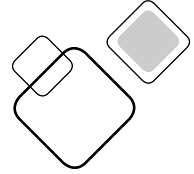

Case Studies in Critical Reflection Praxis in University Studies: The Stance and Dance

DANEEN BERGLAND, HUNTER SHOBE, AND ALMA M. OUANESISOUK TRINIDAD

ABSTRACT | This article articulates the experience of three professors from different disciplines, teaching at three levels of University Studies, Portland State University's general education program, for whom the toggling between personal/professional critical practices and use of reflective practices in the classroom has led to transformative learning experiences for them and their students. It describes the specific reflective tools and methods they used for teaching and professional development, and considers the challenges to sustaining critical reflection and how those challenges might be addressed. The authors argue that critical reflection (CR) is an important practice for teachers and students of general education. In particular, CR engages the habits of mind and capacities, such as critical thinking, central to the goals of general education, as well as engaging the practical skills needed to procure jobs and succeed as professionals. As a professional practice for teachers, it contributes to improved and purposeful teaching methods and rationales, and can build rapport, trust, and credibility with students. Because CR takes time and practice, it is important for students to be exposed to many different methods and have opportunities to practice CR methods from a variety of disciplines/backgrounds throughout their general education.

KEYWORDS | critical self-reflection, learning journals, critical Indigenous pedagogy of place, geography, social work

Introduction

This article articulates the experience of three professors from different disciplines, teaching at three levels of University Studies, Portland State University's

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general education program, for whom the toggling between personal/professional critical reflective practices and use of reflective practices in the classroom has led to transformative learning experiences for them and their students. It describes the specific reflective tools and methods they used for teaching and professional development, and considers the challenges to sustaining critical reflection and how these challenges might be addressed.

Informed by the work of scholars in teaching and learning, and based on our own experiences, we argue that critical reflection (CR) is an important practice for teachers and students of general education. We found that in particular, CR engages the habits of mind and capacities such as critical thinking, creativity, intercultural knowledge, ethical reasoning, and lifelong learning, central to the goals of general education, as well as engaging the practical skills needed to procure jobs and succeed as professionals. Our experiences illustrated Brookfield's (1995) findings, detailed later in this article, that as a professional practice CR contributes to improved and purposeful teaching methods and rationales, and can help build rapport, trust, and credibility with students. Because CR takes time and practice, we believe it is important for students to be exposed to many different methods and have opportunities to practice CR methods from a variety of disciplines/backgrounds throughout their general education.

University Studies: Setting the Stage for Critical Reflection

University Studies differs from traditional general education programs in that students are required to take general education courses at all four levels of the undergraduate curriculum. Most of these courses, especially at the freshman and sophomore levels, are theme-based and interdisciplinary, and all share common learning goals of Communication; Inquiry and Critical Thinking; Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice; and Ethics and Social Responsibility. The curriculum is administered by a single program, made up of multidisciplinary faculty, some affiliated solely with the University Studies program, and others in "shared lines," teaching University Studies courses on permanent or rotating bases from other departments. The Program, where interdisciplinarity is required, and teaching, collaboration, and reflective practices are valued, provides a fertile environment for experimenting with CR.

Defining Reflection, Critical Reflection (CR), and Critical Self-Reflection (CSR)

Reflection is a widely used and contested term in academic settings, though it is generally agreed that reflective practice involves "examining assumptions, [. . .] being self-aware and critically evaluating [one's] own responses to practice situations" and is "part of the process of lifelong learning" (Finlay, 2008,

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p. 52). Many of us practice reflection when we review our work and experience in order to revise and update our course materials or curriculum and what Schön (1983) called "reflection in action" (p. 49). Mezirow (1998) and others have parsed reflection further, noting that *critical* self-reflection of assumptions "emphasizes critical analysis of the psychological or cultural assumptions that are the specific reasons for one's conceptual and psychological limitations, the constitutive processes or conditions of formation of one's experience and beliefs" (para. 41). Critical self-reflection (CSR) turns attention both inward to the self, as well as outward to the context of the self, and requires analysis and critique of the values, perspectives, and assumptions harbored in and influenced by those contexts. Brookfield (1995), in his book *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, elaborates that self-reflection for teachers becomes critical when its purpose is "to understand how considerations of power undergird, frame, and distort educational processes and interactions" and "to question assumptions and practices that seem to make teaching easier, but actually work against our own best long-term interests" (p. 8). He posits the concept of critical reflection as a "stance and dance" in which our stance toward our teaching is one of inquiry and openness, and the dance is the "experimentation and risk" that we engage in as we apply new ideas and methods (p. 42). We've used this concept to frame our case studies and discussion.

Hunter Shobe, Geographer

This section considers lessons learned from teaching both geography courses and a Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) course on globalization as a nontenure track faculty (NTTF). The experience influenced my thinking on how to improve my teaching and student learning in FRINQ, but also about how to improve in my home discipline courses. Here, I focus on one method of critical self-reflection—journals.

Keeping a Teaching Journal for Critical Self Reflection: A Stance

I taught in University Studies on assignment from the Geography Department from fall 2012 to spring 2016. In the past I had made notes, but not in an organized systematic way, that would allow me to trace the trajectory of my teaching over time. Realizing I was often asking my students to write in order to better reflect on what they learned, I decided to heed the same advice and keep a teaching journal to put my own reflections in writing. I found I enjoyed writing about teaching and academic things without having to use academic jargon and conventions. Reviewing my journals helped me develop my

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thinking related to teaching different classes and provided an informal account of student feedback to supplement more formal assessments.

Over time I've developed a set of questions that guide my thinking in revising courses each year: How best to help catalyze student engagement with the course content, concepts, and themes? What exercises and assignments best accommodate a range of students with different backgrounds, various preferred styles of learning, and different reasons for being in school? What are the best ways to promote students applying what they learn to their lives? I found these questions easier to address with my teaching journal as a resource—after all the journal is an account of what worked and what did not. The teaching journal was particularly helpful in guiding my reflections on how best to customize assignments for either general studies or geography courses. Perhaps the greatest benefit of the teaching journal was that it helped me see how I could be more flexible as a teacher.

Assigning Critical Reflection, an Evolution to Student Learning Journals: The Dance

Early on teaching FRINQ, I tried having students write down their main ideas and questions related to the topic before diving immediately into discussions. I hoped this would help students analyze what we discussed and read and react from a personal standpoint. Students seemed to benefit from a few minutes to independently process their thoughts before discussion. Years later, I made the writing assignments a formal part of the class in the form of a learning journal, thinking this would promote the importance of reflective writing. A portion of class time was dedicated to writing in journals. This generated a material record of a student's reflections on content, learning, and the university experience, and a self-authored book of thoughts and ideas from his or her first year of college. More than anything the intent of the journal was to engage the students in course themes on a daily basis (Mcguinness, 2009). The entries were part of a larger strategy to engage students and introduce them to concepts which they could consider in the context of their own lives. Several students began entries with variations of "I never realized this until now but . . . , " suggesting the journal provided a useful space for developing new thoughts about class ideas.

Geographers recognize the usefulness of journals in pedagogy (Anderson, 2012; Cook, 2000; Fouberg, 2000; Fuller et al., 2006; Haigh, 2001; Haigh, et al., 2015; Kenna, 2016; Mcguinness, 2009). Learning journals have many potential benefits starting with their informality—an invitation for students to focus more on their thoughts than on concerns with proper formatting or organization. Journals can play important roles in helping students recognize how they learn as they separate learning from content (Haigh, 2001, p. 168), and

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are more likely to "appreciate the relevance of what they have learned" (Park, 2003, p. 183). Journal writing can catalyze critical thought and prompt students to connect class material to their lives. Fouberg suggests that, "students relate ideas to themselves and use the space of a journal to figure things out" (2000, p. 196). Learning journals allow students to situate themselves and their own position in society as students and researchers in the context of both theoretical and grounded inquiry (Glass, 2014), and devolve some ownership of the learning to the students (Fouberg, 2000, p. 197).

The spirit of Lynda Barry's *Syllabus* (2014) informed my journal assignment in asking students to "pay attention, be quiet, and see what's there . . . not agree with, understand, like, JUST SEE" (p. 5), and to use the journaling to "notice what you notice" (p. 60). Barry highlights the value of having students write in class to engender a feeling of "solitary work" done together (p. 9).

Students handed in journals halfway through each term, which allowed me to gauge which questions had been most effective at catalyzing thoughtful responses. During the first term it became clear that writing responses to general questions was more difficult than responding to specific questions.

Students responded favorably to the assignment, identifying the development of critical thinking as the primary benefit. For example, one student commented in an evaluation that the journals were helpful in getting students to think beyond problems and address, "what we think solutions to problems are." Another student suggested that the assignment could be improved by posing more entries.

After assigning the journals for an entire year in FRINQ, I assigned a learning journal to students in an upper-level geography course, Sense of Place. The journal had similar but different roles in the two classes. In FRINQ, students were often thinking and writing about issues for the first time, and the journal was for many the first opportunity to consciously work out their initial thoughts on the topic. For the Sense of Place class the prompts more often provided students, who were further along in their studies, the opportunity to sort out concepts and analyze previously encountered ideas more deeply.

Maintaining a teaching journal, having the discipline to keep it going, but also gaining insight from putting thoughts on paper, provided me a helpful reminder of some of the potential benefits and challenges my students faced when keeping their journals. It allowed me to reflect specifically on which assignments, lectures, and points of entry worked well in FRINQ, a year-long general education course, and which worked well in geography classes. Critically reflecting on my teaching in general education provided insight on how students will use important concepts from my own discipline in a context other than academic geography. I was better able to reflect on how to find points of

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entry for topics and concepts that are relevant and resonate with students from across academic disciplines.

Alma Trinidad, Social Worker

This section provides a critical reflection and key lessons learned from teaching a Sophomore Inquiry course (SINQ) on Design Thinking for Social Change as a tenure track professor in a shared line with the School of Social Work and University Studies.

The SINQ Design Thinking theme was first launched by University Studies in fall 2014 and partnered the School of Social Work, Child and Family Studies, and the Business School. Its inaugural team of faculty included professors from business, architecture, computer science, and child and family studies. I was the only woman professor of color (WPOC) from social sciences on this team. We initially agreed that my particular section of the SINQ would be a pilot with intentional readings and assignments with explicit processes of integrating equity and examining power and privilege as a designer. Having worked in community development, social entrepreneurship, and youth mentorship with community-based, culturally responsive programs as a social worker and scholar, I used Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place (CIPP), which brings clarity to one's work, roles, and responsibilities as a student and general citizen of society, as the foundation of my teaching, and presumed the stance of a Pinay scholar warrior of kapu aloha and mahalaya.

Teaching as a Pinay Scholar Warrior of Kapu Aloha and Mahalaya Using Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place: A Stance

A *Pinay warrior* is rooted and grounded in Filipino and other Pacific, Indigenous island cultures. A woman warrior is one who fights for ideals and principles important to the community. Historically, Pinay warriors, such as Gabriela Silang, fought alongside Filipino men against the Spanish colonial regime. Their anti-colonial stance perpetuated an identity and position that I embody. It speaks to a social justice framework that embraces Filipino Ilocano indigenous values of *barangay* or *barrio* (small, town community), *kaili* (township), and *pamilia* (family). It honors womanhood, sisterhood, and feminism in the context of community. *Kapu aloha* (sacred love) stems from my roots growing up on the rural island of Molokai in Hawai'i. To *aloha* is to commit to deeply love and fondly care for one's community or place that has been injured, oppressed, and is in need of healing. *Mahalaya* (mahal=love, malaya=freedom) derives from the Filipino Tagalog values of self- and collective determination, and being freed from imperialism, capitalism, and feudalism. These values are embodied in a Pinay scholar warrior of kapu aloha and mahalaya stance. For me, it means

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passionately and steadfastly holding on to the beauty, grace, and fierceness in my work as a scholar —teaching, mentoring, serving, and conducting research for collective empowerment and social change.

Because the academy historically and contemporarily is not designed for my people, I face ongoing challenges and isolation as a WPOC. Especially during my path towards tenure, the voyage has been brutal and continues to present deep contradictions. My stance brings clarity to the purpose of my work, and intention to building relationships with and among people. I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors and the wisdom of my community-based partners engaged in this course. The collective impact is crystallized time and time again by the people, places, and processes rooted in CIPP. It is this reiterative collectivity and desire for community impact that grounds me. This critical reflection serves as a way to highlight such collaboration.

CIPP serves as my foundation of facilitating critical reflexivity among the students and myself, and builds upon the literature on critical pedagogy, the concept of place, and indigenous and ethnic studies. It is a facilitative learning tool to recognize and confront inequities and disparities in a specific geographic community (Trinidad, 2011), and embraces indigenous identities and ways of knowing that are rooted in place (Johnston-GoodStar et al., 2010). As an educator, I utilize CIPP as a tool to facilitate social change by acknowledging unique histories of oppression and resistance, genealogies, and cultural values perpetuated and expressed in a specific geographic place.

Centering Place and Integrating CIPP with Design Thinking: The Dance

The three major CIPP processes, rooted in geographic place, are: 1) analysis of power and oppressive forces; 2) indigenization; and 3) sociopolitical development through student-community engagement (Trinidad, 2014; 2018). These processes were deeply integrated in the SINQ course where students, individually and in groups, used critical self-reflection and reflexivity to consider their social positionalities and the power dynamics in a given time, place, and space, while applying the steps of Design Thinking. Because I scaffolded learning experiences that built upon each other, it was my hope that this reiterative process would eventually become second nature.

In the last decade, Design Thinking has become a popular topic, although sometimes controversial and often misunderstood. While there is still no widely accepted definition, most agree about the basic principles: iterative processes of divergent and convergent thinking and testing, discoveries through empathetic contextual explorations, and synthesis through intuition, creativity, and collaboration (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). These principles apply well to business, social work, education, and the creation of new things and ideas based on human needs.

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Because of my background in macro social work practice, as the faculty for SINQ I intentionally integrated CIPP to bridge the foundations of Design Thinking and its direct application to real world problems and human lived experiences rooted in Portland. Inherent to CIPP is critical reflexivity, where the practitioner (in this case, the faculty) keeps ongoing analysis of one's social locations and positionalities in the facilitation of a process, including teaching, as well as a generative and parallel process among members of a learning community. My specific section of the course focused on social issues related to gentrification, poverty, social sustainability, social justice, and equity. The course aimed to excite and agitate students about the power of Design Thinking through hands-on experiences and equip them with basic skills needed to apply it to their work. Critical reflexivity was facilitated as students grappled with building skills that intersect with diversity, ethics/social responsibility, critical thinking, and communication. Students identified problems they cared about, crafted their design challenge, engaged in field research, synthesized their findings, brainstormed solutions, and presented their concepts, while expanding their personal and professional networks.

Critical reflections, written and oral, done individually and/or collectively, were scaffolded throughout the term. The main assignments included a mix of critical self-reflections of the readings; an interview with a designer, innovator, or entrepreneur; a community-based learning design team project; and a "my designer, innovator, and/or entrepreneur's philosophy for social change and equity" paper. This included critical reflections on how epistemology or knowledge production related to poverty is framed based on their stances. Additionally, during each session, through means of a "postcard," students were invited to share insights and thoughts on content or process of the session. This allowed a dialog and a feedback loop between students and faculty. In the final week of the course, each student evaluated how the term and how the learning experiences impacted their overall journey.

For my part, I kept weekly notes of how each student was generally progressing in regards to critical awareness. Simultaneously, I noted dynamics in the context of the learning community, including my own internal reactions and insights. Through time, I engaged with student(s) in person or virtually (email or online domain) through dialog and courageous conversations, especially when, as a learning community, we collectively were struggling with the topic area of the week. Critical reflexivity as teaching practice kept me a couple steps forward in creating space to continuously humanize the journey.

This critical reflexivity helped to humanize each step of Design Thinking. The factors of CIPP that strengthened my facilitation to humanize the process among student learning were that: 1) knowledge building and production (epistemology) needed to be deconstructed and indigenized in community (i.e.,

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knowledge is validated with, by, and for the people); 2) knowledge production needed the nested support from informal and formal mentors and community partners in the field; it is not an exercise done alone; 3) knowledge production is sociopolitical; and 4) knowledge production involves emotions. Such engagement with critical reflexivity impacted students' critical awareness of the power and privilege of their social positionalities and how oppressive forces may play out in the process of design thinking. Being aware of such encouraged students to develop approaches that may alleviate those forces and create change.

Daneen Bergland, Poet and Online Instructor

This section considers the lessons learned from engaging in Critical Self-Reflection (CSR) as part of a professional development retreat series sponsored by University Studies based on the work of Parker Palmer. The reflections during these workshops, focused on the intersections of self and purpose, led to valuable insights about myself as an instructor, but also the value of CSR for learners at all stages of their careers, from general education student to professional.

Teaching (and Learning) from the "Hidden Wholeness": A Stance

Though I had practiced CSR at different times in my education and career, my experience as part of an ongoing series of faculty development workshops reintroduced and deepened my understanding of it as an important part of my professional and teaching practices.

My CSR allowed me to reexamine the internalized narratives about what it meant to be a teacher and scholar. It helped me further develop the bridge between my students and myself as learners, to "practice" the kind of thinking and reflection I want my students to do, and to do it alongside them, to some extent disrupting power dynamics and humanizing the online classroom. It reinforced my value of teaching, and helped me seek out and collaborate with others interested and engaged in the same kind of reflective work.

I arrived late to academia, returning to pursue an M.A. in poetry writing after a career in social services. Upon graduating, I was hired as a nontenure track (NTTF) faculty member when University Studies was rapidly ramping up online offerings and needed faculty already skilled in online course development and teaching. As a creative writer, not a researcher or scholar, I felt both intimidated and frustrated by academia's emphasis on disciplinary knowledge over teaching ability and expertise. I'd been trained to teach writing; I knew how to create well-organized, engaging online classes, but I wasn't teaching poetry writing, my discipline, in my general education courses. I compartmentalized my identity as a writer, along with my previous career experience, seeing them

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as separate chapters of my life, and mostly irrelevant to the way I taught. This lack of identity as a scholar was furthered by my fixed-term contracts that stipulated teaching 36 credits a year, with no expectations of research or publication. However, the values of the academy, codified in promotion guidelines, made clear that academic publication and research made someone a "real" professor. This led me to undervalue my experiences and limit my pursuits of development and research opportunities, because I felt I was "just here to teach."

Switching Positions Between Teacher and Learner: The Dance

In recent years University Studies has offered multiple series of year-long professional development workshops for faculty centered on the work of Parker Palmer and his book *The Courage to Teach* (2007). In these quarterly, full-day reflective workshops made up of faculty and administrators associated with University Studies at all levels, participants were guided in reflective writing and exercises, through contemplative, creative, and critically reflective practices.

One of the key concepts central to the workshop was that of teaching from the authentic and integrated self, as teachers who are then able "to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves" (Palmer, 2007, p. 11). Questions that tapped more deeply into teaching, beyond content, assignments, and assessment strategies, were fundamental to self, and asked participants to consider their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual identities and purpose, not just as an instructor or administrator, but as a whole person. Questions such as "When do you feel most alive?" and "What are your gifts and limits?" allowed participants to consider themselves as a whole person, not only a teacher. Exercises that asked participants to tell stories or explore metaphors related to these bigger questions of identity and purpose helped us to explore and connect the experiences and ideas that led to and influenced our teaching and goals, and particularly resonated with my poet-self.

One of the courses I teach is a junior-level, community-based, fully online, general education course. Designed by a team as part of an innovation grant, its intent was to offer more experiential and community-based learning opportunities for University Studies students and to provide an online pathway at the junior level of the program. This has been a challenging course to teach because it is so different from traditional courses, and, like most general education classes, students' experience levels and goals are broad and diverse. During one session of the Art of Teaching workshop, I wrote the following in response to the prompt "Describe a time when you felt most alive in your work/place."

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> I'm teaching a course that is new and outside my area of expertise. Because of it not being content-focused (but, rather a service-learning course) and because it is so new, I've been putting most of my "teaching" efforts into modelling and facilitating. My expertise in this class comes from my own experience in service. As a result, I've felt compelled to participate almost like another student, sharing my own stories and feelings, being very open and personal in a way I've never felt comfortable with before. Part of this is because these students are upperclassmen and some of them are my peers in terms of age and life experience. The power dynamics feel different. As I've tried to figure out what to say to them—needing to be helpful, wise, fulfill learning goals, I've found a new vulnerability. Reading their reflections is bringing up stuff I've forgotten or not revisited from twenty years ago. I'm remembering especially mistakes I made. Big ones that sort of haunt me. This, too, contributes to my sense of feeling open, flawed, fallible. In some ways the tenderness seems fertile, like if I am careful with it and don't let myself shut down around it, it could lead to an opening up—it's a place where reflection can happen. I think we're less able or likely to reflect when we're feeling really confident and comfortable. There's no need.

These types of reflections revealed important insights about myself as a person and instructor, the flaws in some of my assumptions about what is valuable to my teaching, about the necessity of vulnerability and risk-taking to learning, and about CSR itself. I was able to remember and relate to the experience of my students. I was reminded of my own introduction to CSR as an undergraduate in Women's Studies classes, and my early career in social service. Through these reflections, I could see my relationship and connection to my students and the coursework more clearly, not just in terms of who/where I am now, but who/where I was early in my career, just out of college, where my students were soon to find themselves. Though it was valuable in terms of content and technique, it also tapped into my personal history, surfacing my own narratives and tacit knowledge that I could use to connect my teaching to my students. Additionally, I could see how the sum of these experiences made me the unique teacher I am, and saw how my teaching aligned with my goals, interests, skills, and experiences. I saw how teaching from this "whole self" served my students, and also how using these kinds of reflections might help them in their own lives, connecting service, coursework, career and personal goals to discover their purpose.

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Because this was a series of workshops that occurred over a period of time, I developed my practice beyond the one-day workshops, and I was able to return to some of the murkier, more complicated conflicts and struggles I was having inside and outside my teaching.

The CSR work I've assigned to my students has been a reminder that they are not blank slates either. Their personal histories and future goals are important to provide both context and content of their learning, and that of the learning community. Additionally, sharing my own reflection and risk-taking, being open about different facets of my life, and drawing connections between these, my students, and the topics of the course, while encouraging students to do the same, helped me to humanize the sometimes sterile online learning environment to one that feels more intimate, peopled with specific and complex individuals.

Remaining Flexible to Stay Steady: Internal Challenges to Critical Reflection

As many authors have noted, and we discovered in our experiences, there are a variety of reasons students may not have the transformative epiphanies we hope to see (Brookfield, 1995; Finlay, 2008; Fouberg, 2000; Park, 2003). CR is open-ended and risky for both students and teachers. It's hard to "teach" or explain. It is non-linear. It requires a particularly open mindset that takes time to develop. There are no right answers, and sometimes the "product" doesn't yield much new knowledge. Students may resent it as busy-work, use it to justify or support preconceptions, may be unsettled by findings, or feel disempowered by new revelations. We recognized from our experience that CR can be emotionally taxing and takes patience, flexibility, and careful scaffolding. Because of this, it is important for general education teachers to hold space for it in our curricula, to practice it alongside students and in collaboration with colleagues.

Shobe realized, in his prompts for reflective journal writing, that he had to negotiate a balance between tasks that are, "too trivial or easy" and those that "challenge students with difficult tasks too soon [that] can encourage feelings of helplessness and a desire to avoid the assignment" (Fouberg, 2000, pp. 198–199): "I found that paying close attention to the specific needs and abilities of students is key to the successful use of learning journals."

Similarly, Bergland cited a lack of depth in some of her students' reflections:

> I've struggled to help students who seem unwilling to do more than the bare minimum, or are unable to move past vague, general, or surface level reflection, repeating themselves or landing on clichés and bromides instead of new insights. I have found it important to remember that students, especially in general education courses, represent diverse backgrounds, learning styles, expectations, and levels of experience. As a

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general educator of undergraduates, sometimes I am harvesting, sometimes I am pruning, sometimes I am fertilizing, and sometimes I am just getting the ground ready for seed.

The process of examining power and privilege was new to many of Trinidad's students, and was further complicated by the position and power dynamics related to authority, discipline, and race:

> For some, it was their first time being introduced to such concepts, especially facilitated by a WPOC. I found students of color and from the social sciences and humanities embracing the process—feeling refreshed to reclaim cultural or social identities and positionalities that have been repressed in their lives, and transformed by the critical awareness harnessed through critical reflection. On the other hand, students from the dominant social groups found such processes annoying, distracting, and irrelevant. Particularly, students who majored in the hard sciences, business, and engineering found this process challenging, indicating that in their work, "we need not worry about human experiences." What helped me reconcile and face this contradiction was a realization that critical awareness was going to take time among such students. It was a systemic condition of schooling—students up to this point in their education had limited opportunities to examine one's power and privilege.

Trinidad also found the need to remain open and flexible in response to evolving contexts. Trinidad found,

> Humanizing the Design Thinking framework presented challenges for me as I engaged with this particular subgroup of students. The blind spots in understanding the human conditions related to poverty needed to be unpacked. In general, as an instructor, I constantly reminded myself that knowledge building and production is transformative and may need time, more so with some. It required me to internalize the fact that it was my responsibility to make space for and validate diverse reactions and behaviors along the way.

Creating an Environment for Critical Reflection: External Challenges

Neoliberalism and corporatization of education, as well as the focus on testing and measurable outcomes, have created an environment stifling to creativity and risk-taking, in general. In addition, teaching and learning have taken a backseat in the competitive and pressurized setting of academia focused

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on publication and prestige within siloed fields rather than on growth and development as teachers. In this environment CR, collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and general education are undervalued. Elevating the scholarship of teaching and learning at an institutional level and seeing general education more holistically would create an environment more conducive to CR. Additionally, faculty development is often focused on techniques, methods, and fixing, whereas CR privileges process, is reiterative, and occurs over time. To foster CR, departments and programs should offer CR-based development opportunities and trainings like those mentioned in this article.

We encourage faculty to learn more by reading any of the excellent books and articles that have been written on CR, to seek out more opportunities to support and practice CR in workshops and trainings, and to engage in CR informally on their own and/or in collaborations with other like-minded faculty or professionals, including those outside one's field or department. As Trinidad notes, collaborating with community partners was important to applying the concepts of CIPP, supporting her in her own CR process, as well sustaining the CR practices in her course. Bergland has further integrated CR into her professional life, meeting quarterly with a professor from another department, to practice CSR about their teaching and goals in dialog with one another and serving on one another's "personal board of directors." Indeed, the writing of this article provided an opportunity for the three of us to share and critically reflect together as a diverse and interdisciplinary group, a rich learning experience for us as teachers and professionals.

Connecting and Reimagining: How Critical Reflection is Important to General Education

Our job as general educators is to draw connections between concepts and methods across disciplines. Included in the building of this web of knowledge are the perspectives, learning experiences, and goals of the student. Both Palmer (2007) and Brookfield (1995) acknowledge the role of teaching as a connective activity "creating connections between educational processes, students' experiences of learning, and what they feel are important concerns in their lives [. . .]" (Brookfield, p. 43). Critical Reflection is a process to reveal these connections.

Fundamental to the goals and purpose of higher education is the ability to break out of one's own "frame of reference" to think for one's self, to examine one's life, thoughts, knowledge, and actions in their political and social contexts; abilities that are, as Mezirow (1998) points out, "essential in the world of work, in functioning as a citizen in a democracy, and in making responsible moral decisions in fast-changing societies" (para. 35). He further notes that

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CR involves imagination and "the capacity to seek out alternatives and look at things as they could be otherwise [. . .]" (para. 3). In other words CR combines critical thinking and creativity, two values echoed in the habits of mind and capacities outlined in the VALUE Rubrics of the Association of American Colleges & Universities, and in the University Studies program learning goals. Additionally, as we are preparing students for procuring and succeeding in the workforce, the metacognitive moves of CR that connect experience to knowledge are very practical. It employs the ability to illustrate their skills and distill insights from recalled experiences. In essence, students are flexing the same muscles they are asked to use when writing cover letters, completing work portfolios, preparing for performance reviews, and when being interviewed.

Brookfield (1995) reminds us that it is important for teachers to engage in CR alongside our students, where we can work from "a position of informed commitment" (p. 23), allowing us to make more clear for ourselves and our students what we are teaching and why, building trust, and establishing credibility. Because teaching and learning are ongoing processes, our methods and rationales must evolve in response to changing contexts. As educators, we must begin with and return to the questions: Who are the people in this class and what do they need from it? It can be easy to slide into and remain in our comfort zones as experts in our fields, teaching the way we were taught and the content we are most familiar with. But we are not just geographers, poets, or social workers; we have much more to bring to the table.

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