teachers. These kinds of insights are acquired through reflection: systematic, thoughtful, thorough, and objective analysis. That comes first and is then followed by critical reflection: a questioning, challenging stance that seeks to ferret out the real, not assumed or traditionally accepted, reasons for the policies, practices, and instructional approaches we have selected to use.

Self-discovery processes like these depend on feedback from others, as the next three chapters set forth. Input offered by students and colleagues guarantees the integrity of reflective efforts—it keeps teachers honest and on track. But before feedback from others, teachers need to construct their own self-portraits. They need to figure out for themselves what they do when they teach, why they do it that way, and how it affects efforts to learn. Feedback from others can be used to correct, adjust, enlarge, and confirm those self-understandings. But when the objective is a career-long commitment to growth and development, we need to set our own agendas, chart our own courses, and build understandings for ourselves rather than relying on a sense of how we teach fashioned from the perceptions of others.

This chapter activates the principle that improvement begins and end with faculty members. When teachers do the analysis, when they decide what to change, how to make it different, and when they make assessments—in sum when they control the process—teachers are motivated. They make changes they believe in, which increases the chance of success and makes teaching improvement a rewarding process. When it is rewarding, that motivates more discovery, more change, more growth, a greater commitment to teaching well, and a really good chance that

instructional health will prevail across the teacher's career. Reflection is the place where the process begins and ends.

What Do I Do? The Nuts and Bolts of Instructional Awareness

This journey of self-discovery begins with the descriptive details—what I call the "nuts and bolts" of teaching. The goal is to develop a detailed understanding of what you do when you teach—how the mechanics of instruction are handled. Knowledge here is bedrock. It's the foundation on which all subsequent understanding of one's teaching builds. Building this foundation takes work and is often hampered by the ways faculty approach the task.

Faculty are used to thinking about their teaching judgmentally. Most of us do not realize the extent to which these internal assessments obscure the details and distort the perspective. Teachers should approach the discovery of instructional details like an archaeologist handles a dig. Artifacts are unearthed and carefully examined. They are measured, photographed, labeled, and cataloged. The details are recorded first; assessments about form and function come later.

In my work with teaching assistants and new teachers, I use the following scenario to help them begin the process of examining the various parts of their teaching. I have them imagine themselves in a group of twenty teachers, all teaching at the same time but in different rooms. I've never met any of them. I need a detailed description of how they teach—one that will enable me to pick them out of this larger group. Two caveats: no description of what they'll be wearing and no hints about the content.

It helps to think of this knowledge as an after-the-fact and out-of-class understanding of teaching. It's the list that might appear under the heading, "In general, here's what I do when I teach." In a very early book (Weimer, 1990, pp. 207–208), I included a checklist that pinpoints some of the specific areas

where knowledge is needed. For example, teachers might want to consider their use of space in the classroom, the mechanics of delivery, how participation works, what happens when disruptions occur, how feedback is exchanged, characteristics of explanations and use of examples, how class starts and ends, among other areas.

For each area, the objective is to ask questions that lead to other questions, each generating information that makes understanding that aspect of instruction more complete. To illustrate:

How do you handle discussion?

After asking a question, how long do you wait before calling on someone?

How often do you call on the same one or two students?

How do you respond to student comments? With an (often lengthy) comment of your own? With a question?

When the discussion drifts, how do you get it back?

How do you get those who don't participate involved?

What do you do when nobody answers a question you've asked?

How well do you listen to student answers?

What strategies do you use when the answer is wrong or not very good?

How often do you use these same strategies?

Questions like these can be thoughtfully considered outside of class. If that analysis makes you wonder if what you think you do is what you actually do, next time you're facilitating a discussion in class, take a look at how you're handling the details.

This process of attending to details often yields some surprising insights. Early in my teaching career, when I worried that students weren't taking me seriously, I gave what I thought were very challenging multiple-choice tests. Students called them tricky and

strenuously voiced objections when the exams were returned. In the process of trying to figure out why these days were so difficult for me and the students, I noticed that on those debrief days I stood with my back against the board, both hands hanging onto the chalk tray. I never found myself there other days in class.

Much of what teachers do at this behavioral level is habitual and patterned—like the way many of my humanities colleagues respond to a disorganized, partly right, albeit convoluted student answer, "Hmm . . . interesting idea. Somebody else." That refrain gets repeated until they hear a student answer that makes sense. Students pick up on these patterns. They come to realize that "Hmm-interesting-idea-somebody-else" really means "Wrong answer but I'm not going to tell you how or why." Do teachers use teaching behaviors like these on purpose? Of course not. They are done without conscious awareness. All sorts of annoying presentational distractions like repetitive pacing, pushing up sleeves, clearing the throat, or repeating a vocal sound like "um" are easily curtailed once they've been observed. I gently pointed out to a colleague that he was annoyingly counting, recounting, and otherwise jingling the change in pockets throughout the class session. Next period, he repeatedly took his hands out of his pockets only to find them fingering his change a few minutes later. The following class period he showed up with his pockets neatly sealed with duct tape. That took care of the problem.

Beyond the behaviors associated with how you teach, this knowledge includes analyzing students' nonverbal behaviors and understanding your response to them. As you teach, what do you conclude from facial expressions, body postures, and vocal inflections? How do you know when students need a break? Can you tell when they are faking attention? What does animosity look and feel like? What feedback from students indicates that you need to slow down or explain something in a different way?

Is it becoming clear why this knowledge is bedrock? Not knowing the details, knowing only some and having vague

inaccurate impressions of others results in a distorted understanding of how you teach. When those perceptions are inaccurate, more surprises occur in the classroom, there's more feedback from students that doesn't make any sense, and classroom dynamics are more frequently misunderstood. I once worked with a teacher who had somehow decided he needed to protect himself from students. It was never exactly clear what he thought they might do to him, but he treated students with great suspicion. If a student gave him positive feedback, he thought it was because the student wanted something. If a student said he was going to miss class for a funeral, he was sure the excuse was made up. By the time I arrived, it had gotten so bad he wouldn't write anything on the board because he could hear students talking about him when he wasn't looking at them.

Inaccurate understandings of how you teach grow gradually. One wrong conclusion leads to another until teachers reach a point where their perceptions of how they teach bear little connection to reality. They describe what they do (or think they do), and we wonder who they are talking about. It is possible to hold a very distorted and inaccurate understanding of the teaching self. Attending to the behavioral details without making judgments or having preconceived notions can help teachers to find their way back to an accurate understanding of how they teach. It works just as well for teachers whose perceptions aren't inaccurate but whose understandings lack depth and detail.

The process of acquiring this detailed behavioral knowledge of teaching develops two skills that are prerequisite to pursuing the deeper understandings called for next. The first of these is observation. Most of us are not used to looking closely, as in examining in detail, what we do when we teach. As with almost anything else, once you start looking closely, it's amazing how much there is to see and how much has not been seen before.

Second, because teachers are so used to looking at their own teaching judgmentally, taking this more objective stance requires

a certain amount of practice. When I read those descriptions written by beginning teachers trying to help me identify them by their teaching, I find them peppered with explicit and implicit judgments. And yet, the ability to reflect deeply requires objectivity. It's about being able to take a dispassionate view of the teaching from outside the teaching. Working to discover and then describe details helps to develop the skill of looking objectively at something intimately owned.

Why Do I Do It? Integrating Beliefs and Behaviors

Asking what you do when you teach should be followed by asking why. The *why* question enables teachers to explore the connections between beliefs and behaviors. What justifies the decisions that have been made and the approaches that are being taken? Does what happens in the classroom reflect beliefs about teaching and learning, or is there a disconnect? Do we hold certain values but use practices not consistent with those beliefs?

Critical reflection offers a means whereby faculty can uncover the beliefs and assumptions on which policies, practices, and behaviors rest. In the field of adult education, where critical reflection is studied, it is differentiated from the more general and generic kinds of reflection by its focus on challenging the validity of presuppositions. "Becoming critically aware of our own presuppositions involves challenging our established and habitual patterns of expectation, the meaning perspectives with which we have made sense out of our encounters with the work, others, and ourselves" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 12). Clarifying still further, this noted adult educator writes, "Critical reflection is not concerned with the how or the how-to of action but with the why, the reasons for and consequences of what we do" (Mezirow, 1990 p. 13). When critical reflection motivates changes in beliefs and behaviors, adult educators call this "transformational learning." It describes the deepest kind of learning, learning that changes who people are

(Cranton, 2006). Learning about teaching can be transformative, changing what teachers believe and what they do in profound and significant ways.

As powerful as critical reflection and transformative learning are, the process of discovering disconnects between beliefs and behavior is not always pleasant. Academics highly value informed and rational decision making. When teachers discover something they should have known about their teaching, they can feel embarrassed, sometimes a bit angry, if not dispirited. As one faculty member told me, "I have taught for almost twenty years and it never occurred to me that grading on the curve takes away the incentive to collaborate. I wondered why nobody wanted to work together on homework problems in class, but I missed completely how that was in large part the result of a policy decision I made." Critical reflection works but the process is not always pain free.

Further more, critical reflection is not like putting on a pair of glasses and seeing the teaching world anew. As much as you may want to understand why you're doing what you do, you may still have trouble seeing it. Wanting to know is necessary, but wanting alone doesn't generate the needed insights. My understanding of how critical thinking works to uncover the whys was greatly helped by Brookfield's book, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (1995). I recommend it because its many examples and activities show how faculty can get to the assumptions and beliefs on which various aspects of instruction rest.

Teachers can effectively start the process by looking at course policies like those on attendance, academic integrity, deadlines, classroom etiquette, and participation. What's the rationale behind each policy and what justifies a particular set of policy details? Why these rules on, say, deadlines, as opposed to others? The goal is to ask questions that lead to the assumptions inherent within the practices. Exhibit 2.1 offers a collection of possible assumptions justifying some of the most common policies. They are valid depending on how the policy is used, but if you find yourself

Exhibit 2.1. Assumptions Presumed by Policies

Attendance Policies

Assume that what happens in the classroom is essential to learning

Assume that a teacher and other learners contribute to efforts to learn

Assume that all students find a formal, structured learning environment beneficial

Assume that students won't come to class unless they are required or there is some reward for doing so

Assume that forcing attendance teaches students the value of regular class attendance

Participation Policies

Assume that students learn by talking about content and that students learn by hearing other students talk about content

Assume that students do not have the right to remain silent in class, even though the course material can be mastered without interaction

Assume that without "points," a significant number of students will not actively participate in class

Assume that students learn the benefits of participation by being forced to do it

Assume that students who don't participate aren't learning or are learning less

Deadlines (no late papers, for example)

Assume that learning can be made to conform to a timeline

Assume that students can't or won't manage their time well

Assume that students will learn how to manage their time well by having a teacher manage it for them

Academic Integrity

Assumes that individual work is valued more than collective work

Assumes that some (but not all) kinds of collaboration are wrong

Assumes that integrity is promoted by strategies that prevent cheating

Classroom Etiquette

Assumes that ringing cell phones, coming late, leaving early, and so on disrupt learning as much as they disrupt teaching

Extra Credit

Assumes that making it an option disenfranchises students who get it right the first time

Assumes that how long or how many tries it takes to learn something is a relevant assessment criterion.

arguing with some of them, they are likely encouraging critical reflection. For teachers, the challenge is to figure out why they've opted for a particular policy and whether that policy might be accomplishing some ends others than those intended.

Let me illustrate further with an example. Let's say a teacher "requires" participation by calling on students. Does making students contribute increase their participation when they are not required to contribute? Does it build self-confidence and motivate them to speak more? What evidence supports that belief? Have you collected evidence in your classroom? Has the evidence collected by others ever been consulted?

Beyond assumptions embedded in policies are other beliefs that powerfully influence instructional practice—like the value placed on covering content. More is always better. Most courses are now crammed to overflowing, and teachers still try to add more. Several questions can be asked that challenge assumptions about content coverage, starting with this one: What is the role of content in learning? Asked differently, is content the end or the means? If content is the end, then students learn information because it is essential to know. If content is the means, then that information serves larger learning objectives such as developing critical thinking or problem-solving abilities. The answer doesn't have to be one or the other. Content can be the ends and the means. However, if content is being used to build a knowledge base and develop thinking skills, then how much time is devoted to developing each? Is there evidence supporting the assumption that thinking skills develop automatically, on their own, without explicit instruction?

The more-is-always-better assumption is further challenged when we ask, How much content is enough? Since it is no longer possible to teach students everything they need to know about anything, how much should they know? Since technology now makes information so much more accessible, do students need to carry in their heads what can be found at their fingertips? Should

teachers avoid using instructional strategies proven to promote learning because they can more efficiently cover content with other, more traditional approaches?

A very different but equally interesting set of assumptions can be found in beliefs about teacher authority. Many teachers believe that they need to lay down the law at the beginning of the class—that if control isn't established right from the start, there's a good chance it will be lost, and then it's very hard to reassert control. This view also holds that if the law is laid down and the class abides by the rules, that tight-fisted control can be relinquished some as the course progresses. What an interesting set of assumptions. Where do they come from? On what experiential and empirical evidence do they rest? What is the relationship between instructor control and student learning? If students are controlled, does that mean more and better learning? How does a tightly controlled environment affect the motivation to learn? And finally the question that most needs to be considered: Is the use of power promoting learning or protecting the teacher?

Critical reflection does not ask easy questions. It hits hard on strongly held beliefs and sensitive issues. Back to the practice of calling on students, which a lot of faculty do because they are motivated by the belief that cold calling develops students' confidence and communication skills. Perhaps it does, but whatever the experience develops, it doesn't seem to increase voluntary participation in subsequent classrooms, at least according to research reported in the literature so far (a summary of this research appears in Weimer, 2002, pp. 34–37). But calling on students does solve a teacher problem. In our culture, there is an expectation that questions will be answered. "How are you?" merits a response, albeit a perfunctory one. Ask a question in class, hear no answer and feel discomfort. In a subtle way, the teacher's authority has been challenged. But there's an easy way to make the discomfort go away. Call on a student, bring the teacher's power to bear, and pressure someone to give an answer.

If the discussion of any of these examples has provoked a response, then it has successfully demonstrated the role critical reflection can play in helping teachers understand the rationale behind their actions and discover inconsistencies between what they believe and what they do in the classroom. So much of what teachers do derives from tradition: we teach as we were taught. To grow and develop as a teacher, it is necessary to regularly look closely and critically at what we are doing and ask why. The answers are not always what we might hope to hear, but as most of us have learned in life, in times of pain we grow the most.

Critical reflection works equally well when teachers start with their beliefs and move from there to the level of practice, as they might by preparing or reviewing a statement of educational philosophy. Faculty regularly create these for job interviews, teaching awards, or as part of promotion and tenure processes, which means they may contain "impressive" philosophies as opposed to ones that accurately state a teacher's beliefs and values. The insights to be gleaned through critical reflection are easily sabotaged by anything less than complete honesty. Beatty, Leigh, and Dean (2009a) have developed an exercise that faculty can use to help them discover the true tenets of their teaching philosophies. It is preceded by another excellent article on teaching philosophy statements (Beatty, Leigh, and Dean, 2009b).

Using an accurate statement of teaching or educational philosophy, a teacher can design a set of policies and practices consistent with those beliefs. The idea is to start fresh, exploring what policies, practices, and teaching approaches best reflect those beliefs, independent of whatever policies are currently in use. In my graduate seminar, students observe each other teaching on several occasions and read classmates' teaching philosophy statements without knowing who the authors are. Then I have them match the statements with teachers. The success rate is dismal, which says something about how well behaviors reflect beliefs (and

vice versa), but the exercise fosters lots of discussion and some important insights.

There are some published accounts in which teachers reflect critically on an experience, often one when things in a course did not go as expected. Not only are these instructive reading, but they demonstrate what teachers can discover when they look critically, openly, and objectively at an experience. Here are some of my favorites: Damico and Quay (2006); Khazanov (2007); Noel (2004); and Sandstrom (1999).

Critical reflection doesn't always lead to transformative learning, but it can. My move from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered philosophy changed my practice so dramatically that some days I hardly recognized the teacher I had become. It was a fascinating journey—one of the richest and most rewarding of my career. I began by doing what I've advocated in the chapter thus far. I started paying attention to what I was doing and asking why. I discovered that critical reflection is an iterative process. One question leads to another; one insight to another. The move is inward, and the result is an ever-deeper understanding of the instructional self.

Who Am I and What Can I Become?

Every teacher is unique, even though they do many of the same things: lead discussions, explain difficult ideas, answer questions, provide feedback, design learning experiences, and organize content. They accomplish these tasks with the behaviors identified in response to the question, What do I do when I teach? At this point teachers may also have answers to the why question: Why do I teach using these policies, practices, and behaviors? What's left is exploring how it all fits together, so that teachers can find their way from who they are to what they can become, next semester, next year, and across to the farthest end of the career.

Instructional identity grows out of those sets of behaviors and the beliefs on which it rests but it moves beyond them as well. Teaching behaviors do not occur in isolation. Everything a teacher does connects and interacts with everything else. How it all fits together is what makes a teacher unique and can be thought of as teaching style. Eble (1983, Chapters One and Two, pp. 1–35) explains teaching style by comparing it to handwriting. Legible handwriting can be read by anyone because everybody makes the letters in the alphabet sort of the same way—just like all teachers lead discussion sort of in the same way—they ask questions, respond to answers, ask follow-up questions, encourage students to ask questions, solicit comments, and challenge unsupported opinions. These similarities allow us to recognize discussion when it occurs, even though how one teacher conducts discussion may look very different from how another teacher does it. However, if we know a teacher well, just like we know a family member's signature we can pick out that teacher's discussion style. It is unique and identifies the teacher just as definitively as handwriting does a person.

Even though every teaching style is unique, not all are equally effective. Some are not, and even among those that are, teaching styles vary enormously—so much so that some argue good teaching cannot be defined and it most certainly can't be measured. That argument has trouble standing given the decades of research exploring the ingredients or components of effective instruction. The same factors (things like enthusiasm, clarity, knowledge of the subject matter, preparation, and organization) keep emerging, study after study (two venerable sources were cited in Chapter One: Sherman, 1986, and Feldman, 1988. For a more recent and well written analysis of "best" teachers, see Bain, 2004).

The variations among effective styles and among those that do and don't work can be explained with any of the components of effective instruction. I'll use organization. Like the other aspects of good teaching, organization is an abstraction, not a tangible entity. If missing, it can't downloaded, printed, and attached to the teaching. Whether or not a teacher is organized is inferred by the presence or absence of behaviors that have come to be associated with it. In the classroom, a teacher conveys organization with behaviors like verbally listing main points, using transition movements, outlining content on PowerPoint, and so on. Actually, there are many behaviors that may be used separately or in combination to convey structure or sequence. So, all good teachers are organized, but the behaviors they use and how exactly they use them may be very different. Conversely, teachers who aren't especially well organized do not use these behaviors or don't use them in ways that make their instruction coherent to learners.

Thinking about the characteristics of effective instruction in terms of the behaviors associated with them has a couple of advantages when the goal is developing (as in changing and improving) one's teaching style. The repertoire of behaviors used to convey organization (or any of the other dimensions of effective instruction) can be changed; behaviors added, behaviors deleted, behaviors altered. The order or sequence of the behaviors can also be fussed with and changed. At the level of behavioral details, teaching is more or less easily manipulated.

There's another advantage as well. The abstractions equated with teaching excellence describe what a person is: organized, enthusiastic, clear, fair, knowledgeable, and so on. But decisions about whether a teacher is are made by looking at, often intuitively sensing, what they are doing and drawing inferences from those behaviors. So, to be "more organized," a teacher can start by attempting to change the way he is, or he can begin to use those behaviors associated with organization. He could, for example, religiously devote the last five minutes of class to positioning new and previously covered content. Is there much question which approach is easier and more likely to succeed?

Starting here, the development of a teaching style is straightforward and uncomplicated. Do the behaviors and you will become more organized, clear, enthusiastic, whatever. Individual teaching

behaviors are amendable to modification, and collections of them do add up to the presence of a characteristic, but also, like handwriting, fundamental aspects of a style are difficult to change. I am not terribly organized when I teach; never have been, never will, at least not in this life. I can be organized on paper, but not in teaching situations. I am easily sidetracked by the possibilities of the moment. I do work hard to compensate for the somewhat disorganized way content gets conveyed verbally, and I have improved, but organization will never be a distinguishing characteristic of my teaching.

After the straightforward start, the process of developing a teaching style gets more complicated. Every teacher more or less consistently uses certain behaviors associated with those larger, abstract aspects of instruction. Those behaviors sets exist at different spots along the effectiveness continuum. Teachers need to know where the various aspects of their instruction fall on that continuum and which require the kind of penetrating, critical reflection being advocated in this chapter. And that's not the only factor that makes discovering and developing a teaching style difficult.

Each aspect of instruction is related and interacts dynamically, so a teaching strength can potentially become a weakness. I rely on stories both when I teach students and when I work with faculty. I consider them one of my teaching strengths. Most of my stories involve humor—there's a punch line. I love it when I can make people laugh. But sometimes I get carried away with the stories, with their details, drama, and delivery. Sometimes instead of supporting a point, they become the point. Students remember the story but not what they learned from it. To overcome this potential weakness, I must use stories judiciously—to make the point more dramatic than the story and to tell them when they are needed to facilitate learning, not when I feel the urge to showcase my ability to spin a good tale.

Conversely, strengths can compensate for weaknesses. Enthusiasm is a great example. If a teacher loves the content and lets that love show, that commitment and energy can cover for a lack of organization and the occasional inability to explain something clearly. Enthusiasm allows teachers to show students how much they care, about the content, the learning, even about the students themselves, and that concern can cover a multitude of sins.

Finally, even though the strengths and weakness of a given teaching style are fairly consistent, their affects are by no means fixed. A carefully crafted assignment can work well for several semesters. Then a new class arrives, and you'd think they'd been given the assignment from hell. Moreover, teaching behaviors are not always used consistently. Teachers don't do everything the same way every day, even though some are mighty predictable. Routinely organization is conveyed with the same behaviors, but not by teaching machines performing the task with numbing exactness.

Responding to the "Who am I?" question starts with a clear understanding of what a teacher does that "organizes" the instruction, makes it "clear," conveys "enthusiasm," and so on. Then, where those aspects of instruction fit on the effectiveness continuum in light of how they interact with the other components of instruction must be ascertained. Finally, a teacher arrives at an understanding of the teaching self—what makes it strong, not so strong, along with what makes it unique. It's like putting a puzzle together. You've got a collection of individual pieces. Somehow they fit together—the challenge is figuring out how.

Understanding the complex vagrancies of teaching style takes time and effort. It's one of those jigsaw puzzles with a 1,000 pieces. As the puzzle starts to come together, the emerging picture should be of someone you recognize. Who you are as a teacher is inextricably linked to who you are as a person. The best teaching is always

teaching that is a genuine, authentic representation of the person involved. Developing style at this level means finding ways of teaching that comfortably express your personhood. More about this in Chapter Seven.

There is one last key point here. Coming to know the teaching self should be accompanied by a growing acceptance of that instructional identity, the knowledge of strengths, and an acceptance that some teaching tasks are done less well. This acceptance is not complacent. All teachers can improve, and they can improve any aspect of their teaching performance, but there are limits. I like to think of it this way. Everyone can learn to dance, and with some dance lessons virtually everybody improves. That doesn't make everyone a dancer.

Herein lies yet another reason for focusing on strengths when the goal is realizing one's potential as a teacher. I am more organized than I used to be, but with organization there may be only so far I can go. On the other hand, but when conveying passion for what I teach, I do that well. I can see lots of way to do it even better, and they involve doing things I know that I can do. It's not about giving up on those things we don't do as well but about realizing that one's potential as teacher lies among those strengths. Growth across the career rests on accepting who I am but never being satisfied with what I do.

Individual Activities That Foster Growth and Change

Some of the reflection necessary to understand what you do, why you do it, and what all that says about your instructional identity and growth potential can be done by just thinking about teaching. College faculty have fine minds and can be expected to derive insights and understanding once those minds are engaged and focused. However, the reflection works even better when it's supplemented with activities.

What follows in this chapter is a collection of activities that can be undertaken by individual faculty members on their own. The next three chapters propose activities for growth that involve students and colleagues, attesting to the importance of what others bring to the growth process. However, here at the onset, I reiterate the importance of faculty developing their own sense of instructional identity. The most important portrait of the teaching self is the one you construct, and these activities can help you create a complete and accurate picture.

The activities are not reflective in and of themselves, but they can be used to promote reflection. They can make faculty more observant, thoughtful, and challenging of their own teaching and the learning it fosters in students. There is no magic number of activities to undertake, no set order, and this list is not all-inclusive. Here is yet another opportunity for faculty to take charge, finding those activities that best foster the analysis and introspection needed to encourage growth.

Reading

Connecting faculty to pedagogical literature has been one of the missions of my professional life. I don't remember ever reading anything about teaching before I started teaching. Now, though, reading more than anything else is what's kept me fresh and invigorated. However, the reflection called for in this chapter is best supported by a balanced diet of reading.

First off, everything that could and should be learned about teaching is not found in the pedagogical literature of one discipline, even though this is the first (and often only) place most faculty look. There's no need to avoid this literature, but a steady diet of disciplined-based pedagogical scholarship is like eating food from only one culture. Even though some ingredients may be the same, the foods of any given culture are unique, flavorful in uncommon ways, just as our various disciplines each influences the practice of pedagogy in a unique way. If reading is used to get you

thinking about things differently, your own thinking will be expanded by reading the writings of teachers who think about things differently than you do. The problem with a discipline-only reading diet is that faculty in the same field tend to share many of the same pedagogical views.

Here are some examples that illustrate what might be learned by diversifying one's reading diet. Do you ever struggle to get your students connected with some of the classic works in your field? Gregory (2005), an English professor, offers an interesting analysis of how teachers make that connection difficult for students by assuming students will connect with literature the same way faculty do. How often do you have students coming to class not having done the reading and not ready to exchange any more than uninformed opinions? Four sociologists in three different articles offer creative assignment designs that get students coming to class prepared (Howard, 2004; Yamane, 2006; and Roberts and Roberts, 2008). Their assignment designs would work in any class that includes required reading. What about letting students grade their own homework? Before concluding that's not a possibility, take a look at the system Edwards (2007) designed for use in a social statistics course.

Faculty interested in using reading to promote reflection should read some educational research. They need to know what, if any, evidence supports the beliefs held and practices used. Many aspects of teaching and learning have been studied extensively. Since the early 1900s, researchers have been attempting to understand the affects on class size on learning. Earlier editions of McKeachie's venerable *Teaching Tips* (7th edition, 1978) contained succinct and well-referenced summaries of this research. More recently, Stanley and Porter (2002) update those reseach summaries in a fine book on teaching large classes. Much is known about what motivates students. Pintrich's (2003) review is definitive and includes implications of the research for practice. Educational researchers have studied which students seek help and why—see the very impressive work of Karabenick (1998) and Karabenick and Newman (2006) for more on this.

Most teachers will not find reading educational research fun. Like research in other fields, it is not written to inform practice, it has its own protocols and conventions, and it uses language unfamiliar to outsiders. Although one should not avoid educational research entirely, there is another alternative. Research on teaching and learning topics regularly appears in the discipline-based pedagogical periodicals. It is often easier to read and seemingly more relevant because the questions explored are practical and applied. For example, marketing professors McIntyre and Munson (2008) analyzed the practice of cramming and discovered why students do it. It doesn't hurt their exam scores. Many teachers believe that students' attention spans decline 10 to 15 minutes into a lecture. Psychologists Wilson and Korn (2007) reviewed the literature on the topic and couldn't find much evidence supportive of this widely held belief. Engineer Prince (2004) has constructed the most succinct, clear, and well-organized summary of the research on active learning that I've ever read. Each of these examples demonstrates quality practitioner research and reaffirm the value of pedagogical reading outside one's discipline.

Finally, when faculty use reading to promote their own reflection and analysis, they need to be mindful of the caliber of what they read. There's a lot of soft food in the pedagogical literature—books and articles that don't require teeth, not the kind of substantive nourishment out of which new insights and understandings are grown. *Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lectern* (Staley, 2003) or "Ten Easy Ways to Engage Your Students" (Gray and Madson, 2007) offer impressive collections of activities that teachers can use to get students active and involved in class; literature like this does make a contribution. However, it does not foster the insights and growth described in this chapter. Unfortunately, like fast food, this literature is readily available and is just as nutritionally dubious as the main source of pedagogical protein.

Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning

Interest in the scholarship of teaching has generated new acceptance for pedagogical scholarship. At many institutions it now counts toward promotion and tenure. But there's an even more important reason to consider doing scholarly work on teaching and learning. It stimulates reflection almost automatically. When an aspect of practice is researched in a systematic way, when relevant literature is reviewed, and when lessons are thoughtfully extracted from experience, the process focuses attention on teaching and learning in deep and telling ways. Even if what has been written is never published, enough individual learning will occur to make the process well worth the effort. For a fuller discussion of how and why this activity prompts teacher growth, see my book on pedagogical scholarship (Weimer, 2006, pp. 170–174).

Workshops and Conferences

Workshops on a wide range of topics are the staple of most teaching excellence centers and faculty development units. Some national conferences on college teaching also help, and there are sessions on teaching and learning at most disciplinary association meetings. In some larger fields, whole divisions hold their own conferences devoted to teaching and learning. Workshops and conference events don't uniformly stimulate reflection among faculty, however. Some faculty don't learn well in groups; others do. Like students, teachers need understand themselves as learners and opt for those activities that will contribute the most to their efforts to understand themselves as teachers.

Institutional Initiatives

Some institutional initiatives, like Writing Across the Curriculum, have been very successful at prompting reflective analysis of teaching. As faculty across disciplines considered how writing could be incorporated in what they taught, the process raised questions

about content, feedback to students, and a host of other instructional details. To accommodate writing in courses, most faculty had to make changes. Other initiatives like multicultural curricular reform, first-year experience programs, learning communities, service learning, to name but a few, have made faculty think more deeply about what they do and why.

Small Grants Programs

Many institutions offer internal grant opportunities. Usually the stipends are small and often don't include course releases, but they do make it possible for faculty to undertake a curriculum project like designing a new course or redesigning an old one; a technology project that enables faculty (one hopes with some IT—information technology—design support) to begin using online quizzes; paper grading software or clickers for in-class feedback; or a classroom research project such as exploring student perceptions of how classroom environment affects efforts to learn. Projects like these give faculty the opportunity to devote attention to specific aspects of practice.

Curriculum Development Projects

Whether it's an institutional initiative to reconfigure general education, courses for a new major, a significant revamping of a current degree program, or prepping for a course not taught previously, work on curriculum can be a vehicle that encourages reflection. However, the benefits of curricular work do not accrue automatically. Curricular work will have little or no impact when a faculty member is preparing for three new courses at once, when the focus of curriculum development never gets past what content to include, or when the planning gets trapped in a cumbersome process. Most faculty have little understanding of curriculum design issues. Often they opt to organize courses around the table of contents in the selected text. Good planning processes force faculty to ask questions, consider context, and see larger outcomes, but many

approaches mire faculty in details, and they quickly bog down and bail out.

Course and Teaching Portfolios

"A course portfolio enables the teacher to document the careful, difficult and intentional scholarly work of planning and teaching a course. It is also an invaluable tool for documenting and reflecting on the quantity and quality of student learning" (Bernstein, Burnett, Goodburn, and Savory, 2006, p. 8). The same could be said of a teaching portfolio that is usually broader in scope and more focused on teaching. However, if the faculty member prepares the course portfolio for external review, the prospect of summative assessment encourages faculty to be less than honest with themselves and others. On the other hand, if a teacher assembles a portfolio using activities like those proposed by Bernstein and others (2006), then a powerful tool has been added to the repertoire of reflective strategies.

New Learning

For most faculty, learning in their chosen fields becomes a career-long activity. These academic homes become safe havens, much-loved abodes where faculty excel at highly specialized forms of learning. The ability to select instructional policies, practices, and behavior that promote learning depends on understanding what the content looks and feels like to novice learners. When faculty work with content for years, they lose this sense of newness. This is why new learning, learning in another field, new skill acquisition, or engagement with unfamiliar and challenging content can be such an eye-opening experience. It prompts a complete reexamination of teaching practices and the assumptions on which they rest. Starling (1987) and Gregory (2006) describe how much they learned about teaching when they took courses with students. Here's just one of many insights Gregory reports: "We think we are inviting students to be active learners by asking them

questions, but we can easily deceive ourselves on this point because, usually we ask few questions to which we do not already know four different answers that we are eager to explain" (p. 313).

The call for thoughtful, critical reflection as described in this chapter and promoted by such activities is justified by two reasons. First, students need inspired teachers—now more so than ever. Often they come to college without much of the knowledge or many of the skills needed to succeed in higher education and in life. Few college teachers today educate America's brightest and best. Most work of us with students for whom an alive and vibrant teacher can make a world of difference. How well those students learn is linked to how much their teachers know about themselves—who they are, what they do in the classroom, and why.

Second, teachers owe it to themselves. Often teaching takes more than it gives. It can leave teachers tired, empty, and sometimes bitter. A commitment to explore and understand the teaching self offers a way back, as well as a way to preserve instructional vitality. It is a journey that grows competence, confidence, and commitment. In a lovely book written to new faculty, a decorated faculty senior explains what makes career-long growth so sustaining for teachers: "Teaching is more complicated than a relationship with your accountant and less complicated than a marriage, but complicated it is. That's why it's not simply a craft but an art. It's also why, after more than seventy-five semesters in college classrooms, I still find the process deeply and creatively interesting" (Filene, 2005, p. 22).