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# Reflecting on Reflection

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## Reflecting on Reflection: Lessons from Memoir

*Reflection:* in teacher education, if you want a buzzword, that's it. Students are asked to reflect on prior lessons, on observations in practicum experiences, on lesson plans and their delivery, on participation—the list goes on. Why do we hammer reflection so hard?

Few would argue that reflection is not beneficial. That's how professionals behave, after all—they think about what they and others before them have done, and refine their future work just slightly, based on findings from these experiences. Researchers in all fields base their work on prior findings. The average scholar reads other scholars to see what has been done before beginning a new study, book, or article. In order to get to this point, where reflection on practice is natural, it makes sense to embed reflective assignments into the course. But they can be clichéd and difficult to grade and students may perceive them as too easy.

What did I do to combat the fatigue of reading reflections? My students wrote memoirs. They then took their memoirs and turned them into brief, image-focused *pecha kucha* presentations. I asked them to consider why they chose to become a teacher and then show that in the memoir—instead of just telling it as they might in a reflection.

I'll give you a taste of what the latter might sound like: 'I've always wanted to be a teacher since I was five years old and playing school with my stuffed animals! I love teaching and kids.' Alternatively, here's what a reflection on an observation might sound like: 'I watched a lesson on photosynthesis today. It was okay but the students were kind of bored and some were even falling asleep.' Nearly all of the students forget (or never learned) that old creative writing adage: don't just say the lady screamed. Bring her out and let her scream! Or maybe, in this case, it should be, 'bring the student out and let him fall asleep!'

As I analyzed these memoirs for my research and searched for the common themes and little nuggets of truth that were hiding somewhere within them, I found a much bigger truth outside of them. I learned about my students. They learned about each other through rounds of peer review and the *pecha kucha* presentations. And it never would have happened in a formal, organized way without these assignments. Now, another oft-hammered phrase from teacher education floats in: know your students.

It is worth the time to know students and help them know themselves. First,

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because students are interesting and they make our jobs meaningful. And second, because it helps to turn students into passionate scholars. Most students need support for the work of internalizing knowledge and interacting with it.

In most college courses, there is little formalized opportunity for students to look at the knowledge they are gaining from the perspective of who they were before entering the class. The memoir assignment did this and more: students interrogated their lives for meaningful experiences and crafted them into interesting narratives.

Professors have the opportunity to know their students, forge interdisciplinary connections, and build true scholars who can analyze the texts they encounter as well as produce their own. There should be more support for students to reflect in interesting ways on how they are receiving and understanding content as a result of their prior experiences. This is not only for the students' benefit, but also for their professors, so that they might learn more about who those students are. Content delivery is easy. Connection is not.

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