Waiting to Learn and Learning to Wait: An Autoethnographic Metareflection on Journaling as a Reflective Teaching Practice

Ana Palomino

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Waiting to Learn and Learning to Wait:

An Autoethnographic Metareflection on Journaling as a Reflective Teaching Practice

Ana Palomino

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in TESOL degree at SIT Graduate Institute

May 5, 2021

IPP Advisor: Dr. Leslie Turpin
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I am grateful for Claire Kalala, who has built a creative, meaningful, engaging but systematic approach to personal and professional data collection with me. I appreciate her difficult questions and sincere curiosity about my lived experiences in and out of the classroom.

I am indebted to my mom, also known as Nancy Newton, for protecting and keeping my childhood journals safe in the attic for so many years. I am thankful, now, for the moments that make me cringe. She spent many years preserving and protecting them. I imagine she knew that the wisdom in the embarrassment would eventually rise to the surface for me.

Lastly, I am grateful to my life and current live-in reflective teaching partner, Nicholas Roher, who supports, encourages, and shows up for me in too many ways to name. I am fortunate to have someone willing to listen to me talk through my own reflective process for months (and years) and be my reader.
Abstract

In this autoethnographic metareflection, the author, an English as a Second Language (ESOL) teacher, demonstrates how she is working to develop a personalized and systematic approach to journaling as a reflective teaching practice. A self-identified “crisis journaler” for over two decades, the author argues that her journal entries, filled with vented frustrations and attempts to figure out life’s challenges, are part of a professional ongoing, long-term data collection process. The author shows how keeping written records of her experiences has produced the important documents that can now facilitate her personal and professional reflection. Using multiple approaches, the author models how a teacher’s journal entries can be transformed into interactive data for a teacher to learn from, interpret, analyze, and share with others. Analyzing data that emerges from her journals offers a teacher valuable insight into her own thinking and decision-making in the classroom. Exploring both her own journal entries and the published literature on reflection, the author attempts to negotiate and refine her personal and ever evolving understanding of what reflective teaching is and how to do it with a journal.
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Introduction

Autoethnography has been criticized as a “lazy and narcissistic approach to research” and simultaneously praised as a “valuable and worthwhile research strategy that attempts to qualitatively and reflexively make sense of the self and society in an increasingly uncertain and precarious world” (Stephens Griffin & Griffin, 2019, p. 1). It is a “form of academic inquiry that combines personal and theoretical reflection” (Chung, 2019, p. 14). “Academic selfie” is my personal favorite way to describe autoethnography (Stephen Griffin & Griffin, 2019, p. 1). This autoethnographic metareflection combines a review of the literature (the theories) on reflection and my own past journal entries (my experiences) to make the process of reflective journaling an accessible, tangible practice that anyone could see themselves regularly implementing into their own professional practice.

A metareflection is an exploration of past writing and a search for the “patterns, surprises, hidden meaning, and underlying assumptions” that inform my thinking and influence my actions (Stephens & Cooper, p. 148). Keeping a journal, on its own, is not a reflective teaching practice. I need to intentionally review my writing to learn from my writing. I cannot engage in metareflection until I have produced enough material, over a long period of time, upon which to metareflect. My own autoethnographic metareflection focuses on past journal writing related to my teaching and learning experiences as a middle school ESOL teacher. I also use writing from my childhood to better understand why I have been able to keep a journaling habit for this long and to explore why I might show up in the middle school ESOL classroom in certain ways. I offer some strategies and methods that I have considered and used to transform my personal journal entries into interactive data from which I can learn and grow professionally. I am not offering a methodological, standardized approach to journaling as a reflective teaching practice, because one does not exist. I do, however, hope that the reader (a teacher, a nurse, a counselor, a caseworker, a leader, or any person who feels compelled to help and serve others
as a career) feels inspired to experiment with and commit to their own journaling practice to learn more about themselves and how they show up in their communities.

Reflection is incorporated into almost every teacher education program and most states hold some sort of reflective practice requirements for those studying to be teachers. For many teachers, the academic requirements necessary to prove to their academic institution that they have indeed, successfully reflected, often “translates into perfunctory practices like keeping journals” (Rodgers, 2020, p. 101). Fortunately for me, when I started my own teacher education program at the School for International Training (SIT) in the summer of 2019, I had been engaging in highly perfunctory journaling since I was 7 years old and have been consistent with the practice throughout adolescence and into current adulthood. I have over two decades of combined personal, academic, and professional, handwritten journals in two storage boxes in my living room as I write.

With deep respect, I refer to my own journaling as “perfunctory” because I am sure I did not start keeping a journal at 7 years old to reflect on my behavior or gain a deeper awareness of the underlying assumptions that fueled my everyday decisions. Even now, I am not primarily motivated to journal for the purpose of reflecting on my deeply rooted, often unconscious attitude, skills, awareness, knowledge, beliefs, values, motivation, and behavior. Until graduate school, I did not consider my journals, the products of a surviving childhood hobby, as a place for me to really learn about myself from myself. My journals are, and have always been, a place where my voice and experiences hold wisdom, truth, value, authority, and weight for a willing reader. Historically, my journal has acted as a private reminder to me that, just by existing on the shelf (or in a box), my thoughts, feelings, and perspectives matter, almost especially because I record them with little effort or thought. I never needed to put in effort to matter in my journal.

**Figure 1**

*Journal Entry from 1999 (age 9)*
For a very long time I assumed my journals would hold the most value and wisdom for others, such as my imaginary, unborn descendants who would (hopefully) only access the journals long after I died. I did not plan to face the ways I interpreted and paid attention to reality throughout my life. Ideally, the previously mentioned “willing reader” of these journals would never have to be me. Journaling can be used as an “estrangement device” because it allows us to view our experiences somewhat more dispassionately than we can right after the experience (Bailey, 2003, p. 3). I see truth in this but my gut reaction to reviewing my own journals is a deep discomfort that tightens the muscles around my neck, shoulders, forehead, and eyes. My past-self makes my present-self cringe. Historically, my journals have been a private place for me to vent and be my most unflatteringly vulnerable self. I am a recovering “crisis writer;” a person who uses their journal primarily to record and make sense of life’s challenges (Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. xvi). During my first year as a public school ESOL teacher working with middle school students who had recently arrived in the United States, I complained, vented, doubted, raged, and grew various classroom crises with my increased attention to what felt “wrong” about what I was doing (Brown, 2017, p. 46). I was also collecting valuable data on myself. This data
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has revealed so much to me about my own attitudes, beliefs and assumptions that continue to influence my experiences as a public school ESOL teacher.

Figure 2

First-Year Teacher Talk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 3, 2019</td>
<td>“I’m overthinking teaching. I am over-planning, prepping – FOR SURE over-printing. I would very much so like to get better and improve my skills as a teacher – I don’t have to prove to anyone that I’m immediately amazing. I have so much time to get better. I’m excited to get better. Every teaching opportunity is an opportunity to learn, grow, develop, question, and clarify. I have a lot of performance anxiety around teaching. I imagine a lot of teachers do but this feels like more than butterflies.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am learning now that the act of handwriting and then rereading my experiences, in a journal, is a reflective, analytic process that helps me view my actions, my thinking and my feelings more clearly. In writing and rereading, I can observe myself from a safe and humbling distance. Reading the journal entries allows me to see "recurring regularities" in my teaching practice; the recurring problems but also the recurring wisdom (Bailey, 2003, p. 3). Revisiting old journal entries, after some time has passed, allows me to compare how I described an experience immediately after having lived it with how I feel about that experience, now, in the present moment. With time, I am more able (and willing) to see how I could have experienced or observed a specific interaction, event, or situation through certain filters and then, relied on my own distorted interpretation as the one and only finite truth. Journaling can be used as an "estrangement device," not because it makes anything I did or said less humiliating with hindsight (Bailey, 2003, p. 3) but because from a distance, I have the perspective to see multiple truths. Writing these reflections down and reviewing them allows me to engage with and question the assumptions I held at the time I recorded my interpretation of a specific event or interaction. Once I can identify my assumptions, I can better understand how those assumptions inform my decisions and actions in the classroom (Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 29).
A journal is a sequential, dated chronicle of events and ideas, which includes the personal responses and reflections of the writer on those events and ideas (Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 5). My own journals are evidence of my evolving thought processes that document “valuable, often fleeting glimpses of [my own] understanding” (p. 3). I write down my emotions, thoughts, fears, and stories soon after experiencing them. Many of these experiences I would likely never have remembered on my own if I had not written them down. In this way, the understanding I can mine from these moments is truly fleeting. A journal is a device for working with events and experiences and to extract meaning from the events that meant so much to me on a specific day that, soon after they happened, I felt compelled to record them in writing (p. 33). A journal is a place to create, document and tell my story, keeping in mind that it is one of many stories. I am learning through this process that my story and how I tell it holds incredible power in the way I navigate my life, my relationships, my classroom, and the world. Reflective teaching involves critical examination of the stories I tell myself about myself and the stories I tell myself about others, my students, my colleagues, the community I work in, and the that employs me. Writing and reviewing my writing helps me develop a deeper awareness of my classroom decisions and the motivation behind those decisions through the collection of original data about my teaching (Bailey, 2003, p. 1). Personally, I keep a journal and I also happen to write about teaching and everything else in that journal. Looking through a collective blend of personal and professional data, I can see how “often the same dynamics echo across different realms of [my life]” so the beliefs that underlie the decisions I make in the classroom also underlie the decisions I make with my partner, friends, and family. “It is [my] pattern [and my] shape” (Brown, 2017, p. 139).

With so much documentation of events that blend my personal and professional lives, journaling has led me to ask myself, what Mayes (2001) refers to as, questions for “biographical reflectivity.” What personal needs, hurts, hopes, potencies, and fears were involved in my
decision to become a teacher, specifically an ESOL teacher? How are my needs, hurts, hopes, potencies, and fears getting addressed and expressed in my classroom? Are my needs, hurts, hopes, potencies, and fears changing as I develop as a teacher? Is my development as a teacher affecting my needs, hurts, hopes, potencies, and fears? Are they benefiting me and my students or are they ever destructive or inappropriate? (p. 251). I am curious about the ways that teachers can commit to exploring these questions and sharing their findings with other teachers in professional learning communities. I am hopeful that a commitment to exploring these questions will lead to a deeper self-awareness that will, in turn, prime a teacher’s awareness to the needs, hurts, hopes, potencies and fears of her own students.

This is not to imply that this paper will provide the reader (or myself even) any thorough or satisfactory answers to the questions for biographical reflectivity, but I understand these questions encourage a deeper awareness of the ways I show up in relationships and in community. The first time I read these questions, they felt like an attack. I tend to judge my answers to these questions quite harshly. Focusing on my own behavior, my motives, my emotions, and my responses to situations can be an uncomfortable process. I am dedicated to the process because I see how systematically writing about my teaching experiences over time can lead to more impactful connections and realizations (Bailey, 2003, p. 10).

When adults experience a developmental change, they experience inner tension and frustration. The shift is uncomfortable as “cognition and emotion are inextricably tied together.” The discomfort may be universal, but everyone’s shift will look and feel different because adults are “qualitatively different” (Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 35).

What we know is “complex” and “socially constructed” (Stevens & Cooper, 2009, p. 36). I interpret this to mean that our knowledge is based in our experiences and our experiences are influenced by our identities. I am “qualitatively different” in many ways but for the reader, I will name only a few. I enjoy reading, writing, reality television, horror stories and movies, roller skating, house plants, bright colors, big earrings, gardening, warm weather, long walks and
hikes with my dog, road trips (only as the passenger), dancing, songs about devastating heartbreak, and cooking elaborate meals when I feel discouraged. I am a 30-year-old cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, bicultural, multilingual, home-owning, dog-owning, childless, unmarried, middle class, college-educated, U.S.-born, white, white-passing and/or racially ambiguous (depending on the person, situation, place), DMV (DC, Maryland, Virginia metro area)-native, Latina, Peruvian, daughter, friend, sister, girlfriend, teacher, facilitator, millennial, survivor, writer, woman, and learner. My identities and my experiences living in these identities influence and filter my interpretation of reality. I am the expert on my own life and no one else’s.

Fendler (2003) notes that using categories of race, class, gender, age, ability, and sexuality can invoke “populational stereotypes” for the reader so I will also provide some important historical circumstances to provide a better context for when and where this reflection is happening (p. 23). I am currently in my second year of working with middle school English Learners in a Title 1 public school, located on the southeast tip of an historic East Coast port city. My students have recently arrived in the United States and they are from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. My students are in 7th and 8th grade. Before coming to work for a public school district full-time, I took some jobs teaching Spanish and English for children and adults part-time, while working in domestic violence and sexual assault crisis intervention services, full-time. Seven months into my full-time teaching career, in March of 2020, we experienced a huge transition when the state’s governor closed public schools due to the global Coronavirus pandemic. Shortly after, we transitioned to online learning. As of late April 2021, I have been back in the physical classroom for two weeks as we slowly transition to hybrid-learning. I have read, written, and taken notes for much of this paper while passively listening to television shows like *Mariposa de Barrio*, *90 Day Fiancé*, a lot of true crime documentaries, and *Iyanla, Fix My Life*.

Fendler (2003) warns that methodological approaches to reflection tend to assume that anyone and everyone can follow the same steps to arrive at the same place, but this ignores the
effects of socialization, the workings of systemic injustices (p. 18) and the ways these factors influence our experiences and interpretations. Our imaginations are “shaped by our entire life experiences, our socialization, the concepts we are exposed to and where we fall in the global hierarchies of society” (Brown, 2017, p. 17). What I think, believe, and even imagine has been largely influenced by what I have seen, heard, and felt in my life. I have been equally influenced by what I have not seen, heard, or felt. We cannot all follow the same methodological steps to arrive at the same reflective conclusion because none of us start from the same place. We are not all experiencing the same reality and we will each need to move differently to see our own subjective perspective of reality differently. Robert Kegan (1994) believes a person can transform from being subject to (or trapped in) their own personal, unique interpretation of reality to being able to hold that interpretation as one among many other possible realities (as cited in Rodgers, 2020, p. 21).

Kegan’s (1982) Constructive-Developmental Theory describes how adults create their own realities by making meaning of their experiences. Each adult, based on their identities, experiences, perspectives, beliefs, and values, will make meaning of their experiences differently. Constructive-Developmental Theory argues that adults will know that they are growing and evolving when they feel deeply uncomfortable (as cited in Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 35). Arguably, reflection is not supposed to feel good. This explains why rereading my journal entries makes me cringe.

Robert Kegan (1994) introduced the idea of two different types of learning: informational learning and transformational learning. Informational learning happens when we learn new skills. Transformational learning occurs when adults question the assumptions that underlie their beliefs and actions in the world. Writing in a journal is not transformative on its own. I need to read what I wrote to transform. Reading what I wrote and noticing the themes and patterns that emerge from my written descriptions of reality is one way to examine the beliefs and assumptions I held that led me to describe an event or interaction in a particular way. This
means that, over time, I can start to see the shape of my underlying beliefs and how those beliefs prime my attention to certain details while simultaneously limiting my ability to notice and respond to others (as cited in Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 37-9). My journal entries from my first year of teaching in a public school are overwhelmingly negative with a strong undercurrent of panic. My attention was primed to the problems in a way that often left me blind to the successes, the connections, and the learning.

**Figure 3**

*Paying Attention to What’s Wrong*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 1, 2019</td>
<td>“I need a self-care plan desperately. I’m flailing. I am not operating at my highest possible potential and I haven’t been for quite some time. Not working at my highest potential is giving me anxiety.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 9, 2019</td>
<td>“I called out of work today and I am overwhelming with guilt when I truly shouldn’t be. I’m scared everyone is angry with me. I’m worried that everyone thinks I am lazy or weak or not cut out for teaching. I’m worried my competency and work-ethic are being questioned. Why do I believe that?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 30, 2020</td>
<td>“For weeks, [8th grade student] has been coming to all my sections except his own to disrupt – ni me salude.¹ I asked him why he doesn’t come to my class. [other 8th grade male student] said it’s because [8th grade male student] likes me. I asked to speak to [8th grade student] privately. He ignored me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 27, 2020</td>
<td>“This kids are testing me. [7th grade male student] called me pendeja² the day after [7th grade female student] called me a puta maestra³ and I’m mean now – I’m the most mala⁴ bitch of all. But I do like the tone that silent reading sets. They hate it at first but they get into it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 3, 2020</td>
<td>“I feel like I’m bad at some important things –healthy relationship building with solid boundaries, general classroom management. Something revolutionary that I would like to start doing is being open, as a teacher, about where I am lacking and how I am struggling.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I encourage all teachers to engage in some “perfunctory journaling” because it is a way to systematically write about one’s experiences and collect valuable data on oneself in a way

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¹ “he doesn’t even greet me”
² “idiot” or “asshole.” I believe it depends on who you ask.
³ “The meaning of “puta maestra” will be addressed in depth later.
⁴ “evil”
that is, ideally, pleasurable or, at least, cathartic. The practice of journaling, however a teacher
decides to engage with it, should be fun, otherwise it is unlikely it will ever become a practice. A
journal offers a place for a teacher to watch her thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and assumptions
change, grow, develop, and evolve over time. Analyzing her own data can offer remarkable
insights and truths that will aid her growth and development as a person and teacher.

**Expanding My Understanding of Reflection**

**Theories of Reflection and Experiential Learning**

Definitions of and strategies for reflection seem to be as diverse and varied as journaling
techniques. David Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model was the first framework for
reflection I was exposed to during the first year of my teacher education program at SIT. Kolb’s
first stage of reflection requires me to describe my concrete experiences as a teacher in the
classroom (as cited in Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 24-6). To keep myself within the limits of
description, I like to think of using my five senses to notice, remember and record what
happened in the classroom. What did I see in my classroom today? What did I hear? What did I
smell, taste, and feel? Then I extract meaning from the description of my classroom
experiences. What were the motivations and intentions behind the events I observed? I then
compare the stories I created from those observations with what I know or what I believe I know
about myself, my students, about teaching, and learning. Why do I believe my interpretation of
what happened? Then I make choices based on what I think I learned. As I cycle through the
experiential learning model, I will again describe the concrete experiences that result from
acting on those choices in the classroom (as cited in Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 24-6).

Like David Kolb, John Dewey and D.A. Schon also visualized reflection as a cycle and
all three have contributed to many teachers’ current understanding of what reflection is and how
to do it. Fendler (2003) describes John Dewey as an “icon” in the literature on reflective practice
who approached reflection scientifically, while D.A. Schon’s approach to reflection was more
artistic (p. 18).
Fendler argues that the way we use both Dewey and Schon’s conflicting approaches confounds our understanding of what reflection is and how to do it. How is it possible for a reflective practice to be rooted in both “scientific expertise” and “intuitive uncertainty”? (p. 19). What is “reflection” and how do I know that I am reflecting correctly?

For Dewey (1933), reflective thinking takes time. Reflection is active and intentional. It requires the teacher to examine their prior assumptions and sit with how those assumptions influence their actions and behaviors (as cited in Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 21). For Schon (1983), reflection also occurs in stages, but the early stages are automatic, not necessarily intentional. The first stage of Schon’s idea of reflection is called reflection-in-action and this happens during the teaching experience (as cited in Bailey, 2003, p. 1).

Schon’s idea of reflection-in-action can be broken down into two further stages: rapid reflection and repair (as cited in Bailey, 2003, p. 1). Rapid reflection happens in the moments when I quickly determine that the darting eyes, blank faces, and desperate whispers between peers means that the instructions I carefully planned and delivered were not understood. Rapid reflection is the pang of regret and shame I have felt after an emotional reaction to a student’s comments or behaviors. Repair happens when I adjust my instructions to meet my students’ needs, in the moment, without my plan. Repair happens when I take a breath, acknowledge that I have responded inappropriately to a student and take actions to address the harm. Ideally, this causes me to alter my behavior in the future, so I do not cause more harm. Sometimes, we do not realize we need to repair because we do not realize we are causing harm when we reflect rapidly in the moment. In most instances, I need time and distance before my written experiences can reveal a larger pattern of harm. I believe harm might be easier to notice in Schon’s second stage of reflection.

Schon’s second stage of reflection, reflection-on-action, is broken down into three more stages: review, research and retheorize. I regularly engage with the review stage by writing about my teaching experiences, soon after they happen, in a journal. I review my teaching
experiences with my boyfriend, a teacher who works for the same district, lives with me, and teaches English literature in the basement on Zoom while I teach English as a Second Language, upstairs, on Zoom. I have also experimented and collaborated to review teaching and learning experiences in a more formal audiovisual dialogue journal with a colleague, friend, and art therapist; a process which I will discuss in-depth while exploring different ways a teacher can collect data on herself.

Dewey believed that reflection is an incomplete process if done alone. Reflection is not a journal entry. Journal entries are data, and that data must be contextualized, analyzed, checked, and made meaningful in some way (as cited in Rodgers, 2020, p. 91). I make my journaling practice meaningful by looking at what I have written in different ways, from different angles and perspectives. I am not using my journal to reflect until I start analyzing what I collected in that journal, ideally with others. To see the truths to which I am blind and to avoid the trap of my own perceptions, I need to work with people who hold a wide variety of perspectives and experiences. I need diverse perspectives and experiences to learn from, challenge, question and engage with. In exchange, I need to offer up my own experiences for others to resonate with, learn from, challenge, question and engage with. We are all the experts on our own lives and have so much to learn from each other’s expertise.

While learning more about reflective teaching practices and reviewing my own writing, I have learned to more effectively engage with Schon’s research stage. As the reader will learn, I have become more sharply focused on certain patterns in my writing. There are some successes, but the problems in my teaching practice are what regularly recur. I find myself currently reviewing my writing to find something specific in the way I engage with, connect with, interpret, and respond to my students and their families, in and out of the classroom. I am engaging with Schon’s idea of retheorizing and reformulating as I constantly reconsider the ways I interact with my students and their families. I should be doing this for the rest of my career. After I submit this paper and start a new school year, I will revisit the truths I thought I
had found and continue to question, challenge, explore and investigate them (as cited in Bailey, 2003, p. 1). I also anticipate that, later in my teaching career, my attention will (and probably should) shift as my collective teaching experiences change, develop and shape who I am, how I teach, and what I pay attention to.

Dewey’s (1933) “less artistic” and “more scientific approach” also breaks down into a total of five stages: perplexity, elaboration, developing hypotheses, comparing hypotheses, and taking appropriate action (as cited in Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 21-2). When I notice that my students do not fully understand my carefully planned and “flawlessly” delivered instructions that I designed specifically for clarity, I can acknowledge that something went wrong. How could this have happened? I am perplexed and I am uncomfortable because I thought I was doing everything right. I try to think of past personal experiences that felt like this. When I was in middle school, my primary motivation for school attendance was socializing, not classroom learning, and I got separated from my friends in class often to prevent disruptive giggling. In high school I remember teachers sneaking up behind me and snatching my prepaid Nokia phone with an element of theatrical surprise when I was caught playing Snake or sending an expensive text message. My classroom observations, filtered through my own educational experiences, can lead me to develop certain hypotheses. “The students were talking while I was giving instructions because they would rather talk to their friends” and “The students are easily distracted by their phones which makes it difficult for them to pay attention.”

According to Dewey (1933), I should then compare these hypotheses. What do the hypotheses have in common? What is the recurring pattern? The students’ lack of motivation is the problem, not me, because I assume my instructions were very clear and simple to understand. In these hypotheses, I am only paying attention to the students’ behavior and not my own actions. Since I have decided that the students’ motivation is the problem that needs to be addressed, I can assign seats that isolate students from the people they are most excited to talk to in a language class. I can forbid cellphones in class and take away phones when I see
them. Maybe this will work and create a positive, nurturing, and engaging learning environment free of distraction. Maybe these actions will disregard the truths I cannot see, like how students use their cell phones as tools for language production or whisper questions to their trusted friends when they do not understand my instructions but feel too shy to ask me directly or in front of the entire class. If seat assignment and cell phone policies do not produce the desired result, I will still feel the perplexity and discomfort of the original problem and the cycle begins again (as cited in Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 22).

I am comfortable with the idea that sometimes there is not one definitive truth. In my experience, cell phones and socializing with friends can be both irritatingly disruptive and extremely beneficial to classroom language learning. I am less comfortable, in reflective practice, with the idea that sometimes there is only one truth, and I just cannot see it. I appreciate the idea of considering the places where I may be wrong as the most fertile ground for connecting with and receiving others (brown, 2017, p. 94). In the struggle for a finite definition of reflection, I see multiple truths and multiple possibilities.

**Pool Bitch, Presence, and Emergence**

I can say that "Pool Bitch" is easily the most relatable figure I have come across in my research on reflective teaching practices. I understand Carol Rodgers’ (2020) inner "Pool Bitch" to be the part of her that makes decisions and acts on information she is receiving through a distorted mental filter. The “Pool Bitch" in Carol Rodgers sees an ordinary man’s search for a spot to exercise as a misogynist threat and she reacts accordingly, scaring an innocent man and crushing his interest and enthusiasm for communal exercise (p. 5). The filter that caused her to interpret a male swimmer as a physical threat was a hypervigilant filter built upon years of lived experience as a woman. I have a similar filter. I believe the filter was molded and shaped by experiences; designed with the best intentions of self-preservation. When left unchecked, (and I believe most of our filters are largely left unchecked) our filters can cause us to act and react in ways that make others feel as threats to be feared, instead of people. Each of us has a
part of us that interprets certain events, actions, and words through what Joseph Goldstein (2013) explains as “affective filters of the mind.” Rodger’s sees power in identifying and naming the personality that emerges through her affective filter as “Pool Bitch.” We all have our own “Pool Bitch,” a part of us that interprets our observations through the filters of aversion (anger/fear), desire (greed/pleasure), and delusion (boredom/not seeing). “Pool Bitch” was seeing her fellow swimmer, most likely, through an aversion filter. Rodgers, a teacher who writes about presence in the classroom, writes that “an awake mind is free of these filters or at least aware of these filters, but not subject to them” (as cited in Rodgers, 2020, p. 4). Currently I resonate with “Pool Bitch” much more than I have ever resonated with the experience of having an “awake mind,” and as a result, my mind is waking up to the way I filter reality and respond to my interpretation of reality.

**Figure 4**

*Hearing Myself While I Wait*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 11, 2021</td>
<td>“Online teaching is so goddamn slow that I really have no choice but to marinate with what I just said, in silence, for a while.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will say that I really resonate with any aversion to mentions of “mindfulness” and an overwhelmed confusion around terms that feel as abstract as “presence.” Rodgers (2020) describes presence as observing “life’s unfolding with curiosity…without wishing it were otherwise, an openness to the other and what they might become, and to the world and how it also might become” (p. 8). I agree with this in theory on a good day but when I read this in a crisis, this just sounds annoying. I understand I need practice being able to hear the wisdom in this on the bad days.

Recognizing that growth and development happen in moments of frustration and tension, I have been interested in what presence has to offer. Rodgers (2020) lists five attitudes
that lead the way to presence: directness, wholeheartedness, open-mindedness/nonjudgement, responsibility, curiosity, and equanimity (p. 13).

Rodgers (2020) explains that teachers move through three level of directness as they gain skills, experience, and expertise: self-absorption, forgetting oneself, and self-awareness. At the self-absorption level, the teacher is preoccupied with seeing oneself through others’ eyes (p. 13). This became very apparent when I reviewed my first-year teaching journals and heard the underlying paranoia of being watched and judged by others. I heard this in my own journal and so did my graduate school colleagues when I shared my first-year teaching journals with them. I believe I am still in this stage towards the end of my second year of teaching. I want the reader to read me as a flawed, complicated, relatable, at least mildly charming person trying her best to teach and serve her community effectively and wholeheartedly.

**Figure 5**

*First Level of Directness: Self-Absorption*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 3, 2019</td>
<td>“My classroom is the library which is nerve-wracking because I am very much so ‘on display’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 25, 2019</td>
<td>“I teach in the most public of settings with shared spaces, open designed and the library literally also being the meeting space”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 7, 2020</td>
<td>“My class is a whole mess and I’m so grateful more people don’t observe me”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second stage of directness, “forgetting oneself,” allows for play, improvisation, full responsiveness, connection, and joy (Rodgers, 2020, p. 14). I am looking forward to being here. In the third and final stage, self-awareness, teachers gain a dual perception of both their students’ experiences in the moment, and their own assumptions, prejudices, and impulses. “A teacher who teaches from a place of directness will not ask ‘How was my teaching today?’ but ‘Where was the learning today?’” (p. 14). This teacher is aware of the needs, hurts, doubts, struggles, hopes, and fears of her own students. She is also aware of the barriers that exist within her that may prevent her from knowing her students in this way.
Rodgers’ (2020) description of “wholeheartedness,” another aspect of presence, was an interesting perspective for me as a public-school teacher working with middle schoolers, as she notes that “one sign of retreat of wholeheartedness is when teachers feel they must offer bribes or punishments to keep students on task, a feeling not unlike “pulling teeth” (p. 15). My experiences with virtual teaching have included teaching for five or more hours a day to five or six groups of students who, as of April 2021, still refuse to turn their cameras on and prefer to type responses to my questions and greetings in the chat. It has felt like I am trying to pull something much more deeply rooted than a tooth.

**Figure 6**

*Pulling Virtual Teeth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 5, 2020</td>
<td>“I feel like I am losing it in [class] and that I’m allowing my frustration to act as punishment. No one responds quickly in [class]. Their cameras stay off and my wait time between question and response is usually 4-5 minutes after I ask the question in multiple languages”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With cameras off, microphones off and very few signs of life other than the occasional chat from about one third of the class (if I am lucky), it was very easy for me to assume what the students were (not) doing behind their screens. One of Adrienne Maree Brown’s (2017) principles of Emergent Strategy is “Trust the People. If you trust the people, they become trustworthy” (p. 42). There is so much overlap between the idea of emergence and mindfulness. My students’ behavior is influenced by the expectations, boundaries, beliefs, and attitudes that I bring to class. When I trust that my students are in virtual class (unresponsive, with their cameras and microphones off) to learn, they will learn.

I began to open my mind to the possibility that perhaps I am contributing to their lack of participation, their unwillingness to turn their cameras and microphones on and only willingly engage with me through the chat, if at all. Truthfully, I spent a lot of time this past school year feeling offended by their lack of participation. Small audio snippets from moments when their
microphones accidentally and momentarily unmuted, to several parents sharing with me that their middle schooler wants to drop out of school, and even stories that kids have told me about what their classmates really do in virtual class have made me assume the worst, often. This changed when I allowed them, and myself, time (three minutes, exactly) to soak in and observe the moment.

**Figure 7**

*Learning to Wait Patiently for More Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 17, 2021</td>
<td>“We teach who we are, regardless of what method and approach we use. WAIT TIME but I’m angry the entire time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 18, 2021</td>
<td>“It is frustrating that students have cameras &amp; mics off but when I trust they are there &amp; trying to learn it’s sort of a miraculously different experience. I used to look at mindfulness and be like “oh I could never do/be that but I realized there are tools to be the kind of mindful you aspire to be in the classroom – STEP 1) a YouTube TIMER”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 23, 2021</td>
<td>“The YouTube 3 minute timer is a game changer – I used to do 2 minutes on my phone but the aesthetic countdown visible to everyone is wonderful. I feel so much calmer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mach 12, 2021</td>
<td>“Even when it feels like life gives you no option to assume, still don’t”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have not really seen or heard much from most of my students all virtual school year in the traditional sense. Most of them regularly attend my synchronous class and I have been in very close communication with their families about student participation. For a lot of the year, I felt I did not have concrete observations of students to work with this year. I had their silence, occasional chats, consistent attendance, classwork (or lack thereof), and a program I use to monitor their screens. All that data, however, did not feel like “enough” because I was not getting the engagement from students that I wanted and that I was used to. Intentionally increasing my wait time has allowed me to notice my frustrated reaction to my students’ silence and lack of participation in a virtual setting. I found that when I waited, often way longer than I wanted to, and without wishing I were receiving a response (“WAIT TIME but I’m angry the entire time”), I not only got more responses to my questions, but it gave me time to imagine
other possibilities of what might be happening with my students behind the screens beyond a lack of motivation or interest. Imagining other possibilities led me to ask my students better questions about what was going on with them behind the screens. Waiting gives me time to look beyond my initial and often harsh assumptions; that my students are totally disinterested in and unmotivated to learn in the virtual setting.

Open-mindedness, another element of presence, is my favorite element of presence. The importance of open-mindedness in presence highlights the importance of collaboration and sharing one’s experiences and interpretations with others. The lack of participation made me initially question many of my students’ motivation, until I started asking questions of what I was observing. My students, with everything they have going on in their lives, came to virtual class from their home daily, on-time, and often early, yet I still spent most of the academic year assuming they did not want to learn. With open-mindedness, we learn to see the error in our most valued and trusted beliefs and make space for other possibilities (Rodgers, 2020, p.15).

The easier “being wrong” is for me and the faster I can release my beliefs, the quicker I can adapt. I can name my needs (brown, 2017, p. 94). I can take ownership of what I am able to do in the moment and act on that. I can ask for help with what comes up. This way, I can be in relationship with others in the present moment instead of wishing things were different or resenting people for what they will not do (brown, 2017, p. 94). I can consider that my actions are creating the very classroom dynamic that I am growing to resent.

**Figure 8**

*Experimenting with Stating My Needs as a Teacher in the Virtual Classroom*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 18, 2021</td>
<td>“When you do not participate, I feel bored and disappointed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 25, 2021</td>
<td>“[Classroom] expectations before were set by what students would be able to produce and less about how they would contribute and interact with a[n online] learning community”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rodgers (2020) argues that when teachers are present, they are also taking serious responsibility for their decisions, acts, and thoughts, even the unconscious ones. In taking responsibility, teachers acknowledge the power of their feelings and thoughts and how those feelings and thoughts manifest in the classroom, larger community, and world (p. 16). “What we practice at the small scale, sets patterns for the whole system” (brown, 2017, p. 53). “The large is a reflection of the small” (p. 41). A responsible, reflective teacher examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice. She is aware of, and questions, her assumptions, and the values she brings to teaching (Bailey, 2003, p. 1).

Curiosity, another element of presence, occurs in three stages: spontaneous interactions, inquiry, and the intellectual stage (Rogers, 2020, p. 18). I would say that I am currently in the inquiry phase, looking back on the spontaneous interactions recorded in my journals and asking, “What is that?” and “Why did that happen?” I am asking a lot of questions without a remote end; questions that I do not expect to be answered. As Zora Neale Hurston (1937) wrote in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, “there are years that ask questions and years that answer” (p. 21). I am only in my second year of teaching middle school ESOL in a public school and I do expect experience to eventually afford me a better understanding of how to facilitate, notice and encourage learning and connection in the classroom and larger community.

The final element of presence is equanimity that “manifests as an unshakeable balance of mind” and being able to experience “gain, loss, blame, fame, disrepute, pleasure and pain” without getting sucked in (Rodgers, 2020, p. 19). I also struggle to relate to this. What makes equanimity a little easier for me to swallow is the idea that “change is constant” (brown, 2017, p. 41). I know, from keeping a journal for so long, that the problems I write today will someday, in the future, seem silly, but always insightful.

**Figure 9**

*November 21, 2000 (age 10)*
Though I am no longer invested in getting signatures on my good credit card, I am interested in praise and being told I am doing a good job. This entry is an insightful, personalized reminder of a child’s (and adult’s) need for praise and recognition. I accept that presence also requires an open-mindedness to the idea that transformation is a very long-term process. I must be willing to wait; to “let experiences accumulate, sink in, and ripen” to let myself be changed. (Rodgers, 2020, p. 16). A journal is a good place for experiences to ripen.

**The Constant Comparison Method**

As mentioned before, I keep a journal and I also happen to write about teaching in that journal. During the 2019-20 academic year, my first year as an ESOL teacher for a public school district and my first year as a graduate student in a teacher education program, I kept up that same habit. In the Spring of 2020, my Intercultural Communication and Inquiry for Educators (ICIE) course at SIT was led by Leslie Turpin. My fellow learners and I were tasked with finding and committing to a cultural question for a semester, documenting and sharing our experiences with inquiry. In the Spring of 2020, teaching as I understood it came to a screeching halt when my state’s governor closed public schools, pausing in-person instruction and school as we knew it. Not long after, I started to notice how my role in school had started to change.

**Figure 10**

*Teaching Experiences that Felt My Past Work in Direct Social Service Work*
My work experiences in supporting survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault to navigate institutions and organizations that offer legal, counseling, housing, transportation, and food assistance services, has influenced the way I respond to the needs of my students and their families in a pandemic. For my ICIE course I interviewed several elementary school ESOL teachers at my school about their roles before and after the Coronavirus pandemic. Our conversations left me in awe of the dedication, resiliency, resourcefulness, brilliance and creativity of our community’s educators. I took notes from the interviews in my journal. It was during this experience and this course that I started to see my perfunctory journaling practice as a collection of historical documents (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004, p. 100) that are keeping record of this enormous educational shift triggered by the global Coronavirus pandemic. At the end of the course, I extracted data from my journals that I considered “relevant to teaching and learning in the classroom” from 53 journal entries written on 53 separate days between November 25, 2019 and June 11, 2020. The 53 total entries had a 13,170 word-count. I read and audio recorded all entries in a 1 hour, 19-minute podcast-style shareable file to be heard by my graduate school colleagues. For privacy reasons, I replaced every name, besides my own with, “X.” 27 of the entries were categorized as “Before Corona” because they were written on or before schools closed in mid-March. The other 26 entries were categorized as “After Corona” having been written after schools were closed.
In the Summer of 2020, as a part of SIT’s first virtual Sandanona Conference, I shared how I used the Constant Comparison Method to break down the 53 entries into “incidents” or “communication units” (Fakazli & Kuru Gonen, 2017, p. 714). In the context of my journal, a communication unit was a chunk of text that related to the same event. I cut the communication units from a print-out of the transcript of my journal. I glued 135 “Before Corona” communication units onto dark paper and 119 “After Corona” communication units onto light colored paper for a total of 254 communication units related to my teaching and learning experiences from the 2019-2020 academic year. The tangible, color-coded units were intended to help me better detect patterns between my thinking and actions “Before Corona” and “After Corona.” I compared all 254 units to each other using the constant comparison method to form eight initial categories: my role, my students, families [of my students], [community] resources, teachers, feelings, miscellaneous, affirmations, and [classroom] instruction. I did not start the process knowing how I would sort the data. I waited to see what the data would show me. I was not able to see my journey in the classroom linearly or chronologically when it was broken down into 254 communication units. The patterns, themes and categories emerged from the process of organizing, sorting and categorizing the communication units into different categories with different rules of inclusion. This was an inductive analysis. The constant comparison method is a creative process that required me to carefully reconsider my own judgements about what was truly significant and meaningful about the life experiences I had described in my journal (Dye, Rosenberg & Coleman, 2000, p. 2).

The Constant Comparison Method asks the teacher-turned-researcher to create rules for the categories; guidelines that justify why she is assigning a specific communication unit to a particular category. Two of my initial categories were titled “Students” and “Families.” Communication units could qualify for either category by pertaining to my observations of and interactions with students and families. The units also (and mostly) included my reactions to my interactions with students and their families. As I went through rounds of categorizing and
recategorizing communication units from the initial eight categories to 27 subcategories, I had to continually attempt to adjust and redefine the criteria I was using to create these categories (Dye, Rosenberg & Coleman, 2000, p. 3).

The 27 subcategories included interacting with students, stories told to me by students, pushing students academically, my role as a caseworker, chatting with families, talking with families about resources, talking with families about discipline, and doubts about whether I was genuinely being helpful to anyone. After looking at what the subcategories had in common, I created three main categories from those subcategories (Fakazli, 2017, p. 714), inspired by David Hawkin’s (2002) I-Thou-It framework. This means I recategorized the 254 communication units into three categories: I (incidents in which I spoke about myself), Thou (incidents in which I spoke about students and families) and It (incidents in which I spoke about “content”). Upon reflection the final categorization was a lazy categorization that had little to do with my understanding of Hawkin’s (2002) framework. However, the categorization process did highlight what I had been paying attention to and when my attention shifted.

Figure 11
Map of Final Category Breakdown
The final “Thou” category was made up of three subcategories: “Student Interaction,” “Classroom Management,” and “Families.” When I looked at the pile of communication units titled “classroom management” and the pile of communication units titled “student interaction,” I noticed the classroom management pile included significantly more communication units. With distance and time, I can hear the pettiness in the rules of inclusion used for the “classroom management” category.

“Classroom management” came to include mostly moments in class when I did not feel in control or, more often, moments when I viewed what was happening in my classroom through an aversion filter. This looked and sounded like negative and emotional reactions to a student’s comments or behaviors. “Classroom management” did not include many concrete descriptions of actions that I had taken to approach or address the undesirable student behavior that had caused me so much distress.

The earliest “classroom management” incident was mentioned on November 25, 2019, the first day of my new job. I saw that I did not start writing about interacting with students, which included learning about them and hearing their stories, until January 10, 2020. I had one “Before Corona” family interaction which meant that most of my interactions with families happened after the Coronavirus pandemic shut down schools for in-person instruction.

While I was making sense of the communication units, I had to ask myself why I am categorizing this incident with a student as a “classroom management” event and this other incident with a student as an “interaction.” Incidents I had categorized as “student interaction” described the stories students had told me and the conversations we had had about their lives. Why did I use the term “classroom management” to describe feeling powerless, overwhelmed, hurt and frustrated in the classroom? I was beginning to see the incidents categorized as “classroom management” as my reactions to having my feelings hurt by my students.

I also started to wonder why my journal held more documentation of my negative reactions to student behavior than documentation of the meaningful ways students had shared
themselves with me in class. If what we pay attention to grows, I felt it was possible I had been “growing the crisis [and] the critique” (Brown, 2017, p. 46) by focusing more on my hurt and frustration and less on the inner lives, thoughts, emotions and experiences of my students.

The constant comparison method is extremely time-consuming and involved. I struggled to keep track of all 254 communication units that traveled with me in a plastic bag that had come with a recent purchase. I completed this during the summer months of vacation when I was not teaching. I wanted to share my experience with this method because it was impactful and required me to find entirely new meanings in what I had previously found meaningful for different reasons. I originally wrote many of the classroom management incidents because I felt frustrated. My frustration was meaningful to me when I wrote about it. Questioning how I responded to what had happened was not. Now that I have waited for my experiences to ripen, my vented frustration is meaningful to me because rereading it allows me to learn about myself from myself, in my own voice. I can hear, very clearly, what I am noticing and not noticing.

Noticing my own patterns of engaging with and “managing” my classroom in my first year of teaching had primed my attention to the ways I engage my students as I started my second year of teaching. My attention continues to be focused here because I believe that a supportive, connected classroom environment is conducive to language learning. The constant comparison method provided me with an outline for transforming passing moments recorded in a journal into tactile data that I can interact with, analyze, interpret and reinterpret when I need to. Playing and experimenting with my own data allowed for larger, previously unseen, themes and patterns to emerge from seemingly small, unimportant, even petty, events.

**Guiding My Reflection with Frameworks**

Using frameworks to guide my reflection gives me an opportunity to recategorize my experiences and review what I have written from a new perspective. If I were to use the Constant Comparison Method again, I could use frameworks to establish categories and rules of inclusion much more thoughtfully than I did with David Hawkin’s (2002) I-Thou-It Framework.
In September, at the start of the 2020-21 academic school year, before we had students in our virtual classrooms, all teachers in my school district attended a virtual Restorative Practices training facilitated by Dr. Abdul-Malik Muhammad. I took notes from the 2020 training in my journal. Later in the academic year, I read Dr. Muhammad’s (2019) first book, *The Restorative Journey*. Restorative Practices are “a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision making.” My interest in Restorative Practices comes from a desire to effectively lead, strengthen my community, restore relationships and repair harm (Wachtel, 2013, pg 1).

**Figure 12**

*The Social Discipline Window*

(Wachtel, 2013, p. 3)

Dr. Abdul-Malik Muhammad introduced me to the Social Discipline Window at his 2020 virtual training. The Social Discipline Window is a "leadership model" that identifies “four basic approaches to maintaining social norms and behavioral boundaries” in a classroom (Wachtel, 2013, p. 3): “not” (low challenge and low connection), “for” (low challenge and high connection), “to” (high challenge and low connection), and “with” (high challenge and high connection) (Muhammad, 2019, p. 58).

Challenge refers to “setting limits, establishing expectations, providing structure, holding folks accountable, and providing norms and standards” while connection refers to “being
nurturing…[and] compassionate [while] wielding empathy, connection, and love” (Muhammad, 2019, p. 57). As a teacher, I want to create learning environments where students feel connected to the material, their classmates, their teachers and the wider school community. I also want them to feel challenged by and responsible for their own language learning. The fundamental unifying hypothesis of the basic approaches is that “human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them” (Wachtel, 2013, p. 3).

I appreciate Muhammad’s (2019) understanding and explanation of the Social Discipline Window because it echoes the idea that “what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system.” As a teacher, a person in power, I can see my own life, my work, and relationships as the “first place…[to] practice justice, liberation, and alignment” (brown, 2017, p. 53).

Muhammad (2019) explains that teachers doing things to students might justify their low connection and high challenge by saying things like “I’m just preparing my students for a challenging, harsh, cruel, and unforgiving world (p. 59). I think many teachers, myself included, unknowingly do things to students with an underlying motivation of love and concern for the student, their well-being and their success in the community. Teachers operating in the “not” box of the Social Discipline Window are “not engaged, not effective, and not really present” (p. 59). A teacher doing things for students, with the best intentions of providing support, does not hold students accountable for their actions in the classroom (p. 61).

Small actions of varying levels of connection and challenge, happening in classrooms every day, echo larger systemic patterns. A “to” approach assures that “I (the teacher) win [and] you (the student) lose.” It looks like effective teaching in many instances, and it also looks like punishment, fear, exclusion, isolation, dominance, zero tolerance in others. It can make people feel like objects to be controlled. Muhammad (2020) claims this approach echoes the “law of the
plantation” and inevitably leads to the discipline disproportionality that can be seen in mass incarceration, abuse, and community violence. A “for” approach is an “I lose, you win” approach. People are objects to be saved, specifically by a teacher who “knows best.” Teachers using a “for” approach might be experienced by others as a “pushover, soft, or permissive.” When operating with a “for” approach, acts of “service” are informed by a deficiency mindset. I decide that I need to do something for a student because I have also decided that this student is incapable of doing it for themselves. These small acts can create larger patterns of learned helplessness, dependency, victim mentalities, manipulation and coercion. With a “not” approach, teachers and students both lose. A teacher sees people as objects to be ignored. This shows up in larger systemic patterns such as neglect, mistreatment and abandonment. When I can connect to and challenge my students, doing things with them rather than to or for them, I am treating them as humans to be valued (Muhammad, 2020).

When I first learned about the Social Discipline Window, I was relatively quick to identify the ways I work for and with students. Muhammad (2019) notes that most teachers fluctuate between using their authority with and for students (p. 19). It was not until I heard Dr. Muhammad (2020) vulnerably explain the way he operated in the “to” box that I started to clearly see myself there as well. He said, “If I’m being real, [certain classroom] consequence[s] are designed to satiate my desire for revenge,” not to address or repair harm. This struck me because it resonated with me in such an uncomfortable way. Am I designing consequences in my class to make things better or to “extract my particular brand of flesh?” (Muhammad, 2020). I started thinking about the small ways I seek revenge upon children when I feel hurt or frustrated by their words or actions. By engaging with D.A. Schon’s Research stage of reflection-on-action and reviewing my own writing over a longer period and from a distance, I start to see patterns in my writing; the harm that recurs but also the occasional successes (Bailey, 2003, p. 1).

**Figure 13**

“Success” that Certainly Did Not Feel Like Success When It Happened
February 25, 2020  “[Female 7th grader] cussed me out because I asked her to move so that the cards [for the activity] do not get disorganized. She had already refused to move when talking with friends. She yelled ‘No aguanto estas putas maestras’\(^5\) I pulled her aside and expressed my feelings. She swore she wasn’t talking about me, that she was talking about [male teacher], a man who has not been to work in 5 days. She was panicked…I am a little astonished and impressed by my ability to handle getting cussed out by children. I approach them calmly, pull them to the side and tell them that I feel disrespected by their comment, particularly because I never and would never speak to them that way. I do not yell. I do not get upset. I don’t even reprimand. I smile and express my feelings. I think it might be working long-term. I do not want to yell. I don’t even raise my voice. I feel a little crazy and I imagine I look a lot crazy.”

I am drawn to the February 25, 2020 passage for several reasons. I observe my dangerous tendency to make a single observation and assume it is part of a larger pattern. I recorded this interaction with one student, yet I start talking about how I do this with plural “students” and “them,” as if this an approach I use consistently and intentionally with all my students. I may have been trying this approach with other students, but I did not document those instances in my journal, and I do not remember those instances, so I have no evidence. I do, however, see my attention growing my emotional reaction to the perceived “disrespect,” which takes energy and attention away from examining and questioning the motivation behind the unusual outburst I observed. I decided that this moment would be a lesson in empathy for her but not for me. I missed the opportunity to learn more about my student’s experiences as I was not able to find the opportunity in this crisis (brown, 2017, p. 44) because she had hurt my feelings. With distance I see that she did not really “cuss me out” or even cuss at me; she cussed about a group I happen to belong to, while I just happened to be in the room. In this moment, I did not consider the emotional landscape of a 7th-grade girl, who recently immigrated from Central America to a new city in the United States, leaving behind the only family she #

\(^5\) In my head, “No aguanto estas putas maestras” loosely translated to “I can’t stand these bitch-ass teachers.”
knew, and adjusting to new family in a new country all while being tasked with learning an entirely new culture, language, and educational system. She was probably having some legitimately frustrating interactions with me and her other teachers. There were likely some valid reasons as to why she could not stand her * putas maestras* but she moved to another state and I never asked her. I did not see the lessons and insights she could have offered in that moment.

I also really love this journal entry because I can see the wisdom in the problematic logic and self-absorbed emotional reactions. I see myself making small steps towards an “Affective Statement,” an informal restorative practice, before I had learned what “Affective Statements” were or how to make them correctly. “Affective statements are often simple, yet profoundly powerful statements we make to let the recipient know how their behavior impacted us. They are ‘I’ statements and are connected to behavior” (Muhammad, 2019, p. 91). Affective statements also require a teacher to be vulnerable with others, with a student, and

“as it turns out, many of us are not okay with directly telling someone who frustrated/upset/disappointed/annoyed/angered us that they did so and how they did it. Some of us are very comfortable with yelling at or negatively shaming them. Others are talented at being sarcastic or passive aggressive with the person. Most of us are gifted at talking about them to others” (Muhammad, 2019, p. 99).

I believe I wrote about “feel[ing] crazy” and I had an awareness of “look[ing] and sound[ing] crazy” because I was (and still am) unaccustomed, especially in a classroom setting, to communicating with others about how their behavior really upsets me. I am much more familiar with my own style of sarcastic, passive aggressive shaming. This is apparent in the January 6, 2021 entry.

In my last virtual class of the day, we were discussing and negotiating classroom norms for using Spanish and English in class. A 7th grade male student, who I have only met through virtual classes, responded that he only wants to use Spanish in English class. I asked him
“why?” and he responded, “Para que usted aprende.” I wrote down the rest of our conversation in my journal. I did not necessarily think I was wrong for this at the time, but it impacted me enough to write it down.

**Figure 14**

*Seeking Revenge in the Classroom*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 6, 2021</td>
<td>[Me]: ¿Crees que necesito aprender español?[^6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[7th grade student]: No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Me]: ¿Por qué dijiste eso?[^8]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[7th grade student] No sé.[^9]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Me]: Claro que siempre puedo mejorar, pero ¿alguien te está pagando para enseñarme español?[^10]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[7th grade student]: No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Me]: Ah, ok. Bueno, alguien me está pagando para enseñarles el inglés[^11]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If I honestly reflect on this conversation, I was trying to embarrass this child because he had embarrassed me. I remember the way the tone of my voice rose in my throat to be intentionally condescending. How had this child embarrassed me? Why was this mild-mannered virtual comment more embarrassing to me than being referred to as one of many * putas maestras* in a public, in-person setting? I wrote the March 17, 2004 entry when I was 13 years old for my 8th grade English Language Arts class about my favorite movie, *Selena*, based on the life of Tejano legend, Selena Quintanilla Perez.

**Figure 15**

*Wounds that Bleed in the Classroom*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 17, 2004</td>
<td>“The best movie I’ve ever seen is Selena. I’ve seen it about ten times and I could still see it another ten times. From the title you could guess it’s about Selena, the singer and her life story. First of all, I love Selena so I would</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^6]: “So that you learn.”
[^7]: “Do you think I need to learn Spanish?”
[^8]: “Why did you say that?”
[^9]: “I don’t know”
[^10]: “Of course, I can always improve, but, is someone paying you to teach me Spanish?”
[^11]: “Ah, ok. Well, someone is paying me to teach you English.”
like the movie but also the movie is good anyways. They have all her problems she faces in her career, like once she was supposed to talk to these reporters from Spanish talk shows. Her father told her she shouldn’t because her Spanish sounds weird (which is what my parents always tell me) but she talks to the reporters anyway and greets them all with the traditional hug and kiss on the cheek.”

This 7th grade male student who I intentionally humiliated does not have access to my childhood memories and I never shared them with him. He does not know how family and friends at the Peruvian functions asked my parents questions, in my presence, about why I was not more able and willing to speak Spanish. This student does not know that I remember my parents expressing, to me and others, confusion and disappointment around my inability and resistance to speaking Spanish. He was not there when I felt stupid, embarrassed and a little like I was being thrown under the bus for my inability to communicate. He was not with me when I finally did feel brave enough to try and my Spanish pronunciation became a casual spectacle for everyone to hear at the family gathering. He does not know about the cousin who has referred to me as la muda.12 This student does not know that speaking Spanish to me, still, at 30-years-old, feels vulnerable. I still carry a small fear or even a type of “performance anxiety” around speaking Spanish with others in a way that “accurately” represents my cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identity. I suspect that my public use of Spanish is a way to prove to others, but mostly myself, that I am not only “Latina enough” but smart enough. I can see, now, that the comment “Para que usted aprende” could have made him feel powerful in a frustrating and isolating situation where he likely feels powerless, but my wound did not allow me to recognize an opportunity. A commitment to learning more about how my wounds show up in the classroom, to me, feels like a moral requirement for teaching. A child unknowingly stepped right into a wound that I was not fully aware of and it impacted his learning and relationship with his teacher.

12 “the mute”
Twenty years of journals provide tremendous insight into the way my personal needs, hurts, hopes, potencies, and fears are addressed and expressed in the classroom (Mayes, 2001, p. 252). Other examples of very common wounds and filters that often alter our perception of classroom realities are racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ageism, ableism, xenophobia and any other belief we have consciously or unconsciously internalized that has allowed us think that others are meant to be feared, inferior, excluded or hated. As a heterosexual, cisgender, white/white-passing person born, raised, and socialized in the United States, these wounds and filters have absolutely shown up (and still do show up) in my own perception of events and experiences.

The Social Discipline Window feels like a moral guide to aligning my day-to-day teaching decisions with my values. I can measure my actions and decisions against clear definitions of connection and challenge to learn more about how I am showing up in my classroom. Viewing my actions through this window encourages me to pay attention to the ways that I, as a teacher, hold an incredible amount of power. I have a responsibility to use that power to value and uplift the students who are in my classroom. Muhammad (2019) encourages teachers to be radically honest and vulnerable about how we interact with students. Often, the way we choose to be with students has little to do with the students’ actual needs and much more to do with what is going on with us personally (p. 62). As an authority figure who works with children, this is difficult and vulnerable to admit. It is also my responsibility to acknowledge and confront this truth to be more aware of how my emotions, my experiences, and my interpretations of reality influence my interactions with students. The decisions teachers make while connecting with and challenging the people in our classrooms have an effect, not only on our students, but on their families and their communities (Muhammad, 2019, p. 62).

Viewing my actions and the assumptions that fueled those actions through this window encourages me to constantly question my own interpretation of reality and look for the truths I cannot see. The Social Discipline Window makes me think of how I cannot always lean on my
Waiting to learn and learning to wait

own understanding of my experiences. I can, however, trust and acknowledge the Divine in myself and others with all my heart so that my path and next steps of action will be directed (King James Version, 2017, Proverbs 3:5-6).

Spirituality and Divinity

Brown (2017) argues that we “must walk the spiritual path that is available to us only in this time, with its own unique combination of wisdom and creation” (p. 12). As a second-year middle school ESOL teacher working in an urban Title 1 public school, navigating virtual language teaching (and learning) in a global pandemic, this really resonates with me.

Figure 16

Virtual Learning: A Moral and Spiritual Journey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 30, 2020</td>
<td>“Am I supposed to differentiate according to tech access? I’m trying to create activities that one can easily do from their phone but is that “unfair” to the one who can access and do more from their computers?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 11, 2020</td>
<td>Online learning is amazing and works well – or it can. Several students are reading/willing to read with the camera off. Participation is up. I don’t break up fights or worry about whose on whose lap –I’m at home, eating well, taking breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2, 2020</td>
<td>“It has been difficult convincing myself that online learning is worthwhile—it is more exhausting to convince others/my students that it is worthwhile”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 25, 2020</td>
<td>“I’m seeing how I have nagging underlying beliefs about what my students can and can’t do online. I harm my own well-being and my students when I set my expectations so low for them that I create a place for myself where I have to “do the rest”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| December 1, 2020      | [Me]: “You all are boring”  
[Me]: “This is boring to me”  
[Me]: “No me gusta hablar a mi misma, eso me aburra, no me gusta hablar a cuadritos negros que no me contestan.”  
[Student in the chat]: “hahahahahaahahahahahahaha” |
| February 26, 2021     | “Teaching is a prayer in the sense that I have to also make my wishes, intentions, expectations and desires EXPLICIT like with EXACTLY what I want, how and when. I don’t think I feel comfortable demanding that from others. I don’t even feel comfortable being that explicit with God” |

13 “I don’t like to talk to myself, this is boring. I don’t like to talk to little black squares who do not answer me.”
According to Mayes (2002), spirituality is “the realm of understanding oneself as a mortal being in an eternal context who must confront ultimate questions that are quite difficult to answer.” (Mayes, 2001, p. 252) What happens when we die? or Where are the opportunities for growth, development, and transformation in this current crisis?

I want to note that modern spirituality leans towards “individual interpretation and experience” and much less towards “institutional loyalty and doctrinal ‘correctness’” (Mayes, 2001, p. 255). I have not always been open to inviting religion, God, or the Divine into my classroom. Mayes (2001) argues that religion and spirituality hold tremendous influence in the shaping of culture and “if it is a mistake to exclude considering spiritual commitments in the analysis of society, it is also unwise to ignore it in the education of teachers.” Teachers, especially language teachers, are “cultural agents” so it is important that we understand how culture, religion and spirituality interact (p. 258) in our own lives and in the lives of our students.

We base many of our day-to-day decisions on the assumptions we hold about “the possibility of other realities that transcend this one” (Mayes, 2001, p. 252) and perhaps the requirements we believe it takes to be allowed access into one of the other possible realities. How do my underlying assumptions about these possible realities influence my day-to-day decisions, including the ones I make in the classroom? How did my spiritual beliefs influence my decision to teach in the first place?

Religion and any corresponding institution were not directly involved in my upbringing as my parents did not practice a specific religion or take me to religious services. Church existed in the peripherals of my life through invitation-only by friends and extended family, but the invitations were frequent. I do not attend church now, but I panic-pray to whoever might be listening when I am scared and unsure but, respectfully, because I assume God must be busy. Through my early exposure to interpretations of Catholicism and Christianity, I ended up internalizing a general feeling (because I did not speak it) that a vengeful father-figure who lived
in the sky was watching, judging and waiting to dole out the punishment I deserved. I have a 
memory of my parents explaining to my aunt, a nun in Apurimac, Peru, that I had not yet been 
baptized and she looked at them disapprovingly and, at me, with a sympathetic smile. “Dios 
perdona a los niños,” she said. What I heard is that I had until age 18 to do whatever I needed 
to do in order to have access to the best possible reality that transcends this one. I wanted to 
avoid punishment and counterbalance the possible mistakes I would inevitably make. Doing 
good things was motivated partly by fear, guilt and shame and not entirely by my own joy, 
pleasure or curiosity. I am seeing now how it is important for me to acknowledge how religion, 
spirituality and culture interact to influence my choices. I suspect that my understanding and 
interpretation of God also influences my understanding of authority. For a long time, it did not 
occur to me that God could be rooting for me to do well (Vanzant, 1998, p. 20).

I want to move away from the idea that the Divine is a disapproving third-party who is 
keeping close record of my mistakes. I like the idea that “every living thing is a unique 
are manifestations of the Divine. My students, ages 12-15, are manifestations of the Divine and 
I have the divine opportunity to be a part of their development. We do not “always act like [we] 
are representatives of God” (p. 27) but I want to see the Divine in myself and others even when 
my interpretation of events scream that the Divine is not there. I want to see the Divine in 
myself, to forgive myself, even when my experiences, interpretations and behavior tell me 
otherwise. When my experience and interpretations do tell me otherwise, I want to assume 
there is a truth I am blind to.

A day of virtual teaching with students who are reluctant to turn on their cameras or 
microphones and may or may not respond to me in the chat includes an endless stream of

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14 “God forgives children.”
questions that are quite difficult to answer. My most persistent and frustrating, difficult-to-answer question this school year has been, “What is happening right now?”

There have been countless times this 2020-2021 academic school year when I have asked a question into a void of black Zoom tiles, unseen entities who watch, listen, and respond in infrequent and, often inconvenient ways. In this way, teaching has felt like meditation and I am learning that “when we take goals into meditation, we run the risk of being disappointed or discouraged” (Vanzant, 1998, p. 47). I have experienced the most tension and frustration in virtual class when I expect a specific response with any sort of urgency. Iyanla Vanzant (1998) believes that “prayer is when we talk to the Divine and meditation is when we listen” (p. 47). Virtual teaching is teaching me to ask a question, be still and wait; to send out a prayer and then meditate on it. Virtual teaching is teaching me that when I am confused, frustrated, overwhelmed, and burnt-out, I must see the “opportunity in the crisis” (Brown, 2017, p. 44) by asking questions of what I believe I am experiencing.

Incorporating spirituality into my reflective practice looks like a deep trust that the information I need to transform myself arrives in small, quick, fleeting moments every day. When I document those moments in a journal, I am seeing the Divine in my most mundane experiences and acknowledging the incredible, Divine insight those experiences will eventually provide with time. My own spiritual commitment to reflective teaching includes always looking for the endless stream of difficult questions without getting swept up in its currents. I see the endless questions as a way to take a “moral stance of inquiry” (Rodgers, 2020, p. 102). Discussions about morality, spirituality, divinity, our beliefs about our roles and responsibilities as authority figures in the classroom, and people in the universe, deserve a place in our collective struggle to define “reflection.”

Collecting Data on Myself and My Experiences

What is Data Collection? Am I Doing it Right?

Figure 17
The most important takeaway from this exploration on collecting and analyzing data in a teaching journal should be that there is no “correct” way to collect data on oneself or one’s experiences. As I have said before, I am a strong advocate of “perfunctory journaling,” meaning I encourage the type of data collection that takes little effort, thought, or intention. I suspect my own data analysis has revealed a lot about the way I show up in the world; I was not intentional or mindful of the data I was collecting or how I was collecting it. In my first year of teaching, the data I collected was honest and raw because I did not record the data with the intention of ever showing anyone. When I started my second year of teaching, I had recently shared my first-year teaching journal with colleagues, ran my first-year teaching journal through the constant comparison method, and shared additional findings from the data analysis with colleagues. I am much more intentional about what and how I write in my journal now than I was before I started sharing what I wrote in my journal. With an awareness that my journal freewriting often resembled “rambling” that tended to focus on the negative, I started to use prompts or focused freewriting to encourage myself to record my observations and interpretations differently, perhaps “more accurately.” I see the value in prompts, and I still hold a lot of curiosity about them. However, I also see how prompts (in my experience) can feel limiting. Ultimately, journaling should be something the teacher enjoys, and they should feel free to find a way to make journaling uniquely pleasurable and accessible to them. If data collection is not, in some form, enjoyable, it is much more difficult to make it a practice. I intend to explore the methods and practices I have experimented with in my journals to collect data on myself and my experiences.
Freewriting

I currently journal in books designed for artist’s sketching with felt-tipped markers; all supplies I buy with a teacher discount at my local art supply store. Though I sometimes draw or doodle, I am drawn to freewriting and handwriting. I use different colors to separate my ideas. Freewriting is the foundation of a professional’s journal and it has incredible benefits like building “writing fluency, playfulness, confidence and creativity” (Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 137-8). My journal is filled almost entirely with freewriting. I write what I am thinking about and feeling in that moment; it is a “check-in” and a “flowing of unconscious ideas and unanticipated observations” (p. 138). As I said before, I am a crisis-writer, meaning I have historically used my journal to “vent emotions and distractions” (p. 138) and, potentially, build and nurture certain crises with my focused attention. My own tendency to filter experiences through an aversion filter and be hypercritical towards myself has made me curious about prompts and their ability to direct my attention somewhere new and, perhaps, necessary.

Focused Freewriting

Stephens and Cooper (2009) explain that focused freewriting is commonly used by teachers and students to “generate ideas, raise questions or concerns, explore interests or to summarize ideas” around one central theme, topic, or question (p. 139). My understanding of focused freewriting includes prompts. Prompts can be direct questions or phrases that the writer must finish.

I have not tried this, but I like the idea of asking myself restorative questions in a journal when I believe I have caused harm, or I am struggling with something I have done or said in the classroom that I now regret. What happened? What was I thinking about when this happened? What have I been thinking about since the incident? Who do I think has been affected by my actions? How have they been affected? (Wachtel, 2013, p. 7).

Between September 8, 2020 and November 2, 2020, I did try to use the DIE (describe, interpret, evaluate) exercise as a prompt on an almost daily basis to record the daily events of
my virtual classroom. I was hoping that using the DIE model as a daily prompt in my private journal would somehow help me gain a deeper awareness of my “subjective evaluations” and the way I project my judgments onto what I “think [I] see (or hear or feel or otherwise perceive)” (Nam, & Condon, 2009, p. 82). I wrote these entries at night and I started by describing my memory of the school day. I tried to write about what I saw, felt, heard, smelled, and tasted in my virtual classroom without “guesses or value judgement” (p. 82) (“D” for describe). Then I interpreted and made meaning of the observations I had recorded, imagining the possible “why’s” behind what I experienced in class (“I” for interpret). Immediately after describing and interpreting, on the same night and in the same sitting, I would try to evaluate my own recently recorded interpretation of what I had experienced (“E” for evaluate). The description, interpretation and evaluation were each written in a different color; I used the letters as prompts. In evaluating, I had to ask myself, “What is my interpretation missing? What am I blind to?”

I rarely had a good answer to these questions because immediately after writing my interpretations, they looked accurate and pretty good to me. I really did not have much to say about my interpretations at all because I was not able to challenge my own opinion right after articulating it. Trying to evaluate my own interpretation immediately after writing it down became frustrating and boring. My descriptions are multiple paragraphs, while the evaluations are usually two or three sentences. When I tried to evaluate how I made meaning of my day on the same night that I described and interpreted my day, I could not offer myself much because I did not have nearly enough distance to reevaluate my current perspective. Further, I did not invite an outside party to challenge the interpretations I was making in my journal. Dewey believed that reflection is an incomplete process if done alone and I understand why (as cited in Rodgers, 2020, p. 91). I also suspect that writing my observations in a journal is not as interesting to me as telling a story.

Figure 18

Prompt Impatience
Interpretation is clearly the most fun part of the DIE model for me. My responses to the DIE prompt have highlighted my need to wait, sit still, focus my attention on what I am experiencing in the moment, and allow time for interpretations to build from extensive and thorough observations. It also showed me that meaningful reflection takes time and distance; significant learning from an event does not seem to happen the same day that I record the event.

If I were to follow the DIE prompt again, I would not try to tackle the entire prompt all at once. I would spend many months describing each day. Then, many weeks or months later, revisit those prompts with an interpretation. Many months or weeks after that, I would circle back to each entry with an evaluation. Description, without interpretation, is a powerful skill that must be practiced. I see value in spending time (months) recording only what I see, hear, feel, taste, and smell in my classroom, daily. In time, I can revisit the descriptions to interpret them and invite others to interpret those with me. In more time, I can revisit the interpretations to evaluate them and send the same invitation to others for feedback.

**Lists**

*Figure 19*

*A List of Responses to the Sentence Frame “I feel ____ because ______.”*
In my journal I keep to-do lists, lists of vocabulary I would like to review with students, lists of who was present in class on any given day, lists of student phone numbers and addresses, lists of things I need to buy, and lists of answers that students have provided to a spoken question. Lists can be used to “prioritize responsibilities, generate ideas for research projects or new programs, plot steps needed to complete a manuscript or a project, or summarize major stepping-stones or significant events in one’s career” (Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 140). I saw a pattern in this list I made of student replies to the question “How are you feeling today?” The pattern led me to decide that my next prioritized step for instruction would be to explore different ways to express happiness in English.

**Metaphor**

**Figure 20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 3, 2020</td>
<td>“All of this is starting to feel like it’s for nothing. Like I’m putting on a circus with personalized selections for each kid and they’d rather watch TV”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using metaphor to approach a problem that the writer is struggling with is a “powerful vehicle for understanding ourselves.” Metaphors allow us to approach the problem indirectly and “perhaps comes closer to truths that may be painful to see.” Uncovering the truths through metaphor in a journal can help a writer uncover the beliefs and assumptions that guide their behavior and “color [their] interactions with others (Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 146). The metaphors I wrote in my journal, often unintentionally, provided a lot of insight into how I was approaching distance learning.

When I think of the audience during a performance, they are quiet, and do not speak, out of respect. The audience is not typically acknowledged by the actors during the performance.
and the audience is not usually responsible for any part of the performance. When I think about my ideal middle school English language classroom, I see a safe, shared learning environment where connection thrives, and students feel motivated to explore and take ownership of their learning. In the metaphor that I wrote on October 3, 2020, I can see that I was discouraged. I was struggling to connect with students in a way that felt authentic, and, as my “audience,” I am sure my students struggled to feel connected to me in a genuine way while I was busy putting on a virtual production. I made assumptions about what students were doing during synchronous virtual class time and I assumed their actions were hindering the connection that I wanted. I blamed the students for not being interested in this amazing production I was putting on for them; but was I including them in the production? Did I provide opportunities for students to direct, produce, act, stage manage, or sound engineer the production? I was resentful for feeling like I had to put on a “show” instead of facilitating a lesson (even though no one asked me to put on a show), without thinking about what I was doing to make it feel like a “show.”

**Dialogue**

**Figure 21**

*An A Dialogue Between Myself and Online Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| November 22, 2020     | **Online Learning:** your students do greet you/turn on cameras when they come to class. Sometimes you have to remind but you set the routine. Even if it takes the whole year to set the routine, they will understand the importance of greeting people in any space...routines do not just communicate order or discipline or structure or limits—a routine means that what we do every day is important.  
**Me:** I say I want to teach students to take control of their learning but I organize class in a way that is built on a belief that students “can’t work independently.” What else do I believe students can’t do?  
**Online Learning:** What do you believe you can’t do?  
**Me:** How are these beliefs constructing my reality?*                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

Writing a dialogue in a journal requires the writer to have a conversation with herself or herself pretending to be something or someone else. In this conversation, I am imagining and writing a conversation between myself and online learning. I write from the perspective of both
myself and the “person, event, or subject [I] wish to understand better.” In a dialogue, I speak directly to the “person, event, or subject” and I simply allow the “person, event, or subject” to respond (Stephens & Cooper, 2009, p. 142). In this dialogue from November 22, 2020, I wanted to talk to “online learning” so I could air my grievances and let it know how it frustrated me. To my surprise, online learning ended up offering me a lot of empathy and shifted my attention towards what was going well with virtual instruction and further, what was possible if I was willing to reconsider my interpretation of what I was observing in the virtual classroom.

Collaborative Audiovisual Journaling

Figure 22

Written Reflection on Audiovisual Versus Written Journal Entries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 16, 2020</td>
<td>“Keeping a written journal and an audiovisual journal are distinctly different experiences. “Free thought”—candid free thought of an audiovisual diary—I feel a little more exposed—the honesty slips out before I have time to catch it or filter it. In written journal entries it is easier for me to be descriptive. I am a storyteller by nature so it is harder for me not to interpret in an audiovisual diary.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From December 2020 to March 2021, I collaboratively collected data on my teaching and learning experiences with a colleague and friend, Claire Kalala. Her identities include, but are not limited to: “Black, Congolese, biracial, cisgender, straight, fat, woman, healer, artist and art therapist” (C. Kalala, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Together, we developed prompts that we agreed to follow for a total of five entries. Each audiovisual entry was recorded on the website, Flipgrid, a platform I also use to practice speaking skills with my students. Flipgrid allows users to create videos that can be up to ten minutes.

Claire offered art prompts. I made art about what I thought, felt, hoped, and needed. I drew a metaphorical bridge from a metaphorical somewhere to a metaphorical someplace else. I created a magical teacher suitcase with compartments that represented the thoughts, experiences, ideas, and beliefs that I always carry with me into the classroom as a teacher. I
WAITING TO LEARN AND LEARNING TO WAIT

drew another compartment in my suitcase for things I have lost during virtual instruction and others I have gained. I drew an iceberg with an angry and frustrated protruding icy point and, immediately below the surface, a sad and lonely icy base. I drew a golden Palomino horse who felt safe in her home in a mountain valley with a fish-filled river running through it, a strawberry patch, forests, and mountain goat friends who can make feta cheese.

Figure 23

Responses to Art Therapy Prompts

In our audiovisual journal entries, we described what had recently been working for us in our teaching and learning contexts and what we had been finding challenging. Jeffrey (2007), an English language teacher who has conducted multiple diary studies throughout his teaching career, explained that his first diary study resulted in him realizing that his negative perceptions of himself as a teacher and his teaching were more in his mind. He goes on to explain that there is a common human tendency to focus on the negative things that happen in the classroom while ignoring the positive. We committed to describing both the negative and positive events in our teaching and learning contexts to work around this common human tendency that Jeffrey describes (p. 3).
We also experimented with the question “What are you working on and what is working on you?” This reflection question was shared with me by one of my professors at SIT, Leslie Turpin (L. Turpin, personal communication, October 4, 2020). This was an interesting way to frame the “positive” and “negative” aspects of teaching as we found that our answers to “What am I working on and what is working on me?” often intertwined and rarely included descriptions of two separate events.

As we negotiated the prompts and kept each other accountable to recording and responding to entries while both working full-time and finishing our respective final semesters of graduate school, we discussed how this collaborative data collection project was a heuristic inquiry process; a very intentional process that required us to develop systematic approaches to collecting observations and sharing that data with each other in a meaningful way. While both challenging and resonating with each other’s experiences, we were able to identify previously unnoticed truths in each other’s subjective experiences (Kapita, 2019, p. 193).

We recorded audiovisual responses to each other’s entries for a maximum of ten minutes. Our responses also followed prompts. After listening to each other’s entries, we described our reactions to each other’s experiences using starter prompts that we then finished with our own thoughts and reactions: “I resonated with,” “I was impacted by,” “I am curious about,” and “I can offer you...” The following statements and questions from Claire during our collaborative audiovisual journaling project inspired deeper reflection and highlighted why Dewey believes true reflection needs to be done collaboratively (as cited in Rodgers, 2020, p. 91).

**Figure 24**

*Questions that Emerged from Reflecting Together*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Claire’s Audiovisual Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 18, 2020</td>
<td>“I was curious about your ‘I want’ image because I noticed you had beautiful, swirling arrows around a face that looked playful, silly but also is, like, chomping?...I’m curious what your feelings are about expressing your wants and desires. What’s that like for you personally”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and professionally?” (C. Kalala, personal communication, December 18, 2020).

February 2, 2020  “I noticed a theme around expectations…I’m wondering, how do you feel when students don’t meet your expectations?” (C. Kalala, personal communication, February 2, 2020).

February 10, 2020  “I’m curious about…as you continue to develop and think about your own racial and cultural identity and your proximity to whiteness…how [do] you think that’s impacting how you’re viewing this?...How does using the [restorative justice framework] and your relationship to your proximity to whiteness…challenge or reinforce how you see yourself?” (C. Kalala, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

I learned about myself from the way that Claire heard my experiences and I learned about myself from the way that Claire shared her experiences. We intentionally used words and phrases to describe how we were feeling in the moment of recording each entry. I remember being very impacted by watching Claire’s audiovisual journal that included herself taking a moment and a deep breath before describing how she felt in the moment (C. Kalala, personal communication, December 7, 2020). In my own entry, I had not been taking the time, not even a moment, to observe my feelings before deciding to share them. I had to ask myself “Am I present in the recording and documenting of my experiences or am I rushing to complete a task with a finite end goal?” I am learning that “there is always enough time for the right work” (brown, 2017, p. 41). I can wait and I need to wait because understanding the way I am perceiving reality is not an action to check off a to-do list. It takes intention and time.

Data Analysis and Determining Next Steps

Teaching Teachers to Study Themselves

In their book Advising and Supporting Teachers (2001), Mick Randall and Barbara Thornton argue that “learning about teaching needs to be an ongoing process” and advisors working with students in teacher education programs “need to develop in the teacher the ability to continue to develop their teaching autonomously” (p. 55). An important part of teacher education involves teaching a teacher how to reflect on their own actions and behavior,
Waiting to Learn and Learning to Wait

independently, so that teachers are constantly experimenting and adjusting. When a teacher completes their teacher education program, they “should emerge as an autonomous professional” (p. 63). Teacher education programs cannot require teachers to journal without explicitly teaching their students how to use their journals to reflect on their own teaching practice. If requiring or even encouraging a journaling practice, it is essential that teacher education programs model and teach teachers how to transform their teaching journals into data that can be analyzed. Data analysis is a magical process that transforms the seemingly ordinary, mundane, and unimportant events of our lives into opportunities for personal, spiritual, and professional metamorphosis. I believe teachers can be motivated to keep and maintain a journal by being exposed to the kind of personalized growth that a journaling practice and further data analysis process has to offer each teacher who chooses to wholeheartedly engage. Showing teachers how to learn from the experiences they have recorded in writing is one way to encourage and inspire a long-lasting, consistent practice of autonomous, reflective, professional development.

The successful completion of learning to be a teacher means that the teacher “is empowered to make their own independent decisions about teaching and [can] continue to grow as an independent professional” (Randall & Thorton, 2001, p. 64). When a teacher is done being advised in a teacher education program, they should not need to rely on that advisor to make the choices that are best for themselves and their students. Teacher education programs can use journaling and data analysis to teach teachers to be their own advisors for the rest of their teaching careers.

For a teacher to learn from what they have written in a journal, they must be willing to re-engage with their past writings and re-experience the moments they recorded from a different perspective. Journaling is not a reflective practice. Analyzing the data that emerges from our journals is a reflective practice. Transforming journal entries into data, for me, involves turning the moments into an experience I can interact with, listen to, communicate with, talk to and
challenge. The end of my second-year teaching ESOL in a public school will happen on a day in mid-June 2021. In the summer, I plan to transcribe my journal entries from this past 2020-21 academic school year and audio record myself reading the transcript. I believe this year’s audio recording will be much longer than 1 hour and 19 minutes. Looking at my writing, in-depth, has changed the way that I write and I seem to have unconsciously decided that means writing more.

For other teachers, transforming their journal entries into data that they can interact with might look like typing up their journal entries and then printing that transcript. As the teacher reads through the transcript and starts noticing different themes, they can assign each theme a color. The excerpts or passages that fit the criteria for the “theme” can be highlighted or underlined with its corresponding color. If the teacher feels compelled, they can cut the transcript into moments, events, or “communication units,” arranging the pieces until categories emerge. I understand the idea of transcribing multiple handwritten entries might be off-putting to many, so, a teacher can always collect their data in an electronic document. There is no wrong way to collect data. However, I would encourage the teacher recording their experiences electronically to not edit their historic documents in anyway, no deleting and no spell check.

As much as I value handwriting, I am incredibly grateful that the Flipgrid videos Claire and I recorded could be easily downloaded without any transcription effort. Flipgrid autogenerates captions for videos recorded on its site so I was able to copy and paste most of my entries into a document to review. A teacher who is not drawn to handwriting their experiences may feel more inclined to use an audiovisual platform like Flipgrid that allows for fun, instant collaboration. Another teacher might prefer something more private, like voice memos on their phone that are only accessible to them and can be reviewed later.

I am inspired by Fenner (1996), an artist who used “systematic heuristic inquiry to discover personal meaning in a series of 45 art images she created on a daily basis over a period of two months.” Fenner studied all 45 images and recorded audio of her verbal
reflections on the art pieces as she thought aloud (as cited in Kapita, 2010, p. 196). In my third year I want to challenge myself to draw weekly cartoons of my experiences in the classroom and, after some time and distance, audio record my reactions to the art as I review it again.

Teaching online this year gave me way more direct and instant access to my journal and in November of 2020, I started to record the most impactful interactions I was having with students and parents as I remembered them, very soon after they happened. I also wrote down words I said in class that impacted me. I did not realize at the time that, without an academic prompt and without interpretation or judgement, I was actively describing what was happening in my classroom in an authentic way that was interesting and enjoyable for me.

Figure 25

Transcribing Classroom Conversations from Memory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 24, 2020</td>
<td>“The chat is for school. The chat is not for developing romantic relationships.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1, 2020</td>
<td>“Ms, porque le miro mas grande su cabello? Ask me in English. Ms, why I see your hair more big? My hair is BIG because I DID NOT WASH IT”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 21, 2021</td>
<td>“Tienes preguntas? No. Puedes explicar la actividad a todos? ... Tienes preguntas? Si. Que tenemos que hacer?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 “Do you have questions?”
16 “Can you explain the activity to everyone?”
17 “Yes. What do we have to do?”
I want to reiterate here that there is no correct way to collect data. The data collection process can include spoken words, written words, poems, paintings, drawings, to-do lists, calendars, schedules, receipts, photos and truly any other artifact that one can imagine that holds a record of day-to-day actions. Collecting data should be fun, interesting, and engaging in a way that will motivate the teacher to maintain it as a practice. There are many ways that teachers can be intentional (not correct) about collecting data by using prompts or questions that will guide their attention. I suspect that because I have developed such a strong and longstanding personal freewriting practice, I have also developed a strong aversion to prompts for personal use. I associate prompts with “school writing,” not fun writing. I do not want to make prompts part of my own daily habit, but I would like to incorporate them weekly because I see how prompts can guide and shift my attention. In my third year of teaching and reflecting, I would like to intentionally practice the skill of describing what I saw, felt, heard, tasted, and smelled in my classroom.

**Teaching Teachers to Teach Themselves**

My data collection practice is designed around my needs and what feels right to me. Data analysis, however, should not be designed to “fit my needs.” In reviewing and analyzing my own journal entries, I recognize there is a real risk of being caught in a cycle of “endless self-reference.” To prevent myself from falling into the trap, I can develop a data collection and analysis process with a “detailed sound design;” one that is rooted in following an open-ended question (Kapita, 2010, p. 196). Examples of those questions might be “What is the meaning of X?” or “What could I discover about the experience of X?” or “What is the impact of X on my experience as a [teacher]?” (Kapita, 2010, p. 192). I did not intentionally start this

18 “I don’t know how to say this, but I have trust.”
autoethnographic metarefection with a specifically heuristic question in mind, but I wanted to know what I could learn about myself as a teacher and person from reviewing my journal entries related to teaching and learning.

A defining characteristic of heuristic inquiry is the researcher’s intentional use of one’s own self-awareness “to discover new, in-depth meaning about an intensely experienced phenomenon” (Kapita, 2010, p. 192). Heuristic inquiry is a “passionate yet disciplined commitment to examine a question intensely and continuously until its discoveries are thoroughly illuminated” (p. 193).

Heuristic inquiry requires the teacher to create a structure or a systematic approach to collecting and interpreting their own experiences. I need to map out a plan that I can reference when documenting my experiences, and later, make meaning of those experiences. I think of this as a framework that I can use to keep my interpretations in check. The Social Discipline Window gave me language to identify different truths about the way I show up in the classroom and with my students. This framework, particularly the “with” approach, provided me with a guiding light and a point of reference to compare my actions with and work towards throughout the year. It was introduced to me weeks after running my first-year teaching journals through the constant comparison method and days before starting my second year of teaching. At the start of the school year, my attention was primed to the ways I do things with, for and to students as well as the ways I disengage from students. A “sound design” also includes sharing one’s observations and interpretations with others (Kapita, 2010, p. 196). Data analysis should challenge me and make me feel a little uncomfortable so that I know I am growing. I described my interpretation of what “growth” felt like to Claire on Flipgrid.

**Figure 26**

*What Growth Feels Like*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Audiovisual Journal Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 11, 2021</td>
<td>“A lot of the reflection process and, like, looking at how I’m interacting with students...feels like a combination of relief and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
egg on my face. I guess relief 1) in the fact that it’s like ‘phew! I can see that I’m doing this now and there’s something I can do about that’…. I think reflection is supposed to feel a little bit [like this], like, ‘damn, that was so silly but I’m so relieved that I’m not necessarily going to keep being that silly’.

How did I arrive at the point where I realized I was “being silly,” or better put, problematic and harmful in my classroom? A framework helped. As abstract as reflection can be, it helps to have guidelines and boundaries to keep my learning focused when I am sifting through so much of my own information. I am curious how I and other teachers can use different frameworks to prime our attention during data collection and, later, use that framework to gain insight into the ways we show up in the classroom.

**What I Learned from Studying Myself**

Transforming my mundane moments into data to be analyzed has allowed me to see certain truths about my own attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, hopes, wounds, needs, identities and experiences and the way those show up in my classroom. I am easily offended. I use passive aggressive and sarcastic shame as a punishment. I focus on the negative. I feel uncomfortable explicitly stating what I want and expect from people, especially when what I want from them is connection and human interaction. I have extremely high expectations (that perhaps I do not always clearly communicate) of people but I do not always create ways for people to meet those high expectations and when they do not meet my expectations, I become upset and frustrated. I build strong connections and relationships with people. People feel comfortable coming to me privately with their problems, worries and doubts. Though I always see problems, I am also always trying to find solutions. I have been harmful, problematic, self-absorbed, innovative, helpful, and creative in my first years of teaching ESOL in a public school.

I teach the societally dominant language, English, to Spanish-speaking children who have recently arrived in the United States, often under traumatic circumstances. I try to connect to them in a heritage language that, for me, holds deep-seated wounds around rejection and
identity. It is important for me to notice how my personal wounds can make me temporarily blind to the obvious control I hold in my power-imbalanced classroom. I am committed to asking questions, specifically around the wounds and hopes of my ethnic and cultural identity. This identity is oftentimes, to me, unclear and ever evolving. I want to explore how my lived experience in this blurred identity shows up in my classroom. In the future, I hope to see more “academic selfies” (Stephen Griffin & Griffin, 2019, p. 1) from educators who are willing to honestly and vulnerably explore how their complicated identities influence the way they perceive themselves and their students.

There are some hard truths that I am just much more open to hearing from a person who I know can empathize without judgement. My journal allows me to learn about myself from myself. Rereading my journal, written in my most vulnerable and authentic voice, challenges and humbles me. My journal can generate wisdom, just not right away.

I have confirmed that my past, present and ever evolving identities and corresponding experiences make me keenly aware of certain truths and, simultaneously, blind to others. I will not always be able find certain “truths” on my own, especially the truths that make me uncomfortable and will initially resist. I need guidance and collaboration with and feedback from others who have different lived experiences, identities, and perspectives. I need other people to help me unveil all the learning that is available in my journal entries. If a teacher does not feel comfortable sharing her journal with others, a framework can act as a third-party sounding board and point of reference.

My SIT supervisor and professor, Elka Todeva, observed my virtual classes in the Spring Semester of 2021. I wanted her to provide feedback on how I use English and Spanish in the classroom so that I can better support my students in their English language production. I really want them to talk to people (for example: me, but eventually everyone). She has been attentive to my vented frustrations, firsthand. At one point, she recommended I watch Adrian
Underhill teach pronunciation as it was something I did not know how to do in an engaging or interesting way (E. Todeva, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Adrian Underhill unintentionally modeled “presence” for me in a way that finally clicked. Adrian Underhill, in his Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation Workshop, shows how presence is fun, pleasurable, and absolutely delightful. He takes English pronunciation “out of the head” and “into the body.” Underhill has found a truly engaging and enjoyable way to focus students’ attention to the smallest, most ordinary movements of the corners of our mouths, our tongues, teeth, lips, cheeks, throat and all the other muscles we use in speech but, perhaps, do not pay much attention to while we speak every day. He makes noticing and observing, without interpreting, irresistible. Underhill makes the movements we do not normally notice fun, pleasurable and wondrous, just by modeling a different awareness and perspective. Each speech sound, every movement of the mouth, is magical. Students find the joy in noticing sounds because they are encouraged to interact with sounds in a totally new way. Underhill helps students build a connection between “the head” and all the tiny muscles that move when they produce sounds in English. “When things move,” he explains, “they’re visible. In a way, we are making sounds visible” (Macmillan Education ELT, 2011). Underhill transforms the sounds into something students can see, just as a teacher can make her stories visible, audible, and tactile through data analysis in an attempt to deepen her understanding and self-awareness. Journaling and rereading what I have written allows me to see my reality as one of many possible realities. Changing my perspective transforms my reality and I can change my perspective of reality just by imagining and truly considering other possibilities.

Over the past two years, I have repeatedly and casually said that “I am not sure if I am spiritually prepared to teach middle school” in moments of frustration, confusion, annoyance, hurt and disconnection. I believed this comment was a joke, but I also believe that there is some truth to the jokes that people make about themselves. It is more than likely that I have not been spiritually prepared to teach middle school. I have not been prepared to ask a question without
expecting or receiving a response; to build connections with people who do not want, did not ask to be, and often are not in my virtual classroom. I have not always been willing to wait. I have not always been able to accept multiple contradictory truths. Truthfully, the most surprising conclusion of this project is that I see the importance of teacher education programs approaching and encouraging discussions of spirituality. A person’s unique morals, values and interpretation of spirituality have a huge impact on their choice to serve others as educators.

Incorporating mindfulness, presence and spirituality into my own reflective practice taught me the importance of waiting. I had a very loose understanding of the importance of waiting before but have often used my inherent impatience as an excuse to not engage with “waiting” as a practice. I was not spiritually prepared for some of the feelings that came with waiting, as I spent hours every day, desperately hoping for some sign of life from my students in the virtual classroom. It became very clear this year, from reviewing my writing, that I struggle with waiting and I am seeing how my unwillingness to wait and consider other realities often impacts connection in the classroom.

“Presence” and “mindfulness” were both confusing and abstract concepts for me before starting this research. The way our culture seems to overindulge in both words makes me see the two ideas as both higher states of being that are unattainable for me and the current buzzwords that will eventually fade from our conversations around education.

I understand presence, now, as a commitment to paying attention to and celebrating the smallest, tiniest movements and moments without immediately assigning meaning, judgement, or a reason “why.” When I write down and record the small, tiny, easy-to-overlook and easy-to-forget moments of my classroom in a journal, I acknowledge and celebrate them as valuable data with Divine insight to offer, even if that data needs to “sink in and ripen” a bit before the insight is ready to harvest (Rodgers, 2020, p. 16).

“All observation, inasmuch as it involves interpretation, involves some level of judgement,” (Randall & Thorton, 2001, p. 55), but I can stall judgement when I give myself
Waiting to Learn and Learning to Wait

significant time and distance between describing and interpreting my experiences. When I stall judgement, I can consider and embrace so many more possibilities, realities, and truths.

I can wait. If I am not good at waiting, I can use tools to help me wait. I am really interested in how teacher wait-time can reduce anxiety around language learning (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009, pp. 39-44). I am learning about the imagined (and unimagined) possibilities that can arise from asking a question and waiting for a response for so long that it feels like an answer might never come. Waiting allows me to observe the present, gather more information and imagine multiple possibilities before jumping to the conclusion that there is only one finite truth. Waiting never disrupts the “flow” of the class. Waiting is holy. When I wait, I wait to react and when I wait to react, I leave my interpretation and judgement of a person or a classroom experience for another time. When I decide to document those moments by writing them down in a journal, I acknowledge and honor those experiences for the insight and wisdom they could potentially hold; even when what I am writing, in the moment, feels far from insightful and wise.

It is possible that the reader is inherently patient and not deeply wounded by the idea that she is stupid or not “Latina enough.” The reader likely has their own unique wounds, hopes, fears and potencies that show up in their world and workplace. We are not all starting at the same place and we do not need to arrive at the same reflective destination. There is no “destination.” Reflection is the work I engage in to ensure that my actions align with my values. Data collection, or journaling, is the creation of personal historical documents that can facilitate this work (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004, p. 100). Interacting with the experiences recorded in my journal through data analysis and metareflection offers me (and every teacher who wholeheartedly engages with their own unique version of the process) the critical information I need for personal and professional growth and transformation. As teachers approach and navigate their own unique data, with a collaboratively developed, systematic approach to data analysis, they can uncover the personalized truths that they need to see and hear at this moment in their process of professional growth. Journaling as a reflective teaching practice is a self-led, highly tailored
professional development program that can be uniquely meaningful to everyone who chooses to participate.

Dr. Muhammad (2020) shared the idea that a teacher can have twenty different years of experience or an equally experienced teacher, unwilling to reflect, change and transform year after year, can repeat the same year of experience, twenty times. Our teaching experience is valuable, but we cannot grow from our valuable experience without reflection. I am not offering a standardized, methodological approach to journaling as a reflective teaching practice, but I am hoping that the reader feels inspired to collect personal data, to-do lists, journal entries, receipts, schedules, calendars, poems, or doodles. I hope the reader is excited about the idea of analyzing that data with others to learn about how their identities and experiences impact their own underlying, often unconscious, attitudes and beliefs. Teachers make decisions that are informed by these attitudes and beliefs, and these decisions impact students, families, and communities. If “we teach who we are” (Palmer, 2010, p. xi), it feels like my moral obligation to learn as much as I can about what I am teaching my students when I show up to work every day. Journaling can be a powerful reflective teaching tool to facilitate that learning for teachers.


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