

## **How Does Collaborative Reflection Play a Role in a Teacher Researcher's Beliefs About Herself and Her Teaching?: Discovering the Power of Relationships**

**Christine A. Woodcock, Cynthia A. Lassonde, and Ilene R. Rutten**

*With the commitment to create a new way of capturing the value of a fifth-grade teacher's research, while not losing the much-needed methodological soundness within the work, this study illustrates three teacher researchers' journeys with a model of collaborative reflection. In their attempts to avoid delineating the complex process of reflection, the study instead provided a systematic, tangible avenue through which the teacher could describe and analyze her points of dissonance in teacher research in the company of trusted colleagues. By utilizing a well-researched and thoughtfully developed model of reflection, the researchers discovered that it was the powers of not just reflection, but also relationships, that served as a vehicle with which the teacher could examine and potentially become more aware of her beliefs, feelings, and practices. Descriptions of roles, accompanied by examples of journals, e-mails, and interview transcripts, provide an engaging way for audiences to not only explore this study, but to also discover ways of implementing this model of collaborative reflection to meet their own professional needs.*

### **Introduction**

When leafing through the pages of academic journals, it is frequently the case that most of the articles found within are authored by seasoned researchers, most of whom are professors at major universities. While such authors and their studies are highly respectable and thought provoking, we cannot deny the obvious insights and rich textures that can potentially be brought to the pages of educational research by teachers themselves.

Teachers are more and more frequently generating a knowledge base that was, until recently, considered the domain of university-based researchers. Rather than being regarded as the objects of research, teachers have begun to identify themselves as interpreters of knowledge as they question common practice (Bissex & Bullock, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Dudley-Marling, 1995; Fecho, 1993; Strickland, Dillon, Funkhouse, Glick, & Rogers,

1989). Teachers are learning about the structures of schooling by examining and reflecting upon their own experiences.

Those who are immersed in the everyday culture of schools can provide contexts and practical experiences that some researchers may lack. Exemplary teacher researchers (hereafter referred to as TRs) such as Vivian Gussin Paley (1990, 1991, 1998, 2000) and Courtney Cazden (1996) have provided robust accounts of classroom activity that shed important light upon pedagogical theory and practice. Paley, an esteemed kindergarten teacher in Chicago for more than three decades, has written vivid, poignant books based on her experiences with exploring the powers of storytelling, imagination, and community in her classroom. The intensity and honesty of Paley's work is studied and respected across the country. Courtney Cazden was known around the world as a highly regarded Harvard scholar when she returned to elementary teaching in the mid-1970s. In her struggles to apply her

own language theories to real situations, she developed new insights on the roles of language to share with teachers everywhere.

However, teacher research (TR) has been a hot topic of debate in the research world, especially in terms of methodological soundness. Some theorists allege that TR is not valid because TRs are practicing self-knowledge and because they cannot necessarily see the wider context of their practices (Fenstermacher, 1994). Since it is sometimes difficult to argue the potential lack of objectivity and validity in the case of TR, it is vital that paradigms for TR be created so that the value of TR is not lost. Our study explored one avenue through which researchers may accomplish more methodologically sound TR—by implementing a form of collaborative reflection on TR practice and thought. Aspiring to create a model for collaborative reflection that would not belittle or delineate the complex process of reflection, we instead provided a systematic, tangible avenue through which Cindy, a TR, could describe and analyze her points of dissonance, or conflict, in teacher research in the company of trusted colleagues. By utilizing a well-researched and thoughtfully developed model of reflection, we discovered that it was the powers of not just reflection, but also relationships, that served as a vehicle with which Cindy could examine and potentially become more aware of her beliefs, feelings, and practices. We asked, *How does this process of collaborative reflection play a role in the beliefs of a TR about herself and her practices?*

In our commitment to creating a version of collaborative reflection that could potentially provide a significant layer of reliability and validity to TR, we each assumed roles that would create a three-person version of triangulation. The three roles were the Teacher Researcher (Cindy), the Reflection Facilitator (Ilene), and the Analysis Facilitator (Christine).

Our TR, Cindy, was an experienced teacher who returned to her teaching position at a public elementary school in a small, rural school district in upstate New York after a one-year sabbatical leave. During the leave, Cindy was enrolled in full-time study at a university, studying for her doctorate in reading. Cindy returned to the same building that she had worked in before her leave, but this particular year she was teaching a grade level that she had never previously taught. She was moving from teaching sixth-grade language arts to teaching a self-contained class of fifth-graders. As part of her doctoral requirements, she also was collecting data on her class to be used in the writing of her dissertation. Hence, this was how she assumed the position of the TR. As Cindy experienced professional dissonance during the school year, she documented her reflective thoughts in a writing journal. About once every month, she provided a copy of her journal for the other two researchers, Ilene and Christine, to read.

The Reflection Facilitator was Ilene, a former primary teacher with over twenty years of teaching experience. Ilene visited Cindy's classroom at least one time per month during the school year. She participated as an observer for the most part, but there were times when she supported the students when they were writing. Each time she visited the classroom, Ilene would document her own observations and reflections, which would later serve as prompts for discussion to regularly engage Cindy in audiotaped collaborative reflective dyads, creating the second layer of reflection. It was Ilene's intent to help facilitate the reflective process and Dewey's (1933) criteria of reflection with Cindy.

Christine, a former special education teacher, was the Analysis Facilitator. For the purposes of triangulation and a third layer of collaborative reflection, Christine, "the extra set of eyes," was part of the partnership to offer different perspectives and to help facilitate the reflective cycle, as

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well as the relationships therein. Christine regularly read Cindy's journal entries and listened to audiotapes of Cindy and Ilene's collaborative reflective dyad. Christine facilitated and co-constructed analysis as well as written and oral feedback to both researchers, to help support the reflective process to come full circle and to promote the next series of awareness and reflection.

As our work together progressed, we realized the vast importance of the role of relationships in teaching and learning. To successfully collaborate in TR, we realized the need for warm, trusting rapports with one another as colleagues, in order to engage in the sensitive intricacies of research and teaching. Later, we realized the need to emphasize the relational, affective domains of knowledge construction. While knowledge is socially constructed, as has been articulated by such scholars as Vygotsky (e.g. 1978), knowledge is also textured and complex, often constructed within the context of equally as complex relationships.

### **Theoretical Background**

#### ***Why Reflection? What Is Reflection?***

It did not seem unusual to consider reflection as a major focus of the methodology and theoretical grounding of our study. In its Winter 2002 newsletter, the Center on English Learning & Achievement cited reflective practice as a significant factor in effective teaching and professional development. Not surprisingly, on a nationwide scale, states and local school districts, as well as teacher education programs and national teaching commissions, all strongly encourage teachers to engage in reflective practice. In light of the recent calls by national influences to urge teachers to think systematically about their practices and learn from their experience, some scholars are left to wonder what, precisely, reflection is and what constitutes evidence of reflection (Rodgers, 2002a). Our study

provides an intentional, purposeful model of collaborative reflection for educators and TRs to use.

By applying Dewey's (1938) definition of reflection to our teaching practices, we might say that by observing and recording significant behaviors and outcomes related to our teaching and students' learning, we can better understand how to teach more effectively and efficiently. Dewey believed the process of reflection began when a teacher was presented with a puzzling event. This puzzlement created a disequilibrium or dissonance that prompted the teacher to take a step backward and analyze the event. Dewey (1933) upheld that it is from the analysis of and action on these dissonances that teachers become more effective in their practices.

Schön (1983) emphasized the importance of bringing to the conscious level those practices that are implicit. As teachers always operate from a theoretical base, bringing this tacit knowledge to the surface allows the beliefs to be examined, critiqued, and advanced. As teachers reflect in and on their practice, a growth spiral becomes apparent. The initial reflection phase results in a change of action, which in turn necessitates another reflection or re-reflection stage.

Rodgers (2002a) succinctly illustrates that reflection, as defined by Dewey (1933), may be thought of as a truly systematic, cyclical process (Figure 1). Rodgers (2002a) has accentuated four distinct criteria that encompass Dewey's conception of reflective thought, in addition to having assembled a reflective cycle process (Table 1). These methods are not to be thought of as delineating reflection; instead, these processes are provided with the genuine intention to facilitate a tangible quality for exploring and discussing the rather elusive, theoretical concept of reflection.

According to Rodgers (2002b), as an educator experiences dissonance, he or she must first attempt to thoroughly describe

the experience. In interaction with trusted others, the teacher can then begin to analyze the experience. Once an analysis and a proposed plan have been articulated in the trusting, interpretive community, the teacher can begin to take intelligent action and grow to move on to the next experience.

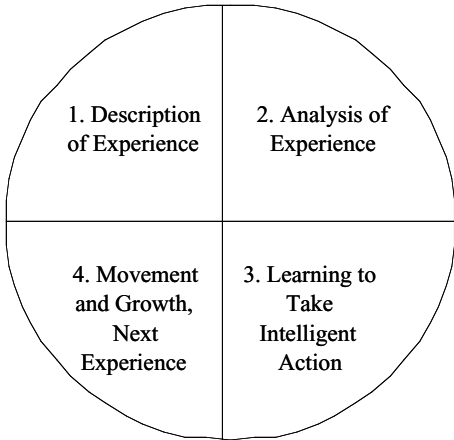


Figure 1. The Reflective Cycle

According to the work of Rodger’s (2002a), as seen in Table 1, four discernable criteria illustrate Dewey’s notion of full reflective thought.

Dewey did not consider the reflective process to have come full circle without some degree of learning that subsequently launches an individual into further, intelligent action. In fact, Dewey (1916/1944) defined education as “that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases [one’s] ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (p. 74). In addition, the notion of a supportive, collaborative learning community must be re-emphasized for sincere reflection to occur.

Table 1. Reflection Criteria

1. Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with greater understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas.
2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.
3. Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others.
4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others.

***The Collaborative Dimension of Reflection***

Reflection in isolation or within the walls of one’s own mind or classroom is an important step in professional growth, but by no means should it be the final step. Bruner (1990) tells us that when people talk about their own experiences, they justify and construct themselves and their identities. Therefore, we not only learn from others—we learn from ourselves by talking and interacting with others. When the process of reflection involves others, we enhance our ability to determine and to shape our own educational philosophies, instruction, and responsibilities to students’ growth.

Framing reflection as a social practice has been an emphasis of educational theorist Solomon (1987). He suggests that teachers’ understandings become more real and clearer as teachers speak about them to each other. As this process involves the close scrutiny of personal beliefs, an atmosphere of trust is essential for meaningful, collaborative reflection to proceed. Dewey’s (1938) notions of

openmindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness foster the trusting environment that encourages collaborative reflection.

When regarding reflection from a sociocultural perspective, central tenets of this theory are that we gain deeper understandings of a phenomenon through our interactions with others, and that our knowledge construction is mediated through oral and written language (Vygotsky, 1978). As we reflect by writing and speaking with others, we are led to question and revisit our teaching from different perspectives. "Reflective abilities will be enhanced through dialogue in the form of seminar instruction, critical thinking dyads, peer collaboration, and structured verbal guidance" (Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000, p. 43).

### *Notion of the Self*

During our study, as we remarked on our reflections, we simultaneously remarked on the overt awareness of Cindy's notions of "self." Cindy, our TR, was not only able to reflect in a meaningful, purposeful manner, but was also gradually gaining an awareness of her actions and feelings and extending positive behaviors across contexts. With ongoing analysis of the collaborative reflections, Cindy appeared to develop an awareness of self, particularly illustrative in her articulation of her own self-theories and how they impacted her teaching and research. In light of this, we decided to examine the notion of self and how it relates to reflection.

In our study, we upheld the belief that people develop particular beliefs about themselves based upon how they organize their worlds and give their worlds meaning. Dweck (2000) refers to these beliefs as "self-theories." Dweck states that people create their own ways to understand experiences and situations and that becomes who they are. Wenger (1998) proposes that selves change based upon

membership and participation in a particular community of practice. We manifest our selves by knowing what is familiar and what is foreign. Selves are layers of configurations that coexist simultaneously.

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) refer to the social world as culturally figured worlds. This theory complements Wenger's (1998) communities of practice. In both, participation involves performing in a competent way. However, figured worlds are described as being formed and re-formed, a more contextual concept than Wenger's communities. Whereas figured worlds may be interpreted as an abstract, evolving group, communities of practice seem to be categories that people choose to join or not. These concepts offer a way to allow people to place themselves beside others in an attempt to determine where they fit in as a piece of the puzzle. Applying these concepts to the classroom, Holland et al.'s work suggests that students and teachers constantly negotiate where they belong in the puzzle as they interact with each other and with the environment.

The meshing of these theories—namely, that people develop various self-theories through participation in different figured worlds—suggests that these worlds lead people to think and act in certain ways in particular situations (Dweck, 2000; Holland et al., 1998; Wenger, 1998). In this study, we sought to apply these theories of self to TR, attempting to shed light on the role Cindy's awareness of her beliefs or self-theories played in her classroom, her research, and her social practices.

## **Methodology**

### *Establishing Roles and Relationships*

We view teacher research as a valuable, evolving methodology that has much to offer researchers and practitioners seeking insight into the application of

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theory to practice. The approach we used to make meaning focused entirely on reflection. Through the process of this systematic, collaborative reflection, we were able to not only examine situations, contexts, and relationships, but Cindy, our TR, was also becoming more overtly aware of herself in the process. She appeared to be developing a capacity to explore her practices and beliefs through an awareness of self that was fueled by the reflection process.

Reflection is a component of research, and the practices involved in teaching are also a process of research. The structure of this study is based on the collaborative relationship between three colleagues. The element of relationship in this methodology was of paramount importance. This importance is based on the works of Dewey (1916/1944) and Hawkins (1974).

As we three researchers embarked on the work together, it was with the sincere commitment we all shared for the processes of teaching and research. Dewey (1938) believed that notions of openmindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness foster the trusting environment that encourages reflection. We believe that we possessed what Dewey would refer to as "whole-heartedness," a genuine, open enthusiasm for one's subject matter. In addition, we had all previously known one another and had developed professional rapport with one another through our common care and devoted responsibility for teaching and educational research. Through these thoughtful rapport with one another, we felt safe and trusting enough to be truly openminded and dedicated to the intricacies of the reflection process, examining our beliefs and considering new possibilities.

In considering Hawkins' (1974) "I-Thou-It" paradigm of relationship, we may see that the creation and sustenance of a relationship is not simply based on two people in interaction with one another ("I" and "Thou"). Even when keeping the

complexities of "I" and "Thou" in mind, there is often an "It" required to truly spark a relationship and to nourish it. The "It" could be any common project or passion the "I" and "Thou" have to share, as long as all parties possess a "whole-heartedness" with regard to the "It." An open, shared passion for an "It" can provide an avenue for individuals to explore the intricacies of one another, frequently resulting in a mutual respect with which to carry on the growing relationship. In our case, our whole-heartedness about the "It" of teaching and research provided a keen energy for us to commit a great deal of time and effort to implementing this collaborative reflection process.

Our three-person collaboration was in no way a hierarchical relationship. On the contrary, our efforts were very reciprocal in nature as we implemented our three roles of Teacher Researcher, Reflection Facilitator, and Analysis Facilitator. In time, we were all reflecting on one another's reflections, in order to bring all of our thoughts full circle on the reflective cycle. In our experience, three people was an effective combination. Rather than having just the TR and one person to facilitate the reflective process, we found that having the "extra pair of eyes" of the Analysis Facilitator helped to provide an added texture and perspective that otherwise would not have existed. While we would certainly not dismiss other combinations of roles and numbers of people working together in collaborative reflection, we found our three-person configuration to be effective and manageable. Any number or combination of people who share a "whole-hearted It" of some fashion, and would like to engage in collaborative reflection, could potentially adapt this model to fit their needs, regardless of background.

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### ***Ongoing Data Collection and Analysis***

Analysis of data was collaborative and ongoing. Although Christine primarily facilitated analysis, she sought to include all of the researchers in the process. For example, in pointing to a particular source of data, all researchers were prompted to revisit the data source and explore it in several ways, based on the reflective cycle and Cindy's experiences.

As opposed to more traditional analysis, which occurs towards the end of a given study, the very nature of this study lent itself to the deliberate, ongoing analysis of data. Even though more substantial conclusions regarding the reflective cycle occurred towards the end of the study, the collaborative reflections regarding Cindy's beliefs about her self and her practices were constant. Analysis began and proceeded simultaneously with the collection of the data. By continuously and systematically thinking about what the data was reflecting, it allowed Cindy to discover her own TR "story"—the underlying patterns of the reciprocal process and the emerging relationships unfolding in the classroom (Glesne, 1999).

Throughout the ongoing data analysis, there was regular communication between all three of us. Cindy faithfully kept a journal of the thoughts and activities associated with her work at both the university and the fifth-grade classroom levels. As the Reflection Facilitator, Ilene regularly read Cindy's journal as well as visited Cindy's classroom. During her classroom visits, Ilene documented her own observations and reflections, which later served as prompts for discussion during the collaborative reflective dyads with Cindy. All of these data sources (journals, audiotapes, etc.) were then regularly delivered to Christine.

As the Analysis Facilitator, Christine listened to the audiotaped reflective dyads, read through all of the journals, and categorized major themes that she found emerging from those data sources. Ilene

and Christine met regularly to transcribe important sections of the tapes and discussed themes as well. Once themes had been discovered, articulated, and color-coded, we all met to discuss the themes in relation to the reflective cycle. In addition, Christine wrote up all of the ongoing analysis in the form of e-mails to Ilene and Cindy for them to ponder and to write more about in future journal entries. In the process of unearthing themes in relationship to the reflective cycle, it was our intention that Cindy closely examine her practices and beliefs, especially those in dissonance, and then continue through the reflective cycle—describing experiences, analyzing them, learning to take new action—and move forward with newfound understandings toward a revised spiral of growth. An important aspect of Christine's Analysis Facilitator job was to provide feedback and themes to the other researchers in manageable quantities.

It was a delicate balance to only focus on those themes that were most meaningful to all three of us as a collaborative team. Manageable, shared goals were imperative. We became immersed in a process to select themes of focus that we all felt to be worthy of further exploration through the reflective cycle (Figure 2). At first, many questions and themes seemed important, and once they had been articulated, they were sieved through in order to really "boil" and contemplate the most mutually pressing ones. Only a manageable number of reciprocally agreed upon themes were really "cooked." As the themes boiled, they popped up repeatedly, evolving in nature as the cooking process, or the reflective process, came full circle.



Figure 2. Narrowing Down Themes of Focus for Reflection.

As time progressed, we all were essentially reflecting on one another's reflections, creating substantial spirals of knowledge in relation to one another, all grounded in the notion of the reflective cycle. Toward the conclusion of the school year and the end of data collection, we all discerned that our systematic, collaborative reflections played a meaningful role in Cindy's awareness of her beliefs about her self and her practices. The nature of the relationships between the three of us was essential. In order to openly share, learn, and grow together, there was a clear sense of understanding and warmth; there was an openmindedness, responsibility, and whole-heartedness between all three of us.

## Outcomes

### Overview

Immediately at the onset of the school year, Cindy experienced a stark disconnection between the institution of academe and theory and her daily practice in the elementary school setting. This was clearly evident in her journal entries, as well as in collaborative reflective dyads with Ilene. This dissonance between the convention of the daily school routine and the progressive intentions she had as a result of her new pedagogical theory was a source of frustration to Cindy. In addition, Cindy experienced a lot of dissonance in her juggling of the demands of the TR role. Rather than viewing the TR role as being an integrated experience, with the teaching complementing the research and the research complementing the teaching, at first Cindy felt as though she had to maintain two different identities or sets of eyes in the classroom. These feelings of disconnection between the university world and the elementary school world persisted throughout much of the school year and were a major focus of the collaborative reflections. All three of us found the notion of relationships to be heavily threaded throughout our exchanges.

At the very beginning of the study, Cindy was suddenly informed that she would be teaching fifth grade, after several years of teaching sixth grade. Having just completed a year's sabbatical leave from the elementary school, Cindy experienced a great deal of dissonance, both professionally and personally. In her journal, Cindy openly shared her mixed feelings regarding the matter of returning to teaching after being at the university full time and how potentially awkward it would be for her to teach a new grade level after several years of experience at another grade level.



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### *Description of Experience*

In the following excerpts from Cindy's journal, we see that feelings of confusion were beginning to emerge for Cindy as she described this instance of dissonance. Cindy was trying to juggle the demanding tasks of research and teaching. In the meantime, Cindy felt sensitive about her obvious position of returning as a doctoral candidate and how that label might unintentionally position her differently among elementary school colleagues. However, it must be pointed out that Cindy was not yet overtly aware of her "new selves"; instead, she was just beginning to explore and to articulate her feelings and experiences.

June 5

I just found out I'll be teaching fifth grade next year. I'm good with that, but my head is swimming with thoughts of how I'm going to do it. I'm supposed to be focusing on my [doctoral/dissertation research] right now, and all I can think about is how I'm going to prepare for being a fifth-grade teacher.

For much of the fall season, Cindy splattered her journal with separate headings and boxed-off margins with such titles as "The teacher in me ..." and "My researcher side ..." While she was able to articulate important pedagogical and research-oriented matters, she was not yet able to entwine the two related practices. As the months progressed, Ilene and Christine attempted to provide Cindy with a trusting, collaborative relationship, which included reflective questions for Cindy to help her address her TR dissonance. Cindy wrote the following in her journal:

November 29

PhD student/teacher: Sometimes I feel people treat me differently because I'm working on my PhD.

They aren't assertive in their comments because they don't want me to contradict them? I never had or would, yet I get that feeling ... I'm being super sensitive but I do think something's going on. I feel different than before the sabbatical.

December 3

Researcher: This whole deal with [my student's] reading has me thinking more as a researcher than a teacher. I think it's because I'm thinking 'what does the research say about this?' ... This is complicated. I really struggle with who I am there.

With respect to the reflective cycle, Cindy had described her experience and had begun to analyze it. However, she had not yet reached the full point of taking action with two major issues—the uncomfortable feeling of "not fitting in" with her elementary school colleagues and the struggle between the PhD student/researcher and teacher roles. In response to these particularly intriguing journal entries, Christine wrote the following e-mail to Cindy and Ilene in efforts to facilitate ongoing analysis of the reflective process:

After describing your experience, you began to analyze it a bit. Whether or not [your elementary school colleagues are] treating you differently, how do you know it is because of the PhD? You then offered the suggestion of getting out of the room more. Have you followed that course of action, or do you have another idea of how you could establish clearer relationships with others, that leave you feeling less vulnerable? Cindy, why shouldn't a teacher wonder those things [from your 12/3 entry]? This time, let's really dissect how/why the roles of teacher and researcher are, and are not, so different.

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### *Analysis of Experience*

In January, Cindy began to progress through the reflective cycle with regard to these matters. On January 28, Cindy responded in a particularly thought-provoking journal entry.

Christine's e-mail regarding getting out of the room more—Yes, I have been making it a point to be more sociable with the fifth-grade teachers. My relationship seems to have changed drastically since the Christmas party ... We talked about families, snowmobiling, holiday plans—no school stuff ... I've felt much closer to [fellow teachers] since that Christmas party. I feel more relaxed and less introspective with them. More natural. Closer.

Christine's second question about teacher vs. researcher—As a teacher, I'm more aware of research now than ever before ... I'm more tuned into the big picture of how research and practice should go hand in hand. Maybe I've become more critical of pedagogy. It's like I've crossed over a dotted line that exists between research and practice. Sometimes I feel like there are "us-es" and "thems" and I don't know which I am right now ... Maybe that's why teachers talk about the "real world" and returning to it after grad school. They lose that connection ... Hey—wait. Maybe that's why I felt dissonance connecting with the fifth grade teachers up to the Christmas party. Maybe I couldn't connect professionally but found a way to connect socially ... Reflecting through writing really helps me figure things out.

By the end of January, Cindy was making her way through the reflective cycle, taking action, growing, and ready to tackle her next challenges. Relationships

were the threads that wove her reflections together. On one level, Cindy's relationships with Ilene and Christine provided her with the comfortable space necessary to reflect constructively on the issues at hand. On another level, Cindy discovered, through collaborative reflection, that it was the nurturing of relationships that provided the comfort necessary to experience less dissonance in the elementary setting. Within the context of relationships with others, Cindy began to co-construct knowledge about the difficult role of a TR. Much like the Hawkins' (1974) "I-Thou-It" model explained earlier, Cindy not only needed the trusting "It" she shared with Ilene and Christine to reflect and construct knowledge; she discovered that she needed an "It" with her colleagues at the elementary school in order to establish mutual respect and, later, a relationship as well.

The following excerpt from one of Cindy and Ilene's collaborative reflective dyads illustrates the valuable role Ilene played. Her finesse in asking respectful, yet probing reflective questions really spurred Cindy's analysis of her situation. In this example, Cindy had already described the experience, which had been the ongoing struggle she was feeling in her attempts to mesh theory and practice. In particular, this dyad captures Cindy's analysis of her attempts to instill the intricate social values of writing to her students. In exploring the notion of audience with regard to writing, Cindy was hoping to promote writing as a means of communication with herself and with others. In doing so, Cindy aspired to convey the intrinsic rewards of writing to her students, not just the extrinsic rewards of pleasing others with finished products on bulletin boards.

Ilene: So are you seeing what you are doing in writing any differently than what the class next door is doing, not in particular, but in general?

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Cindy: We just had open house last night, and I think that might have affected the writing products that have been displayed in the halls ... So what I'm seeing so far this year has been a lot of writing products ... focusing on that finished product ... Whereas I feel more like I'm trying to use writing in a different way, not as something to hang out in the hallway, but as a way to ... clarify what they are thinking about ... So they are ... using writing in ways that can do more ... as a learning experience or a growth experience. I'm trying not to focus on that end product so much.

(Later in same dyad)

Ilene: Clarify this then for me. Because you were talking about part of your social process in writing is keeping your audience in mind... Social aspect may be implicit and so ... the other teachers, they're writing with an audience in mind as well, which is their parents who are coming to see things. So, help me with that.

Cindy: Good point. (laugh) Okay, now you are making me think here. This is good ... I ... think what I am striving for is ... instead of the audience always being outside of us or someone that we are trying to prove something to ... I want them to see writing as, as a way for them to ... fulfill themselves, too ... And if they are fulfilled by putting something on the bulletin board for the parents to see at parent's night, that's great. But then they are still trying to please somebody else. And I want them to see how it can be used as a tool for themselves.

Cindy did more than analyze the theoretical dilemmas of implementing progressive pedagogy with regard to exploring the powers of social writing. In

her use of the example of Open House to reflect on the functions and audiences for their writing, Cindy began to realize more about her relationships with her colleagues at the elementary school, while still reflecting on the pedagogical question at hand. Although she did not necessarily agree with her colleagues' uses of writing in terms of the bulletin boards and the Open House audience, Ilene helped Cindy see that her colleagues also had social writing and audience in mind, even if it was not in the same ways Cindy had intended for her own students. In time, Cindy saw that perhaps she needed an "It," a common bonding agent, in order to connect professionally and allow a co-constructed, mutual respect to flourish with the other teachers. What was particularly striking about this exchange were Cindy's words, "Good point. (laugh) Okay, now you are making me think here. This is good." Comments such as those were prevalent throughout transcripts of Cindy and Ilene's collaborative reflective dyad. We believed that statements such as those were thoroughly illustrative of the benefits of the collaborative reflection on Cindy's beliefs and practices.

### ***Taking Action and Moving Forward: A Growing Awareness of Self for the TR***

The collaborative reflections became a vehicle through which Cindy became much more overtly aware of her beliefs and practices. In fact, in one of her journal entries from the fall, Cindy even articulated metacognition as perhaps being a central factor in reflection.

November 30

I [am] investigat[ing] reflection ... How do I want to be seen? ... I see it as ... taking action as a result of the reflection. Maybe metacognition is wrapped up in these terms too.

With ongoing analysis of the collaborative reflections, Cindy appeared

to develop an overt, perhaps metacognitive awareness of self, particularly illustrative in her articulation of her own self-theories and how they impacted her teaching and research. With the help of our collaborative reflection research team, over time Cindy was able to develop such a keen awareness of her self that she was able to see that she was not originally comfortable with either of the roles of teacher or researcher. Therefore, to effectively mesh the roles was nearly impossible until she took some time to relax and to reflect on the situation, thereby alleviating the dissonance she felt, in the company of supportive colleagues.

*Categories of Self-Theories.* Cindy explored and articulated her own self-theories as they played out in the daily practices of the TR, as a result of the collaborative reflection and the meta-awareness (metacognitive awareness) the process granted her. Through the analysis of the data, three categories of self-theories emerged for Cindy. Because each of these selves coexists simultaneously in layers of configurations (Wenger, 1998), it is important to discuss the intermingling of all three categories that Cindy discovered.

First was Cindy's awareness of self as a returning graduate student. The elementary school faculty was aware that Cindy was nearing the end of her work on her doctorate. Cindy, seeking to connect with her colleagues rather than be distinguished from them, was unsure of her place, her image among them, and how she should adjust her position among them. On December 3, Cindy wrote the following in her journal:

I'm tired of people trying to put me in my place (position me). I'm so hesitant to share my ideas and have been because I didn't want them thinking I was being a know-it-all. But it's backfired. Now, are they making comments about my program versus their experience because they know I won't gloat about my graduate

work? This is complicated. I really struggle with who I am there. Maybe I don't belong there any more. ... I try to present my opinions diplomatically and intelligently without putting theirs down.

Cindy felt that her teaching methods were more progressive than those of the other teachers. She started to question how the practical reality of teaching aligned with the principles she had formed by reading and adapting the educational research in her doctoral studies. Cindy was having trouble justifying to her elementary school colleagues the connection between research and the daily practices in her classroom that she so valued, because her colleagues kept telling her there was a chasm between the university's teachings and what worked in the "real world."

Second was Cindy's awareness of self as an experienced teacher at a new grade level. Professionally, moving to a new grade level means committing to learning the content, gathering materials, and so forth. It is a commitment of time, energy, and dedication. Also included in this category of self-awareness, was Cindy's hope to fit in socially with her colleagues. She felt very different and disconnected from most of the other teachers, not only professionally but socially as well. That began to change when she decided to put more effort into getting to know them personally, detached from school. On January 28, she wrote:

I have been making it a point to be more sociable with the fifth-grade teachers. My relationship seems to have changed drastically since the Christmas party. ... I've made it a point to stop by their rooms in the morning just to say hi or to talk about what's coming up that day. I feel more relaxed and less introspective with them.

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Cindy began to find a way to connect socially with her colleagues, which led to feeling safe around them. Eventually, she noted in her journal that this led to her feeling more comfortable sharing professional ideas with the teachers, which inherently helped with sharing thoughts regarding teaching at a new grade level.

Third was Cindy's awareness of self as a teacher researcher. Although this awareness seemed to mature over the course of the school year, as did her other self-theories, Cindy was very troubled with feelings of guilt and overcommitment. Over time, this awareness became a main focus of much of our study, as illustrated in our conclusions.

### Conclusions

#### *A New Cycle: The Collaborative, Reflective Meta-Awareness Cycle*

As our study evolved, so did our reflective cycle. Although the cycle we had originally begun utilizing, based on the works of Dewey (1933) and Rodgers (2002a, 2002b), was an ideal and noteworthy starting point for us, as time progressed, Cindy found that the reflective cycle needed tweaking, based on rhythms she felt were commonly occurring within her practice. After careful consideration, we developed a new reflective cycle in the hopes of sharing it with other educators and TRs (Figure 3).

In the original reflective cycle, collaboration was lacking. In our experience, collaboration was paramount, because much of our knowledge was constructed in relationships with one another. Once Cindy had thoroughly described an experience, the ongoing analysis came in the form of Ilene and Christine's collaborations with her. In fact, we felt that our collaboration encompassed the entire process, as illustrated by the ring of collaboration encircling the full reflective cycle (Figure 3). With the

collaborative reflection as a vehicle, Cindy found herself much more overtly aware of her beliefs and her actions and the thoughts underlying those feelings, hence the "meta-awareness of self" as a new piece of the cycle. In our experiences, from this meta-awareness comes truly "Informed Action" (Figure 3).

According to Flavell (1981), metacognition is an awareness of oneself as "an actor in his environment, that is, a heightened sense of the ego as an active, deliberate storer and retriever of information" (p. 275). Metacognition has been simply defined as thinking about thinking, or knowing about knowing. A basic concept of metacognition is the notion of thinking about one's own thoughts (Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 1998). A conscious awareness of our thoughts as TRs is what truly impacts and furthers our knowledge. By developing metacognition, we may articulate what otherwise may not have been expressed. Our study sought to articulate the TR's meta-awareness of self through collaborative reflection as the process through which she methodically considered her actions and beliefs and gradually developed a newfound, overt awareness of herself with which to more effectively practice.

Relationships were of vital importance in this study. The successful nature of the collaborations seemed rooted in the trusting relationships we shared. In fact, collaboration, seated in relationships, was found to embed the entire reflective cycle. Each step was enhanced by our collaborative relationships. We decided to purposefully place the shaded term "relationships" as the foregrounding to the entire process. The shading is meant to imply that the relationships changed with intensity throughout the process. The relationships were present at the inception of the research, but the relationships evolved and relational dynamics were born out of the process.

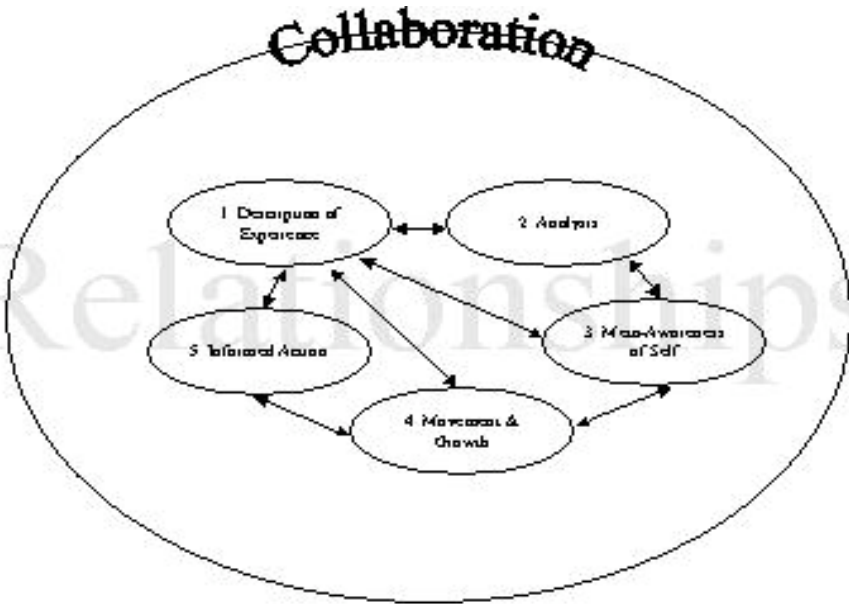


Figure 3. Revised Reflective Cycle

Interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships with one’s self, with others, with the research itself, and of course, the relationships between us as researchers, were all of great consideration, because we found that our knowledge was constructed within the context of relationships. Overall, much like previous theorists have articulated a vision for the social construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978), we uphold that knowledge is not only socially constructed, but is constructed within the contexts of relationships as well. In the relational construction of knowledge, there is the added emphasis on the texture or dimension of the relational dynamic between one’s self and others that contributes to the knowledge gained in socializing an experience.

Vygotsky (1978) upheld that all knowledge is constructed in the context of social interaction. Rogoff (1990) extended Vygotsky’s ideas to emphasize and

elaborate on the two-way exchange of creating knowledge and sharing meaning. Taking in knowledge is not a one-way street, or simply an individual endeavor, even in a social context. In the vision of Malaguzzi (1993), all knowledge is based in relationships, and an active relationship with one’s self is embedded in the social construction of knowledge. We discovered that we not only needed genuine relationships with one another in order to effectively embark on and flourish within this type of work; in the midst of it, Cindy discovered that her relationships with her colleagues at the elementary school played a large role in her beliefs about her selves and her practices. Cindy’s collaborative reflections allowed her to see that, through relationships with others, she was provided with the fuel necessary to increase awareness of her own beliefs.

In addition, as Rodgers (2002a) upholds, the description of a given

experience is hugely important, given that a person may not continue through the cycle without effectively capturing the complexities of the experience from the beginning. Also, the steps of the cycle generally do not follow as smooth an order as we would hope. For this reason, we decided to place arrows in every which direction throughout the cycle to indicate the lack of a smooth, linear path through such a complex process. Often times, the person engaged in reflection must revisit steps and think of the reflective cycle as a deliberate, ongoing pursuit, with the determination to eventually reach all of the steps even if he/she has to revisit steps in order to accomplish a full cycle.

### *Questions of Limits and Suggestions for Future Research*

This way of working together in collaborative reflection is certainly not the only way. Instead, our work is simply to be thought of as an example, based on thoughtful, caring execution, especially with regard to relationships. This process requires a great deal of time and commitment in order for it to be successful within the reflective cycle presented. When used within time-constrained contexts, the process may feel frustrating. Nevertheless, we contend that the full process is extremely worthwhile.

If a particular focus for the reflective cycle does not come full circle, are the steps still valuable? On some level, of course, any attempts at reflection are valuable. However, we believe, along with other theorists (e.g. Dewey, 1938; Rodgers, 2002a, 2002b), that the reflective process does not necessarily result in thoroughly changed, examined, realized behaviors unless all of the steps have been comprehensively executed.

We aspired to create a model for collaborative reflection that would not belittle or delineate the complex process of reflection, but instead provide a systematic, tangible avenue through which

all people could describe and analyze their points of dissonance. In the case of this particular TR, Cindy was able to use this collaborative process to unearth understandings regarding her beliefs about her self (selves) and her practices, hence making her TR more valid because the powers of reflection served as a vehicle through which she could thoroughly examine important experiences in the company of others. It is our hope that future educators and researchers interested in ways to enhance reflective practice will utilize adapted versions of this well-researched and thoughtfully developed model of reflection.

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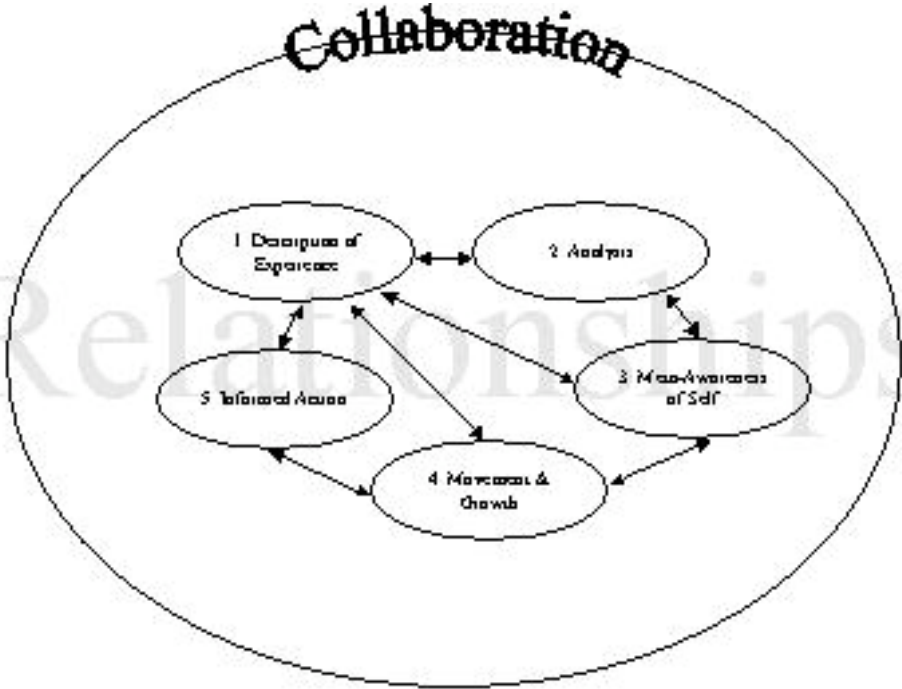


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## Appendix

### Collaborative Reflection Handbook



By collaborating with others, with whom you have trusting relationships, you may journey through the steps of this reflective cycle. Start by thoroughly describing a specific, perplexing experience. Once this reflection is shared with colleagues, you will be collaboratively and deeply analyzing the experience. Once much of this analysis has taken place, you will become much more overtly aware of yourself and your actions. This collaborative spiral of reflections and analysis will

guide your growth, and of course, will hopefully fuel more informed action on your part in the future. Just please remember that this is not a smooth, linear path. As our arrows indicate, the steps may naturally jump around, due to the complexities of our lives. However, once you have journeyed through the entire cycle, it can be extremely rewarding to have new insights, as supported by the multi-layered reflections within your supportive relationships with colleagues.

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## Roles for Implementation

### The Duties of the Teacher Researcher

- Write in a journal regularly to reflect on your experiences, looking for recurring dissonances in your practice.
- On a regularly scheduled basis, provide a copy of the journal to your collaborators for them to read.
- Help to schedule times for the Reflection Facilitator to visit your classroom, and allow time for discussion after the observation.
- Revisit the journal and your reflections and explore the thoughts in several ways, based on the reflective cycle.
- Once themes of focus have been discovered, articulated, and categorized, all three collaborators should meet to discuss the themes in relation to the reflective cycle.
- Once a theme of focus has been collaboratively decided upon, the Teacher Researcher is provided with reflection questions to ponder and to write more about in subsequent journal entries. This is your time to analyze the experience and plan appropriate action.
- As time progresses, you and your collaborators will essentially be reflecting on one another's reflections, creating substantial spirals of knowledge in relation to one another, all grounded in the notion of the reflective cycle.

### The Duties of the Reflection Facilitator

- Visit the Teacher Researcher's classroom on a regular basis.
- During visits, document your own observations and reflections, which will later serve as prompts for discussion to engage the Teacher Researcher in an audiotaped collaborative reflective dyad, creating the second layer of reflection.
- Regularly read the Teacher Researcher's journals.
- Meet regularly with the Analysis Facilitator to discuss the articulation of themes of focus.
- Once themes have been discovered, articulated, and categorized, all three collaborators should meet to discuss the themes in relation to the reflective cycle.
- As time progresses, you and your collaborators will essentially be reflecting on one another's reflections, creating substantial spirals of knowledge in relationship to one another, all grounded in the notion of the reflective cycle.
- In all ways possible, help to facilitate the reflective process and Dewey's (1933) criteria of reflection, mostly through the means of questions to your collaborators.

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### The Duties of the Analysis Facilitator

- As “the extra set of eyes,” your role in the partnership is to offer different perspectives and to help facilitate the reflective cycle as well as the relationships therein.
- Regularly read the Teacher Researcher’s journal entries.
- Listen to the audiotapes of the collaborative reflective dyads.
- Facilitate and co-construct analysis as well as written and oral feedback to your collaborators, to help support the reflective process, to come full circle, and to promote the next series of awareness and reflection.
- Categorize major themes found to be emerging from everyone’s reflections.
- Meet regularly with the Reflection Facilitator to discuss themes of focus.
- Once themes have been discovered, articulated, and categorized, all three collaborators should meet to discuss the themes in relation to the reflective cycle.
- Write up all of the ongoing analysis in the form of e-mails, or some other efficient means of communication, for your collaborators to ponder and to explore in future journal entries and reflective dyads.
- An important aspect of the Analysis Facilitator’s job is to provide feedback and themes to the other collaborators in manageable quantities.
- As time progresses, you and your collaborators will essentially be reflecting on one another’s reflections, creating substantial spirals of knowledge in relation to one another, all grounded in the notion of the reflective cycle.

*Prior to joining the faculty in the Education Department of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Christine Woodcock was a special education teacher. Her research interests include children’s literature, gender studies and how they relate to literacy theory, and applications of feminist methodologies to the field of literacy.*

*After twenty years of teaching at the elementary level, Cynthia Lassonde is currently Assistant Professor in the Elementary Education and Reading Department at the State University of New York at Oneonta.*

*Ilene Rutten is a doctoral student in reading at the State University of New York, Albany, with research interests in teacher education and teacher/student intersubjectivity. She received her masters of education degree from the University of North Dakota and taught in the primary grades in Wyoming. Her research is partially supported by a Presidential Award from the University of Albany Initiatives for Women.*