REFLECTIONS
NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

General Submissions
Teaching and Learning Reflections

Cover Art by Robin Richesson

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Letter from the Outgoing Editors

Julie Cooper Altman, Michael A. Dover, Priscilla Gibson, Arlene F. Reilly-Sandoval, and Johanna Slivinske (with Rebecca Krenz)

Abstract: This is the letter from the editors for Volume 24#3, the final issue edited by the 2017-2018 co-editors. This letter is written by the outgoing 2017-2018 co-editors, and includes article summaries written by Rebecca Krenz, MSW-Candidate and 2018-2019 *Reflections* graduate assistant.

This is the final Letter from the Editors of the 2017-2018 editors. We call ourselves the 'outgoing editors' in order to stress a very significant moment for this journal: the commencement of the editorship of Darlyne Bailey, Professor and Dean Emeritus at the Bryn Mawr College Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research. As Editor-in-Chief, the next issue of the journal, Volume 24, Number 4, Fall 2018, will fully complete the editorial transition to Darlyne and her editorial team.

This issue contains the final six manuscripts for which the editorial decisions were made under the 2017-2018 Co-Editors. The 2017-2018 editors oversaw the journal for the five issues from Volume 23, Number 3 (Summer 2017) to Volume 24, Number 3 (Summer 2018.) They succeeded the editorship of Michael A. Dover from Volume 18, Number 2 until Volume 23, Number 2. Significantly, the work of the co-editors established the first time that editorial leadership of the journal came from outside the university hosting and publishing the journal.

From Volume 1, Number 1 until Volume 18, Number 1, the journal was published at California State University Long Beach. The journal was founded by Sonia Leib Abels, a former Cleveland State University faculty member. Sonia relocated from Cleveland to the Los Angeles area in 1994 with her husband, Paul Abels, former Associate Dean of the Case Western Reserve University Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences. As director of the School of Social Work, Paul sought and obtained the support of the faculty to host such a journal. As someone with a strong background in narrative approaches to social work practice, the vision of the founding editor, Sonia Leib Abel, was to publish an interdisciplinary journal of narratives of professional, beginning with Volume 1, Number 1 in Winter 1995.

Sonia's vision determined the title of the journal and has set a tradition that has been followed since that time. Paul and Sonia Abels continue to reside in Los Angeles. They saw the transition to Jillian Jimenez as editor beginning Volume 5, Number 1 in 1999. Following the death of Jillian in October 2009, Eileen Mayers Pasztor assumed the editorship as of Volume 16, Number 4. It should be pointed out that at two key times in the history of the journal, long-time Associate Editor Rebecca Lopez stepped forward to ensure the continuity of this journal. The key role of the respective directors and the faculty of the California State University Long Beach School of Social Work will long be remembered by the readers and authors of this journal.

Their support for the journal by that school continues today in two key ways. With the support of Nancy Meyer-Adams, Director, the School is one of the Publishing Partners of the journal, along with University Georgia School of Social Work, Howard University School of Social Work and Monmouth University School of Social Work. Also, California State University Long Beach Professor of Art Robin Richesson has stayed with the journal since its transition to being published beginning May 2012 by Cleveland State University School of Social Work.

Although since that time the journal has been published online, the journal has retained the same look and feel, by and large, and most important has done through though the cover page illustrations done by or overseen by Robin. We are so pleased that this has continued one important part of the journal's tradition.

The art for this issue, created by Robin Richesson, was inspired by author Meagan A. Hoff's article, "A Focus on Becoming: Reflections on Teaching" Meagen briefly describes seeing two girls peering through a window, when going to collect them for a summer camp for refugee girls. According to Robin, "This image struck me as a metaphor for the way we see one another, but due to cultural bias, emotional issues, and language barriers, we can't always communicate or empathize as we hope to. The glass, with its reflections, is that invisible barrier, obscuring the emotional life of the girls from their teacher."

We, the outgoing co-editors, have been honored to have served as co-editors during the important transition to the journals fifth editor, Darlyne Bailey! Amongst those co-editors, we would like to acknowledge the primary role of Arlene Reilly-Sandoval, who personally oversaw the editorial decisions beginning Fall 2018. This freed up one of us, Michael Dover, to focus his attentions on the duties of Publisher and to help facilitate the editorial transition to Darlyne's editorship. The editor makes all editorial decisions, determines issue content, and approves all final issue galley proofs, but the articles are assembled into and issue on publishing end (which involves copy editing, proofreading, issue assembly, website maintenance, and fund-raising.)

The co-editors would also like to thank Carol L. Langer for taking over the Learning and Teaching Section from Arlene during the period of our co-editorship, as this facilitated Arlene's crucial role among we co-editors.

We look forward to the next issue of the journal for more information about the exciting developments planned by Darlyne and her Associate Editors Monica Leisey (Salem State University) and F. Ellen Netting (Virginia Commonwealth University), and by her Assistant Editor Kelly McNally Koney.

Finally, the co-editors would like to thank two persons whose skills have immeasurably helped ensure a quality journal during our time as co-editors. Tara Peters, MSW, MA (English) was the 2017-2018 Graduate Assistant, as appointed by Cathleen Lewandowski, Professor and Director of the School of Social Work. Since she graduated, Tara has been appointed the journal's Copy Editor and will continue in that role as part of the publication of the journal. She has established a strong foundation for the continued improvement of the quality of the narratives as published. Assisting with that process this year is the 2018-2019 Graduate Assistant, Rebecca Krenz, BSW.

Before introducing Rebecca, we would like to thank Dean Gregory Sadlek of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. Dean Sadlek has from the start strongly supported the value of the journal. Upon the recommendation of former Director Murali Nair and current Director Cathleen Lewandowski, he has approved allocations which have permitted a Graduate Assistant assigned each year since 2013-2014 to the Journal, as well as an annual course release to Prof. Michael Dover for his work on the journal, first as editor and then as publisher.

Rebecca Krenz, this year's Graduate Assistant, is a student leader in her own right, with CSU's HYPE team, an on-campus certified peer education group, that helps to develop leadership, communication, intervention and referral skills to facilitate healthy decision making and role-modeling. She has already played a key role in helping publish this issue. We would like to acknowledge the role she played, for instance, in writing the below summaries of each of the narratives in this issue. Enough about the journal, let's go to the heart of the matter, the narratives in this issue!

"Brit Think, American Think" by Paul G. Johnson

Do Americans have a flawed system by which we practice social work? Does the United Kingdom have a better strategy to allow social work students to graduate with out drowning in student loan debt? The issues faced by social workers in the United States are not specific to our own country. So why not look internationally for solutions to the shortcomings in our own practice? These are conundrums Paul G. Johnson addresses in "Brit Think, American Think." Starting practice in United Kingdom, Paul now resides and practices social work in the state of Maine. Paul explains how education and experience in the U.K. allows comparison with how social workers function in the United States in both practice and educational settings. We may find the answers to the issues which plight our personal practice on the micro, mezzo, and macro level, by viewing the solution from a international standpoint.

"Becoming Competent to Teach Competence: Learning and Teaching Relational Process" by Lance Taylor Peterson

In therapeutic settings all helping professionals work to understand the development of the 'unsaid' between clients during sessions, specifically in couple and family practice. Lance Taylor Peterson refers to this as noticing and attending to relational process, in the article "Becoming Competent to Teach Competence: Learning and Teaching Relational Process." Lance explains how we as social workers must learn to see the process as it unfolds, and in turn help our clients objectively see their own process as a teaching moment which can strengthen interpersonal relationships outside of therapy. The dilemma is how does a seasoned clinician teach this skill to a novice social worker in an academic setting? Lance explains the theoretical obstacles encountered when teaching students through experiential activities. Lance would have the students video-record role-play scenarios, and give audio feedback. One day Lance's own relational process became apparent. Lance recounts the discovery, when working with students, that just 'being' a social work practitioner continually develops this skill in examination of one's own relational process.

"An Innovative Approach for Learning Self-Awareness and Nonverbal Communication: Horses for Healers" by JoAnn Jarolmen

Non-verbal communication presented in the therapeutic context presents opportunities for comprehension that can contribute to understanding client needs. Academia spends much time fine-tuning social work student verbal communication skills for optimal outcomes during future client interaction. But how often is body language or personal space talked about in the classroom? What is the most effective way to teach non-verbal material for practical application? JoAnn Jarolmen describes how to tackles this important, yet often forgotten, topic. JoAnn does this through her narrative of a Horses for Healers program which helps students become physically self-aware. JoAnn describes watching students have personal breakthroughs with the horses. In the process, the students realize how they can apply this knowledge with clients who may have verbal barriers of communication. By adding this experiential and didactic component to the course material, JoAnn was able to emphasize the need for self-awareness in practice to best help clients.

"A Focus on Becoming: Reflections on Teaching" by Meagan A. Hoff

Our personal narratives and presumptions about others greatly limit our capacity to meet out clients where they are. Many times we have preconceived notions about how our clients should show up and what it means if they do not. Instead these self-constructed narratives about others inhibits our clients from telling their own stories, and we miss the greatest opportunities to provide the services we initially intend to offer. Megan A. Hoff discusses the experience of working at a summer camp for Syrian refugees. Megan reflects back on the experience to explain the personal process of learning to humanize pedagogy by questioning what is said and done with clients. "A Focus on Becoming: Reflections on Teaching" tells a story of a social worker trying to help clients around the always difficulty issue of assimilation. After struggling with administrative pressures and personal frustration, Megan has a heart-warming, eye-opening moment. This culmination of a process of honest reflections on teaching practices is of value to educators in the helping professions interested in what Megan calls the journey to critical consciousness.

"To Bracket or Not to Bracket: Reflections of a Novice Qualitative Researcher" by Bibi Baksh

As social workers we cannot forget the importance of research. During our time in school we spend much time studying core components of social work practiced in the community, but we do not study the community which we learn in. Bibi Baksh speaks on personal research findings of a qualitative research project completed with four other PhD students, in the article "To Bracket or Not to Bracket: Reflections of a Novice Qualitative Researcher". Baksh and colleagues used critical race theory and phenomenology to sift through the appearance of racism in the classroom. Bibi walks us through this experience, which included feelings of dichotomy when pondering both bracketing and reflexivity congruently during the research process. Bibi's reflection gives an account of the self-insight discovered while conducting a research study. This leaves the reader with more questions to be answered, which is the sign of a solid narrative.

"A Night to Remember: An Autoethnographic Window into Facilitating a Dinner Stories Event for Healthcare Workers" by Susan Breiddal

Just like our clients, we as counselors need to find places to tell our stories for emotional support. This is exactly what Susan Breiddal set out to do one evening. In "A Night to Remember: An Autoethnographic Window into Facilitating a Dinner Stories Event for Healthcare Workers," Susan narrates an evening where a group of colleagues become the therapeutic group for themselves, sharing the burdens and bright spots of their practice. When facilitating any group of people, one must exemplify the specific skills needed to create a therapeutic alliance by: establishing rapport, creating a safe space for deep emotion, modeling vulnerability, engaging participants, and ensuring physical and emotional comfort through out the session. After some light chatter, Susan starts the night off by telling a story, one which shares relational and emotional vulnerability. The story is about a hospice client who left an lasting impact of Susan's life. This narrative exemplifies the humble moments we often experience with our clients, moments when our hearts are touched. But afterwards we can often find there is no one to connect with about the emotional burden we helping professionals work. Sometimes the things we do for personal self-care cannot fulfill the emotional support requirements that professional self-care involves. Susan's narrative of an evening for dinner, comradery, and story telling examines a new approach to fulfilling professional self-care.

About the Editors: The outgoing 2017-2018 editors are: Julie Cooper Altman, PhD (California State University Monterrey); Michael A. Dover, PhD (Cleveland State University); Priscilla Gibson, PhD (University of Minnesota); Arlene F. Reilly-Sandoval, Phd (Colorado State University Pueblo); Johanna Slivinske, MSW (Youngstown State University). Rebecca Krenz, MSW-Candidate, is the 2018-2018 Graduate Assistant for Reflections.

Brit Think, American Think

Paul G. Johnson

Abstract: This paper looks at the author's experiences of his undergraduate education, master's education, and early social work career in the United Kingdom, and it discusses his eventual emigration to the United States. He reveals that, despite what he had read and seen on television, living and working in the United States was extremely difficult. The author writes about his belief that the United States was not a welcoming country and about his observation that a negative view is held of those who require social work services. After ten years as a social worker, the author assumed a career in higher education. In that environment, he soon discovered that the philosophy of "more is better" regarding the number of required credit hours was in stark contrast to his experience in the United Kingdom, where fewer credit requirements allowed for greater depth in learning. Finally, the author provides some suggestions on what could be done to improve the profession and its education requirements in the United States.

Keywords: social work profession, social work education, general education, community, social care.

Introduction

This paper looks at my experiences--good, bad, and indifferent--living and working as a social worker and college professor in the United States. I reflect on working in a country where I was not raised or educated and how, at times, this has been confusing and exasperating. Frequently, I have found myself thinking that in the United Kingdom we would have dealt with things differently, even though I have lived in the United States for 32 years and love living in the state of Maine and teaching at the University of Southern Maine in the School of Social Work. As stated by Doel, Shardlow, and Johnson (2011):

> One of the greatest strengths and beauties of the United States is not only its geographical diversity but also its human diversity. This vast range of differences among groups includes those related to age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual identity. (p. 230)

I am cognizant of the fact that, at times, I perceive things differently from my colleagues and friends. You can take the man out of the United Kingdom, but you can't take the Brit out of the man. Sometimes, I feel as if I am living in two worlds. Physically, I am here in the United States, but internally, I still think and feel like a Brit. Indeed, many of my friends refer to me as the "Limey."

Welcome to the United States

In 1986, I emigrated to the United States. The first social work position I took was working at a 52-bed intermediate care facility for dual-diagnosed individuals located in Bronx, NY. Prior to emigrating to the United States, I had worked as a residential and intake social worker in the

United Kingdom. Hence, I thought that this knowledge and background would hold me in good stead in assuming this position. However, I quickly learned that the priority was not the residents; rather, it was ensuring that the program met compliance standards. According to the direct care staff who worked at the program, the facility had been without a full-time social worker for over a year. Initially, I could not understand why this had occurred; however, it soon became very apparent why this situation had perpetuated for so long.

The immediate concern of the program was not that I got to know the individuals who resided at the facility; rather, they were more concerned with state and federal regulations and the need for bio-psycho-socials to be written on all 52 residents. It was pointed out to me that if these evaluations were not in compliance, then the program could lose funding. This paramount concern left me feeling very confused and disillusioned. When I had worked in residential social work in the United Kingdom, my overriding responsibility was the well-being of the residents. I was in their home. It was my obligation to ensure that I took care of them. It was as if my personal, as well as my professional, values were being challenged to the core.

Doel (2016) eloquently captured this dichotomy in the following statement:

> The dilemmas that social workers face are often associated with conflicts in values. These stem from both within the profession because of the elusive, complex and contested nature of social work and its purposes and from the frictions between various social systems. Some conflicts play out within the individual as he or she tries to determine which of the two or more values should triumph when each would lead to a different course of action. Other value conflicts arise between your own and those of other people--colleagues, service users, the management of the agency, the law, etc. (p. 47)

For me, this was my first insight into how programs and services were funded in the United States. In the United Kingdom, most programs were funded by local authorities. There was a consensus or philosophy in the United Kingdom that it was the local authority's responsibility, indeed obligation, to take care of mentally or physically challenged individuals in one's community. However, in the United States this was not the dominant philosophy; rather, there was an attitude that even while these individuals were deserving, one still had to justify the programs and services that were being administered. In other words, at any point, these services could be drastically reduced or even eliminated.

This was a very different experience compared to my work and education in the United Kingdom. The services were not being directed by the service user; rather, there were external constituents who were determining what could and could not be done. For example, there was much more documentation in the United States. Everything had to be justified or accounted for. In the 52-bed facility that I worked in, each resident had an individual treatment plan that listed, in specific detail, the goals the staff were expected to work on with each resident.

Another issue that I found extremely frustrating was the fragmentation of services. For instance, many of the residents at the facility also attended a day treatment program that was under the

control of the same agency, yet it was as if they were two different entities. My work was further complicated when a resident required medical attention. I still recall vividly accompanying one of the residents to the hospital where he ended up spending two days on a gurney in a hospital corridor. It was as if the medical professionals were saying, "This isn't our problem." This was in stark contrast to my experience in the United Kingdom, where different programs and services worked in collaboration. For example, I recall a case I had while performing intake social work: A gentleman in his mid-50s, who had been referred to the local authority, needed hospitalization due to the fact that he had developed gangrene in one of his legs. The outcome was that the leg needed to be amputated. Once the medical procedure had been addressed, it was apparent to all that this gentleman could not return to his own two-story home. He would require some form of residential care that would need to address multiple issues, but at this point his medical and rehabilitative needs were priorities. Indeed, the hospital, social service agency, and rehabilitative program worked collaboratively to ensure that this gentleman got the care he required.

This firsthand experience brought home to me how vastly different the social welfare programs of the two countries were. In the United Kingdom, there was the concept of "from the cradle to the grave." In the United States, you were obligated to show need, and even then, it could be denied. In other words, there seemed to be a philosophy in the United States that one had to demonstrate that there was a need for services. The onus was on the service user to show why they were deserving of services. There was an underlying, almost unwritten, assumption that "people were trying to get away with something."

Although the aforementioned was my first direct experience with this model of social welfare in the early 1980s, I had worked at several summer camps in the United States for the mentally and physically challenged. I was profoundly impacted by the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy that seemed to accompany these individuals who attended summer camp. We had to ensure through the medical department at the camps that everything was documented. When I questioned this, I was informed that, unless this occurred, the camp and sponsoring agency could lose funding. Further, the program needed to demonstrate the services that had been provided to receive reimbursement. Therefore, even though the individuals who were attending the camps were deemed eligible for services, there was the need to continually show why certain services and programs were required. If one did not do so, then one was being dishonest and somehow inappropriately taking funds for which they were not eligible. The onus of responsibility was on the individual to show need.

Working and Living in the United States

However, this harsh reality was very different from the perception I had of the United States when living in the United Kingdom. Through television, movies, music, newspapers, and literature, the impression I had of the United States was that of being a very accepting, generous, warm, and tolerant country. This stark contradiction of seeing the United States from the outside and then living and working in it was very difficult to comprehend. Indeed, I would assert that there are many contradictions between how the world perceives the United States and how its citizens experience its numerous rules and regulations.

Again, I experienced this discrepancy on so many levels. Regarding the places where I worked as a social worker--in a residential treatment facility for mentally and physically challenged adults and in a foster care agency in New York City--I was amazed by not only how the programs treated the service users who came to the agency, but also how they treated the staff.

As noted earlier, prior to emigrating to the United States, I had worked as a residential social worker and an intake social worker. In both settings, I would assert that I was treated well. People were respected and valued; there was a great deal of concern and interest in the staff. I still recall how the team leader of an intake team of a local authority in England would always sit with the team. Whenever we would come back from a home visit, he would be available. However, in the United States, my impression was that employees were a dispensable commodity; they were there to do a job, and if they didn't do that job, well then, they could be replaced. Indeed, when I worked in child welfare, the average time for a social worker was two years. Hence, during the seven years I worked in foster care, I observed numerous social workers leave the agency.

I believe that this philosophy of dispensability also permeated the thoughts of the service users of the respective programs. I was struck by their often-dismissive comments of the fact that I was the seventh social worker they'd had, that all social workers come and go and that no one really takes them seriously. It was as if both the service users and social workers viewed themselves as undeserving, insignificant, and disposable. The service users felt they could not wholly depend upon the social worker, and the social worker had the feeling that whatever they did would be disregarded or forgotten at some point because of the lack of continuity.

Higher Education

Not only did I encounter this philosophy in my direct practice, but also when I began teaching in higher education. I have been fortunate enough to teach in three different university systems. One was a private university in New York and two were public universities (one in New York City and one in southern Maine). I must admit that I have really enjoyed teaching in all three of these settings. I have had the opportunity to teach numerous classes across the curriculum, as well as serve on various department, college, university, and state-wide committees. However, in each setting, the students impacted me profoundly. I was touched by their enthusiasm and willingness to participate in class, the time and effort they put into their written work, and, for many, the obstacles they had to overcome in order to get into college. For me, it has been a privilege getting to know them and being able to work with them.

However, over the course of my academic career, I have heard students frequently say to me that I treat them with respect, listen to their concerns, and show concern for their endeavors. My response is, "Of course I listen to you." However, they go on to assert that there are some faculty members who do not listen to students and that they should not question or challenge their instructors: "It is, 'Do it my way, or else!'" I get very upset when I hear students telling me this.

Throughout my own educational experiences, I can think of numerous teachers and college professors who went out of their way to help me. They listened to me. They encouraged me.

They supported me. They introduced me to people. They took me to conferences. They opened countless doors and provided me with so many opportunities. I have been so fortunate, and in doing all this for me, they ingrained in me a deep sense of responsibility that it was my obligation to treat all my students in the same manner. I needed to offer them the same opportunities that had been afforded to me. Hence, when I see or hear students being treated disrespectfully by some faculty, it causes me a great deal of inner turmoil and concern.

In social work, we talk about respecting our service users, being empathetic, actively listening, showing genuineness, expressing concern, and so forth. Are these just theoretical concepts or tenets of the profession that we really believe in and put into practice? Again, I notice some similarities here between what I encountered when working as a social worker in the field. Often, I have sided with or advocated for my students. There is disbelief on the students' part that I would advocate for them. This has often put me at odds with my colleagues who believe that I should take the faculty's position and that we should show a united front.

I am amazed at how dedicated and hardworking most students are. Many are working at least two jobs, have families, and have been working in residential social work or direct practice for several years. They have a great wealth of knowledge, expertise, and life experience. It has been my experience that if one taps into this, then one's classes can be exciting, invigorating, enriching, and enjoyable. However, for this to occur, one must be willing to surrender power and authority and turn the educational paradigm on its head. In other words, the students become the experts, not the teacher.

General Education

Another area of concern I have encountered in the United States in the undergraduate programs that I have worked in is the number of courses that students are required to take to graduate. There are general education courses, core classes, foundation courses, and social work classes. This is very different than my experience in my own undergraduate education in the United Kingdom, where I studied 12 classes in far more depth over the course of three academic years. In contrast, in the United States, students take four or five classes in different academic disciplines per semester for a 15-week period to gain 12 or 15 credits. The pedagogical approach that is adhered to in the United Kingdom--where students take the same four classes in the same academic discipline over an entire academic year of 30 weeks--provides the students with an opportunity to think and reflect about what they are learning in greater depth, which is in contrast to the United States philosophy of "more is better."

When teaching classes, I often feel as if we are just scratching the surface of the issue; there is never enough time to look at issues in any great depth or scrutiny. In contrast, when teaching at the master's level, students are only required to take social work classes, which enables one to look at the material in far more detail and depth and with a much more critical and reflective perspective. Instead of trying to consume the whole buffet, why not indulge in a few courses and have a deeper appreciation and understanding of the concepts that are being presented.

This also gets into the issue of the cost of higher education in the United States. I am frequently

horrified and stunned at the amount of student debt with which undergraduate and graduate students leave the university. At the University of Southern Maine, which is a public university, students often inform me that when they leave, they will be in debt between $40,000 and $50,000. It is my belief that these numbers are on the low side, and today we are talking about students graduating with debt around $100,000. These figures are terrifying. The median annual social worker (BSW) salary is $54,341, with a range usually between $48,076 and $60,908 (Salary.com, n.d.-a), and the median annual social worker (MSW) salary is $60,799, with a range usually between $54,748 and $67,349 (Salary.com, n.d.-b).

We need to come up with an improved method of enabling students to graduate with a degree that does not saddle them with crushing debt. I would assert that there are the following possibilities. First, when I was in social work school over 30 years ago, several of my peers were "sponsored" by their social work agencies to attend school. The arrangement was that after graduation they would return to the agency for several years. Second, why don't respective states say to students in social work that if they remain in the state after graduation for a certain number of years, they will forgive their student debt? Third, the Council of Social Work Education and the universities in which social work is taught need to be more proactive in getting the message out that social workers and social work education has numerous cost-saving benefits for the taxpayer and is beneficial to the entire community. This leads to the question of what kind of social work graduates and professionals do we require.

Generalist and Specialist Practice

Going back over half a century, Hollis and Taylor pointed to the "lack of adequate criteria for determining what is basic and what is specialized in social work" (as cited in Doel, Shardlow, & Johnson, 2011, p. 257) and considered this to be the main reason for the inability to develop a satisfactory social work curriculum. Bartlett (1970) noted that the concept of specialization is only valid "when there is a concept of a whole that can be divided into parts" and that social work's peculiar origins as "a profession growing through its parts" (p. 94) led to premature concepts of specialization. An aggregation can just as soon become desegregation. She declared that "practitioners not long in practice cannot be regarded as specialists because specialization rests on extended study and experience from which true expertise develops" (Bartlett, 1970, p. 195). Bartlett would, therefore, have considered the idea of developing a specialist area of practice as a social work student as premature.

Bartlett argued for greater discrimination in the use of the terms *generic* and *specific* and of the terms *basic* and *specialized*. Papell (1996) reminds us that the term *generic* first appeared in North American social work in the report of the Milford Conference in 1929, though only a single method (casework) was involved. "The recommendation was that education presented in the university was to be generic while the specialized knowledge needed in settings wherever casework was practiced--such as psychiatric, medical, child welfare--was to be taught in the field" (Papell, 1996, p. 16).

The division between specialist and generalist remains far from clear. The distinctions can be drawn along many different lines, depending upon time and place. Almost 50 years ago, Bartlett

noted that social workers were accustomed to thinking of their practice in terms of agencies, fields, and methods. She mused why it was proving so difficult for "social workers to take the necessary steps toward a perception of their practice as no longer fragmented" (Bartlett, 1970, p. 130).

In other words, there is an expectation at the advanced generalist level that the student will engage in more difficult practice tasks and, therefore, operate from an expanded knowledge base about individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. The advanced generalist must also develop increased skills to intervene in direct service provision with individuals, families, and groups at one end of the multi-level practice spectrum and, at the other end, address more complex indirect practice situations such as supervision, administration, policy, and program evaluation.

The question remains, why is the profession of social work so confused, even obsessed about the terms "generalist" and "specialist"? If one looks back at the settlement house movement and Jane Addams' establishment of Hull House in Chicago, the whole premise was that individual work, family work, group work, community work, and so forth were all integrated. Indeed, many of the pioneers of the profession advocated for social change, changes in the law, and social protection. They also asserted that poverty was a structural problem and required fundamental measures and social change to be eradicated.

Yet, almost 150 years later, we are still having this debate about generalist and specialist. The Council on Social Work Education, universities, licensure boards, social work agencies, and social workers still appear to have conflicting views of generalist and specialist. I would even assert that many see generalist as inferior.

However, if we could view the term "specialist" from the perspective of having greater in-depth understanding or knowledge of the problem or issue rather than using the term clinically, I believe this would be a healthier and more productive approach.

I have already mentioned that I worked in the United States in a residential program for mentally and physically challenged adults and in a foster care agency. It often occurred or was implied that this work was not clinical enough. I really had a challenging time--and still do--understanding what was being implied, because I was doing some of the following in both settings: individual work, family work, group work, and community work. The work was often complicated and exasperating, yet, somehow, because I was not doing a 45-minute therapy session, this work was not as important.

Community Centers

What needs to be done? When I was an undergraduate student in the United Kingdom in the town of Middlesbrough, there was a community center. Every day this center was utilized for some of the following: daycare, lunch groups for the elderly, afternoon tea club, sports events, and evening socials for dances, parties, and so forth. The center was managed by one person but had many paid and unpaid staff. It was open seven days a week for at least 12-15 hours each

day.

Specht and Courtney (1994) talk about community service centers as providing care that is universal and available to everyone, is comprehensive and includes multiple services in one location, and is easily accessible (p.152). The wonderful aspect of the community center in Middlesbrough was that it was located right in the middle of town, so it was accessible to all.

I now live in the town of Brunswick, Maine. It is a beautiful town with a great downtown area. There is a building that is right in the middle of town called Senter Place. This would be an excellent location for a community center. In one location, many community-based services and programs could be provided. The community center also does away with the stigma of providing services. Again, there is still a notion that these programs are only for the poor and disreputable and that social services should be provided to people in the most unattractive way (Specht and Courtney, 1994, p.153).

Unfortunately, in 2018 this negative notion still seems to dominate. In 2015, the Department of Health and Human Services in Portland, Maine was moved from Marginal Way, which was in the center of town and was accessible by car and regular public transportation, to a location outside of town near the Portland Jetport. It is difficult to get to this location, and there are few shops or other amenities in the area. Again, this illustrates that the notion of helping one another has a negative stigma attached to it: People who require services have individual weaknesses and are attempting to exploit the system, and these individuals need to be dealt with in a harsh and punitive manner.

Let's return to the settlement house movement, which began in the United Kingdom in the 1800s with the establishment of Toynbee Hall in London's East End. The settlements provided child care, health clinics, and numerous classes in dance, arts, culture, and domestic sciences. In the 1890s, Jane Addams established Hull House, which was based on Toynbee Hall. According to Specht and Courtney (1994):

> Hull House was in the heart of a crowded working-class neighborhood filled with immigrants from Greece, Italy, and Germany. They started with readings and discussions and showing slides of Florence art. By 1893, there were some forty clubs and other activities including a day nursery, gymnasium, dispensary, and playground. Later they added an art gallery, a little theater, and a music school. The settlers at Hull House associated themselves with many social reform movements; they were defenders of organized labor, they supported such causes as the outlawing of child labor, and they fought for women's suffrage. (p. 82)

Hence, if we were to develop community centers all over the country that were easily accessible; provided numerous services and programs under one roof; were staffed by social workers, teachers, doctors, nurses, police officers, lawyers, and recreational therapists; and offered an array of services and programs that were open to all, I think this would be a more creative solution. This model also gets the social work profession to turn away from focusing on the individual and to look at the environmental issues and how, through community and working

together, we can address issues and concerns in a constructive and positive way.

Conclusion

While I love living in the United States, particularly in the state of Maine, I do have to concede that, at times, being a social worker, and now a university professor, many difficult ethical questions have been raised for me. I realize that, often, I am in the minority when I say that I have some concerns about private practice. I have openly stated this to students in class and acknowledge that this is my personal view and is not shared by the profession.

I also accept that I am very troubled that social workers in the United States are not more actively involved in issues of social and economic justice. Even though the Council on Social Work Education states: "The purpose of social work is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice" (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 5). The dominant philosophy is that of individual work. Somehow, group work and community social work have become appendages. Students have also become savvy to this, saying that they only want to take classes that will enable them to take their licensure exams. Courses in policy, child welfare, elderly, homelessness, group work, and so forth are very nice, but they do not help them prepare for their state examinations.

My dilemma is that I wish the United States social work profession and education system could be more like the United Kingdom's. A system like that would prepare all its undergraduates and graduates to work with diverse populations, groups, and communities, and it would provide them with an opportunity to look at these issues in far more depth and with greater meticulousness than just a series of three-credit courses one must complete to graduate.

I also strongly believe that the profession of social work needs to embrace the concept of social care. Over the past 18 months of the Trump administration, we have heard more and more about the importance of the individual. "Putting America first" is one of President Trump's slogans. However, this individualistic notion does not work. We all do much better when we work in a system of social care that is truly community based. We need to go back to the roots of our profession and embrace what Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Sophonisba Breckinridge, John Dewey, William James, Octavia Hill, Edith and Grace Abbott, James Ruskin, and Beatrice and Sidney Webb were advocating in community work.

It is through a community that services are offered to everyone. We must attempt to get away from the notion that social services are only intended for the less deserving and that there is a negative stigma attached to those who utilize these services. The profession of social work needs to embrace and advocate the notion that services are universal.

At the time of writing this paper, the headline on the front of the Sunday Review section of The New York Times reads: "When History Repeats." Kakutani (2018) writes about the incarceration of her mother's family in an internment camp during World War II, and she writes about how history is repeating itself with the current detention of families near the Mexican border:

Today in America under President Trump, the news is filled with pictures and stories of families and children being held in detention centers, and reports that the Pentagon is preparing to house as many as 20,000 "undocumented alien children" on American military bases. (p. SR1)

If this issue doesn't muster us as a profession and demonstrate that we need to reconceptualize ourselves and do things differently, then I don't know what will! I believe we need to get back to our core roots of Toynbee Hall and Hull House. As asserted, over the past 100 years, the service users who we are committed to have faced numerous complex issues, which require us as a profession to continually evaluate and reinvent ourselves. In many respects, the current situation in the United States has provided the profession of social work with an opportunity to reexamine itself, or, at the very least, question how it goes about serving the populations it proposes to serve.

In March 2018, the School of Social Work at the University of Southern Maine attended Social Work Lobby Day at the State House in Augusta, ME. The school was awarded, through the Maine and National Educational Association, a social justice pop-up grant. Through this grant, we were able to take approximately 60 students to meet with state representatives from both chambers. What was so wonderful about the event was that many of the legislators who the students met were social workers. They talked passionately about the need for social workers to get more involved in local and state government and, therefore, bring a greater social work understanding and perspective to the legislature.

While this approach is going to meet with a great deal of resistance and opposition from both inside and outside the profession, I believe the only way in which we are going to seriously address social justice and economic problems is through a model of community-based social care. We need to be committed to a collective approach rather than a model of individual repair.

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Becoming Competent to Teach Competence: Learning and Teaching Relational Process

Lance Taylor Peterson

Abstract: Though never comfortable with the term competency, I reluctantly accepted it as a way to teach *noticing and attending to relational process* (NARP) for couple and family social work practice. Didactic training combined with experiential activities of video-recorded role-play and audio-recorded feedback comprised my strategy. Although this teaching approach seemed successful, I struggled theoretically with competency, and my ideas morphed through ongoing practice, teaching, and research experiences. I eventually concluded that NARP was not a single competency but was best characterized as "ways of being" as a social work practitioner; I consequently worked to become more articulate and transparent in the classroom. Informed by constructivist pedagogy and relational ontology, I use the following reflection to immerse myself in an ongoing dialogue to understand how my own and my students' unique discourses shape NARP.

Keywords: dialogical analysis, family therapy, competence, constructivist pedagogy, experiential learning

I use this reflection to identify what I have learned about noticing process in relational therapy (which, for this reflection, is synonymous with systemic therapy and family therapy), both as a practitioner and educator. *Process* refers to communication patterns between couples or family members: the spoken words combined with body language, emotions, and meaning contained in the utterance (Conwell, 2014; Davis & Piercy, 2007a, 2007b). For example, when a woman becomes frustrated with her partner for not listening to her request to stop a certain behavior, she might say, in a frustrated tone while sitting back in her chair and looking away with her arms folded, "Just do what you want to do!" Her words alone might signal that she's giving her partner free reign to do what he wants. Her tone and body language, however, signal that she is resigned to abandoning the conversation, but she remains resentful due to feeling unheard. When clinicians attune to communication patterns like this one between couples and families in the present moment (i.e., in the counseling room or another setting), I refer to this as noticing process (Peterson, Jones, & Salscheider, 2016). Such processes reveal crucial relationship concerns requiring therapist engagement for successful therapy (Nichols, 2013).

I draw from dialogical analysis to inform this reflection, which combines discourse and narrative approaches to understand human phenomena (Sullivan, 2012). I have recently used this qualitative analytic tool to make sense of discourses informing the emergence of student competencies for *noticing and attending to relational process* (NARP) after they conduct video-recorded role-play exercises and receive audio-recorded feedback (Peterson, Murphy, & Grandt, 2018). Dialogical analysis employs genre, discourse, and rhetorical features of language. I reduce this reflection to emphasize discourse, which "consists of a multiplicity of speaking voices that express and respond to value judgments in their articulation of a point of view" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 44). Throughout this narrative, I will use this definition to reference "voices" and "discourse" that shape my viewpoint and my students' viewpoints about NARP. I am also informed in this narrative by the constructivist pedagogical principle of meaning-making

(Jonassen, Howland, Moore, & Marra, 2003). I aim to illustrate how my students and I make sense of student peer role-play experiences combined with my audio feedback. While this emphasis could focus on several different principles of relational therapy, I focus on noticing process. To preface this meaning-making journey, I start with an experience as a therapist that catalyzed my devotion to this topic.

The experience was seven years ago. I was in my second semester of full-time teaching in our MSW program, and I was a part-time practicing therapist. I was in a session with a mother and her two adult children, the oldest a daughter and the younger a son. I was overcome with judgment toward the son for his seeming lack of empathy toward his mother, who was expressing anxiety related to a recent family event. This voice of judgment was in competition with another one to be neutral. These two voices became my inner dialogue during the session. At the end of the hour, the oldest daughter encouraged her younger brother to back off from his expectations of their mother. I quickly supported the oldest daughter, allowing the discourse to be shaped by my judgment. "I agree!" I said.

The family did not return to therapy. Though I never discovered the reason, I am inclined to believe that creating a potential split alliance (Escudero, Boogmans, Loots, & Friedlander, 2012) by agreeing with the oldest daughter may have been the cause. Immediately after the session, I knew I had stumbled, and I began critically reflecting on it. Despite my belief of wrongdoing, I struggled to identify a potential corrective course of future action. The session pervaded my thoughts for several days until I had an epiphany. *If I would have more subtly pointed out to the son the anxiety his mother was experiencing in session and helped his mother to continue to articulate her anxious experience to the son, then*--pause and think--*Oh! THAT'S what it means to notice process!* I began a transformative learning experience, which shaped a new discourse about relational therapy.

Though I had practiced therapy for eight years prior to this event, it wasn't until then that I understood what it meant to notice process in session. Some may be surprised that I felt no shame in my epiphany. I had heard of noticing process prior to this incident, but I was clueless as to its meaning. I found it abstract and poorly described. Discourses about this topic vaguely reference process versus content (Nichols, 2013), or perhaps negative interaction cycles (Johnson, 2008). There is far too little reference to concrete transactions between practitioners and clients; although, this is gradually changing (Escudero et al., 2012; Heiden-Rootes, Jones, Reddick, Jankowksi, & Maxwell, 2015). I knew something had to change. I had been in practice for several years. I had taken two classes on family and couple treatment in my MSW program. I had even been teaching classes on family and couple treatment, and, yet, I was just beginning to understand noticing process. My struggle compelled me to further action. I knew as an instructor, I needed to help students understand this phenomenon much sooner than I did.

From Skill to Competency

In conjunction with this therapy encounter, I pondered more deliberately my class structure. I had already been teaching students "skills for not knowing" (DeJong & Berg, 2008), which assist practitioners in assuming a posture of wanting to understand rather than judging clients'

experiences. I knew how to help students affirm client perceptions and normalize client experience. I also knew how to help them ask relationship questions, which are used to work systemically with clients. Feeling mission-bound to teach students how to notice process, I persisted in refining my practice as a systemic therapist. I became intent on noticing processes unfold in sessions and making them transparent to the couples and families with whom I was working.

While more intentionally noticing processes in therapy and thinking more deliberately about what my students were learning, I began making needed class structure changes. Several discourses informed my efforts. I considered student suggestions for class improvement, encounters with faculty peers, my ongoing practice experience, my research of student experiences of gaining competency (Peterson, 2014; Peterson et al., 2016), and my engagement with literature on constructivist teaching strategies (Jonassen et al., 2003; Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson, 1999). Additionally, because of my belief in the value of peer role-play, experiential activities for teaching systemic therapy remained my dominant discourse (Helmeke & Prouty, 2001; Kane, 1996). Attending to these discourses emboldened me to reexamine my use of lecture. I produced online lecture videos, allotting more time for viewing and discussing professional videos in class. Other content changes I enacted included a textbook (Williams, Edwards, Patterson, & Chamow, 2011) to add more systemic concepts to the skills for not knowing from DeJong and Berg (2008), and the inclusion of two theories: Gottman and Gottman's (2008) method and emotionally-focused couple therapy (EFCT) (Johnson, 2008). I developed other experiential activities to help students understand assessment and their own and their classmates' diversities that shaped their unique practice identities. In one activity, for example, I have students watch a segment of the movie, *Marvin's Room*. Thereafter, they assess the family system in small groups, after which we discuss their assessment.

Simultaneously, I concluded that noticing process was too vague a term to capture nuances associated with systemic therapy. Though cumbersome, I ultimately decided that NARP was clearer (Peterson et al., 2016). It fits more comfortably with the prominent discourses in my professional development, specifically my constructivist stance (Peterson et al., 2018) and my holistic interpretation of practitioner development that corresponds with practice wisdom (Fowers, 2003). This semantic change animates the noticing process, thus providing clearer direction for students by identifying two overlapping but distinct parts of process. The first is *noticing relational* processes, which include communication patterns (see above definition) that emerge between at least two related or romantic individuals (Davis & Piercy, 2007a, 2007b). The second is *attending to* those processes by helping families and couples recognize and change these patterns as necessary.

I came to strongly emphasize NARP as a critical systemic skill. However, my inner dialogue, or microdialogue (Sullivan, 2012), challenged this conceptualization. The word skill has a technical connotation that can delegitimize the ethical nature of therapy (Fowers, 2003). Moreover, Education and Policy Standards of the Council on Social Work Education suggest strongly that competence is not just enacting skills but applying knowledge and values with purpose and intention (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 6). International literature supports this more holistic definition of competence (Barak, 2017; Benade, 2014; Khaled,

Gulikers, Biemans, van der Wel, & Mulder, 2014; Khaled, Gulikers, Biemans, & Mulder, 2016).

Still trying to piece together how I was engaging in conversation with students about competency development, I began recognizing my own inflexible voice on pedagogy. I felt somehow constrained to be *only* constructivist. This quandary became apparent during my engagement with doctoral students in another course I teach. Reading their accounts of their teaching style, I realized I had epistemological room to embrace other activities I was conducting in class. Ultimately, my emerging discourse on pedagogy for teaching systemic therapy now relies on elements of post-positivist *and* constructivist pedagogy. Assumed in an objectivist, post-positivist framework (Bellefeuille, 2006) is the existence of universal competencies necessary for NARP. Assumed in the constructivist framework is the need for learning activities that assist students in creating shared meaning and engaging in critical reflection (Fire & Casstevens, 2013; Jonassen et al., 2003; Jonassen et al., 1999). I could embrace both, given that each had something to offer the ongoing struggle of my own and my students' competency development.

Another voice challenging my conceptualization of NARP emerged through scholarship. I collected and analyzed data through unstructured interviews on the experience of students developing "skill" for NARP through role-play assignments. While engaged in data analysis, I felt compelled to follow Wengraf's (2001) advice to carefully craft a conceptual framework to account for the students' learning process. Through my engagement with these discourses, I recognized the inadequacy of emphasizing NARP as a *competency* or a *skill*. Several competencies were needed for NARP. Moreover, while analyzing interviews, I realized that students' moment-by-moment decisions in role-plays were organized by several discourses. While some discourses were from my class or previous classes, others were from students' personal and professional experiences and the information and interactions from their classmates acting as clients. My conclusion is exemplified in the following example.

Instructor and Practitioner Examples

A student acting as a therapist is conducting an initial interview with student peers acting as a married couple, Shane and Jennifer. They are a young, religious, and financially stable couple with three young children at home (ages five and three, and a newborn). Shane and Jennifer have come in due to Shane's struggle with pornography and Jennifer's struggle with postpartum depression, both of which are affecting their relationship negatively. At one point, the therapist is given an opportunity to affirm Shane's perceptions: he is visibly upset (heightened affect and raised voice tone) about his wife's inability to engage in emotional and physical intimacy. Even while being upset, however, Shane states that he needs Jennifer. This statement creates an opportunity for the therapist to affirm Shane's perceptions and help him express his emotions in a way that is more digestible to Jennifer. The therapist misses this opportunity, which I note in my audio feedback.

Although the student acting as therapist recognizes the missed opportunity, she explains that Shane's heightened affect made it difficult for her to affirm his perceptions. She further explains that giving him any kind of affirmation could get him more upset. If he gets more upset, he could

leave the session and take it out on Jennifer or the kids at home. She reinforces her thoughts on this subject, stating that she has never in her own work seen someone that upset be able to de-escalate. (Remember, this is all from a role-play with this student and two of her peers.)

It is clear that this student is navigating her way through an emerging discourse on NARP: (1) my voice, through audio-recorded feedback as instructor, encouraging her to affirm the client's perceptions and bring a relational focus to the session, (2) her understanding of working with couples, informed by her experience of working with clients who typically struggle with anger issues, and (3) her understanding of the ethical ramifications of potentially exacerbating an already-tense situation. In short, she has *valid* reasons for why she did what she did (or did not do), and the multiple voices informing her practice are in tension with each other about what the right course of action is. No one can blame her for this struggle, as it is informed by her experience and her budding understanding of therapy practice in a relational context. In fact, it is similar to the same struggle I have, illustrated in the following example from my practice, with altered details to protect confidentiality.

During a couple's session, a husband remarks to his wife that their ongoing discussion of their relationship makes him want to leave the situation (not permanently, but for a two- to three-day break). In turn, the wife's anxiety escalates as she senses possible abandonment by her husband. His intention was to give himself space from her, but his threat to leave for a brief period of time has, in fact, escalated her anxiety, making her want to discuss the relationship even more. Do I turn to the husband and help him understand that his words had the opposite effect on what he wanted to see change? Do I help the wife understand how her own anxiety is getting in the way of receiving what she wants most, namely emotional connection with her husband? Or do I help both of them see that their anger is increasing as the conversation continues and invite them to reflect on each of their individual contributions to the increased anger? None of these questions has an easy answer, but they speak to discourse related to NARP. Acting competently in situations as the one described will be influenced by what I carefully *notice* and *attend* to. I need to *notice* the relationship needs (Conwell, 2014; Davis & Piercy, 2007a, 2007b; Heatherington, Friedlander, Diamond, Escudero, & Pinsof, 2015). Then, I must draw upon my best understanding of relationship science, reflect upon ethical practice, and attend to the *relational process* and unique personality features of each dyad member.

Engaging with Students in Their Learning and Moving Forward

In yet another transformational learning experience, manifested in the aforementioned examples, I realized NARP requires several competencies, including a deepening understanding of ethical practice. Students come with a complex array of voices informing their competency development for NARP (Peterson et al., 2018). Video-recorded role-play and audio-recorded feedback are a beginning dialogue between me and the student. This dialogue continues to take shape throughout the semester in other readings, exercises, and assignments, including a large group role-play at the end of the semester.

To illustrate, I further elaborate on the practice of providing audio-recorded feedback for role-plays conducted by students. The feedback I provide consists of my general observations

and play-by-play observations for each individual student. While watching the role-play, I take notes for the play-by-play portion, which requires me to pause the recording several times. I emphasize specific skills cited in DeJong and Berg (2008), such as summarizing, affirming perceptions, and skills related to noticing relational process. Citing specific skills is one way I attempt to generate shared meaning between me and the students. Once I have viewed the recorded role-play and carefully looked at my notes, I identify themes for general feedback. I then start recording. I begin with the themes of general feedback to help students take notice of their strengths and areas to consider for further refinement. I share one brief example from our qualitative study to illustrate (Peterson et al., 2018).

In a role-play scenario, a student was a therapist for a 16-year-old African American pregnant female, Gabrielle, and her maternal grandmother, Eva. Gabrielle wanted to give up the baby for adoption, and Eva was adamant about keeping the child in their home, which is what prompted therapy. While providing some general observations to the student, I stated: "You do a really nice job of trying to harness the strength of a relationship through noticing relational process." Then, before jumping into play-by-play feedback, I stated, "I'm confident that with the suggestions I give, you would be just fine with this dyad." Of course, such a compliment has to be done authentically. For example, if in my judgment the student really struggled to connect with the dyad, I would use the general feedback to identify something else the student did well, such as asking open-ended questions. After identifying strengths, I might suggest the student carefully assess the relationship he/she had with the clients in the session. Ultimately, I hope my suggestions promote the habit of critical self-reflection, which students need for their ongoing development.

Returning to the role-play example, Eva had talked about the importance of keeping the family together, while Gabrielle talked about her own lack of preparedness for caring for a child. Eva insisted that she could help, which prompted Gabrielle to express concern about Eva's back problems. After this exchange between Eva and Gabrielle, the student affirms the perceptions of Gabrielle by stating something close to the following, "Gabrielle, what I hear you saying is you're concerned for your grandmother's health because of all the lifting and all the tasks it takes to lift a young child." In my instructor role providing the audio feedback, I complimented the student on affirming Gabrielle's perceptions. I then suggested that the student could more specifically *notice* the emotion of Gabrielle (i.e., genuine concern for Eva's back problems) and *attend* to that emotion by identifying its function in the relationship. Regarding the latter, I could suggest the practitioner (student) say something like, "Gabrielle, as I hear you talking about grandma's [Eva's] back problems, I can tell that this is really concerning to you."

This subtle difference in language is what I aim to have students understand. Such a statement takes what Gabrielle said and identifies its specific relationship function; in this case, it is her concern for her grandmother. Students can learn through this process the empathy-enhancing and tension-reducing impact NARP can have in practice with families and couples. However, if I were to go back and provide feedback, I would have also suggested that the student make this process more transparent for Eva by asking something like, "Eva, what is it like for you to hear this concern from Gabrielle?" Moreover, as with any teaching moment, there are relationships as well between the instructor and students. When I asked the student in an interview about what it

was like for her to receive this feedback, she was self-deprecating about this missed opportunity. I learned through this experience that I have to account as well for the critical voices that emerge in students as a consequence of receiving feedback. Therefore, I have to provide the best balance possible between identifying strengths and areas of growth for students.

While I am trying to achieve this balance, it is important to emphasize that student interviews affirm my practice of formative rather than summative feedback about the role-play experience. I realize that my audio-recorded feedback must honor the unique discourses students experience for developing effective practice and ethical standards during role-play practice experiences. Thus, I seek to use video-recorded role-play and audio-recorded feedback to inspire critical reflection, as promoted by Bay and Macfarlane's (2011, p. 747) interpretation of Fook's description of,

> the creation of a climate, or culture, of critical acceptance, in which one's position, interpretation and practice are deconstructed non-judgmentally, in order to find out "why," rather than approve or disapprove actions. In this sense, the truth of one's narrative is not questioned; however, by opening it to interrogation, other possibilities can be revealed and considered, as students come to understand the story of their "lived experience" and explore the "why's" of their thinking and actions.

My approach employs several important principles of critical reflection as noted by Fook and Askeland (2007). It challenges objectivist assumptions about what is right and wrong in practice, as well as regulation-based cultures that require standards of practice. Such standards infuse anxiety into practitioners who fail to meet them (Fook & Askeland, 2007, pp. 523-526). Audio-recorded feedback is created in such a way to validate student strengths and gently challenge them to consider other options in certain situations. Even then, I have to realize they have valid reasons for accepting or rejecting my feedback.

Implications and Summary

Despite substantial growth as an instructor of clinical practice with families and couples, other discourses on competency development continue to compete for my attention. My case vignettes address poverty, oppression, and other crucial concepts for social work practice. Still, I can more deliberately employ critical theory to strengthen consciousness awareness in students (Suárez, Newman, & Reed, 2008). Social and cultural discourses of our day, including LGBTQ rights, race, privilege, immigration, feminism, the place of faith in practice, and others represent conversations in which my students should be immersed. They can learn to approach these issues from the same non-judgmental posture employed to help them understand their practice experiences. In this way, they learn compassion for themselves and others while trying to make sense of some of the most complex and charged issues of our time. Moreover, these discourses are important because they manifest themselves in several studies regarding the health and mental health of families and couples (e.g., Logie, 2012). Ultimately, this type of experiential activity is fertile ground for students to learn about the varied experiences of clients. Instructors can base vignettes either on real practice experiences (with modifications to protect confidentiality) or on other real stories that exemplify the struggles related to today's social and

cultural discourses.

Another discourse competing for my attention is competency development that applies to several types of social work settings requiring attention to systems. My teaching has primarily focused on therapy practice with family systems. Social workers populate hospitals, hospice agencies, schools, and many other settings in which traditional therapy may not be feasible. Their practice also frequently includes families. Is NARP only for therapy encounters, or could practitioners benefit from employing this principle in several different types of encounters involving families? My belief is in the latter, which summons the need for ongoing research.

Such research could explore how social workers in varied social work settings include or exclude relational others (i.e., families and couples) in services. This examination should not be limited to interviews with practitioners or clients; rather, supervisors and administrators should also be involved. It is crucial to understand how agency policies and practices may support or thwart efforts to serve families. Focus groups, individual interviews, and ethnographic strategies (Longhofer, Floersch, & Hoy, 2013) could be used in tandem to understand how the delivery of services includes families. Should a need be recognized to more deliberately include families in services, ongoing research and social work practice development could target this aim.

Quantitative research could be used as an adjunct to this agenda. If agencies implemented practices of greater family inclusion, believing that these practices would improve service provision, pre- and post-tests could be used to determine if clients improve on expected outcomes. For example, one would expect mental health symptom improvement with greater family involvement for those receiving assertive community treatment (ACT) services. This research could also include careful and intensive program evaluation in an effort to identify and strengthen agency systems and policies that encourage greater family inclusion.

Concluding this narrative, I have come to believe my teaching must encompass the following: 1) improving my own competence in NARP in practice, 2) improving my competence in teaching competence in NARP, and 3) attending to my own relational process with students. This latter point has become increasingly poignant in the context of the data my fellow researchers and I analyzed. I believe continuing to develop these three practices will lead to the desired result of students developing competency in their service to couples and families.

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An Innovative Approach for Learning Self-Awareness and Nonverbal Communication: Horses for Healers

JoAnn Jarolmen

Abstract: Nonverbal communication and interpretation of feelings is integral to the therapeutic process. Social workers learn to listen and respond to communication. Our challenges as social work practitioners are accessing skills and learning self-awareness through self-knowledge and personal perception. The Horses for Healers program helps practitioners access skills: body language, personal space, and nonverbal communication, as well as self-awareness and knowledge regardless of cultural or language barriers. It also develops the ability to use cognitive behavior group skills.

Keywords: Horses for Healers, equine-assisted learning, equine-assisted psychotherapy

Background

Several years ago, I was watching the local news on television, and a project called Horses for Healers was featured. The purpose of the program was to provide assistance with developing bedside manner for mental health professionals, particularly psychiatrists. As a professor of clinical social work practice, I decided to investigate this program. Through the local news station that carried this story, I got the email address of the director of Horses for Healers and inquired about the program. When I received the information, I brought it to my supervisor and asked for permission to pursue the possibility of our students attending the program. She gave me permission and I followed up with the dean. It took a while to coordinate the process, but after much bureaucratic red tape, explanation, and rationalization for its significance to our students, we were given permission to attend.

Through investigation and research, I discovered that horses are used since they are extremely sensitive to emotional nuances. They are animals of prey, so in order to continue their existence, it is essential that their sensitivity is acute. We spend an undue amount of time as instructors of mental health professionals trying to help them develop self-awareness. It is often difficult for students to hear critical feedback from supervisors and liaisons who are charged with this responsibility. Self-awareness is a social construct that comes from one's inner personal self (Gardner, 2001). Horses for Healers provides exercises that use horses as a conduit for feedback of emotional nonverbal communication. They help mental health professionals encode and decode nonverbal communication to make them more astute in understanding and forming a therapeutic alliance with those they serve. The subtleties of nonverbal communication are explored, and an increase of self-awareness is developed through this experiential learning modality. Students are given the opportunity to interact with the horses, practice client engagement skills, and collaborate on effective treatment plans. The skills of cognitive behavioral group therapy (CBGT) are reinforced through the exercises provided in this workshop, which include tasks, brainstorming, problem-solving, and processing feedback. As a result, self-knowledge is also accessed through this modality. As per Gardner (2001), self-knowledge is reflected self-awareness; that is, receiving knowledge of oneself from others' feedback. As mental health professionals continue to seek out effective ways to assist their

clients, the students in our program now have another method of therapy to consider. A pre- and post-test was used to consider the effectiveness of the program, and a qualitative instrument was used.

As per Cohen and Cohen (1998), the most important social worker skill is the ability to be competent communicators. They define this as the following: "Competent communicators are better able to empathize, better at managing interactions, and can command a larger repertoire of communication strategies" (Cohen & Cohen, 1998, p. 358). To be a competent communicator, a social worker needs self-awareness and understanding of both verbal and nonverbal communication. Communication is seen as an essential skill along with empathy, reflection, and initiating difficult conversations with clients (Forrester, Kershaw, Moss, & Hughes, 2008).

Horses for Healers in Action

This workshop helped participants learn about the usefulness of coursework involving equine-assisted learning (EAL), which "is an experiential learning approach that promotes the development of life skills for educational, professional and personal goals through equine-assisted activities" (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship [PATH], n.d.).

EAL integrates the interaction of humans and horses in a planned learning process with defined goals and expectations. Expectations include interaction to foster trust, respect, honesty, and communication (PATH, n.d.). Learners experience a variety of cognitively and emotionally processed activities through guided reflections (Kane, 2007). Horses and humans have a long history of interaction, but recent research has uncovered yet another place where horses and humans can interact to develop awareness, sensitivity, and feedback to nonverbal communication in mental health professionals (Dyk et al., 2013). EAL has been used successfully with nurses and doctors to develop awareness of nonverbal communication. The horse becomes the vehicle for this understanding since, as animals of prey, they are reactive to feelings of those in their domain (Walsh & Blakeney, 2013). They provide immediate feedback of feelings to their human partner. This intervention is not exclusive to mental health professionals. Many "at-risk" children, adolescents, and adults suffering from poverty, deprived socioeconomic environments, and so forth have benefitted from the learning experiences made possible through EAL and through equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP; Burgon, 2011; Cameron & Robey, 2013).

How It Works

The curriculum is both didactic and experiential. Both take place in the natural environment. It begins with proper introductions, explanation of conduct and safety, and ends with proper closure. Participants agree on physical, mental, and emotional security before beginning. Each horse activity must include ample time for feedback and discussion. Questions should be open-ended. Activities are observational and hands-on: Students watch the instructor work with others (observational), and they work with the horse on a one-on-one basis (hands-on). Work is done on an individual basis and as a group.

The following are activities done with the horses:

1. observe the body language of horses (introduction to nonverbal communication),
2. notice when the horses notice you (awareness of sensory presence, personal space, and boundaries),
3. demonstrate safe and respectful behavior around horses (to feel safe, understand the behavior and psychology of horses),
4. choose a horse to work with in subsequent exercises (notice subjectivity in judging strangers and work on projection),
5. describe the mental, emotional, sensational, and intuitive aspects of the horse,
6. apply grooming brushes and combs to the horse's body (awareness of horse-human sensations),
7. pick up the horse's front leg and feel the moment of release (to get in sync with the horse's process of release, trust, and relaxation),
8. become aware of leadership and fellowship roles and skills,
9. get the horse to overcome and move through an obstacle course where some aspects may be perceived as scary and unsafe (become sensitized to how others express fear and resistance and the need for established trust),
10. move the horse around the ring perimeter (demonstrate personal style of assertiveness and motivation),
11. trot the horse on a lead rope (coordination and cooperation with horse),
12. use tactics to send the horse away from you, and then reverse tactics to draw the horse back into your space (gauge group energy and effect on horse), and
13. halter and saddle the horse with the application of extended appendage of three people being the brain, left hand, and right hand (examine teamwork, roles, communication; Kane, 2007).

Goals

The goals of this experiential learning program are many. First, paying attention to the subtleties of nonverbal communication helps to increase self-awareness, enabling mental health professionals to better interpret the communication in which they are immersed. They also need to develop an awareness of their own nonverbal strategies, which is the first step for improvement in interpersonal communication.

Second, they need to understand the skills of CBGT. This is a cognitive learning experience that begins in class prior to the event. As such, they will make a connection between thoughts, situational triggers, and the elicitation of negative affect. Evidence-gathering and addressing thought distortions are essential to becoming more aware and objective about one's thoughts. The use of brainstorming helps with gathering ideas to use for experimental activities to reach their goals. This helps with the exploration of underlying beliefs of which students are not fully aware.

Third, the practice of CBGT skills is explored experientially through the cost-effective program of Horses for Healers. It is important for students to experience, with an open mind, the

viewpoints of others as well as the feedback from other group members about their strengths and challenges. They will develop with others problem-solving strategies, and they will get feedback on cognitive distortions as well as problem-solving techniques. Students will develop a sense of belonging to the group, which helps to decrease their insecurity as they view others experiencing similar issues. Students will learn to explore communication in a safe environment as well as sharpen their different problem-solving techniques that are learned from others, either directly or through modeling techniques. They will practice the skills that they have acquired in real time. When students support each other in the group process, better outcomes are achieved. Some of the methods used in CBGT that are applicable to this program are challenging thoughts, monitoring moods (including anxiety), brainstorming, and problem-solving.

The Student Experience

The process in place in the Horses for Healers program is experiential and can be seen as more than educational because it includes dealing with the mental health of individuals, families, and groups (Notgrass & Pettinelli, 2015). According to Gardner (2001), "we learn by doing it rather than by explaining it, by being present in the experience rather than only by talking about or thinking about what might be" (p. 30). She refers to this concept as "active learning" (Gardner, 2001, p. 38).

Thus far, I have taken three groups of students to this program. Each group has had different experiences. All three groups have felt the benefits of the unique opportunity for participation. All students were part of the advanced clinical social work practice courses in the master's level of the social work program at the university where I teach. When I first presented the program to my class in fall 2015, I was tentative in my explanation. I worried that the students would feel that it was an outlandish idea and would think it unfathomable. The reception was positive. I believe the students were eager to participate in an active learning experience. After all, social work is a practice profession.

The administration and dean of the graduate school were very supportive and funded this one-day workshop. Students raved about it and let the faculty and other students know what a worthwhile experience it was for them. Money had gotten tight in fall 2016, so it took some private donations for that group to experience the program. Thereafter, I reached out to resources at the university, and I took the advice to apply for an internal grant. To my amazement, I received an internal grant (Faculty Foundation Research Award), and my third group of advanced clinical practice social work students attended the program in October 2017. The program has evolved into a more clinically defined activity with an emphasis on CBGT skills. Self-knowledge is developed through interaction with classmates and nonverbal feedback from the horses. Therefore, CBGT is a natural outgrowth of this particular experience.

Below are students' narrative comments from spring 2017:

1.   What was your reason to or expectation from offering horses a chance to teach us about nonverbal communication and emotional intelligence?
        "To increase my nonverbal communication skills."

"To learn a little more about myself and my nonverbal communication skills."
2.   List one thing that you learned about yourself/others in relationship to bedside manner as a result of interacting with the horses.
"I need to work on my initial engagement skills and time to 'warm up.'"
"I learned to be able to read from body language what people are thinking. I learned how to take a more empathic approach."

Below are students' narrative comments from fall 2017:

1.   What was your reason for or expectation from offering horses a chance to teach us about nonverbal communication and emotional intelligence?
"I learned that horses understand feelings."
"I felt it was very insightful."
2.   List one thing that you learned about yourself/others in relationship to bedside manner as a result of interacting with the horses.
"Patience is important."
"I learned self-awareness."
"I learned perception through body language."

It was enlightening to watch the group process unfold. Some students who were less academically astute seemed to excel in this practical setting. Others became leaders of the group. Other students who appeared quite self-assured seemed to become intimidated by the horses and had difficulty approaching and interacting with the animals. Others remained on the periphery with little to no interaction but stood back with caution. At one point, I intervened and asked the frightened students to link arms with me as we approached the horses. I felt their anxiety and reassured them through words and nonverbal communication. That included steadily approaching the animal with little trepidation. With their trust in me, they were able to approach the horse, and many eventually became comfortable with the process.

At one point, an older horse pulled on the sleeve of a student's jacket. She came and reported this to me. I went over to the horse and he did the same to me. At first, it was a little jarring, but his behavior was explained by his running out of patience with the process. He had been working with the students for several hours, and just like clients, he got irritable and signaled nonverbally to stop. It was an actual learning experience in real time.

Students worked in groups and decided on the scenario that they would use as the issue that brought the client to therapy. One student would hold the task in hand (a large ball) as a reminder of the task that needed to be accomplished. The other students would decide upon the interventions to be used and how their goals would be accomplished. One such scenario was centered on an actual issue that the horse was having at the time. She had recently lost her mate and was not readily engaged. The students brainstormed several ways to achieve engagement with her, and in the end were able to touch and console her through nonverbal and verbal communication. As they processed the intervention, they realized how they each contributed to the process and were aware of the achievement they had made as professional social workers. Self-knowledge about their own abilities was noted. They were successful through persistence

and patience.

Of course, the interaction was voluntary, but no matter how involved the students were, they all gave positive feedback on both the qualitative and quantitative survey instruments. Some of the comments on the fall 2017 pre- and post-test were:

1.   "One of the greatest experiences of my life,"
2.   "It was a good learning experience,"
3.   "A very useful therapy technique that will be helpful in field and practice,"
4.   "This experience was incredible," and
5.   "Great experience!"

The pre- and post-test survey is seen in Appendix A. The frequencies for learning the difference between EAP and EAL (see Appendix A, question 1) is seen in Table 1: 16% did not learn the difference, while 84% acknowledged learning the difference. The result for the variable of learning about yourself through this experience (see Appendix A, question 9) is seen in Table 2: 24% said they did not learn about themselves, while 76% said they did. The result for the variable of the importance of nonverbal communication (see Appendix A, question 11) is displayed in Table 3: 32% did not think it was as important as the 68% who did.

Table 1

Difference between Equine Psychotherapy and Equine Learning

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	4	16.0	16.0	16.0
	2.00	21	84.0	84.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

Table 2

Learn about Yourself

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	6	24.0	24.0	24.0
	2.00	19	76.0	76.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

Table 3

Nonverbal Communication

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	8	32.0	32.0	32.0
	2.00	17	68.0	68.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

Although some students reported that they did not learn the difference between EAP and EAL, it would be interesting to investigate the actual explanation of what they felt they should have learned. It is important to probe further to investigate what students' needs are for better understanding the difference. Other students said that they did not think self-awareness was essential for mental health professionals. I also think that the development of nonverbal communication, self-awareness, and self-knowledge needs to be explored with those students who don't realize the importance of it in the field of social work.

Conclusion

The Horses for Healers program is an innovative workshop and approach to help students learn nonverbal communication skills as well as self-awareness, relationship with clinical practice, bedside manner, and cognitive behavior group skills. With the evolution of the program to its present level of EAL, students have been experientially exposed to an innovative method of learning knowledge, skills, and affect to better inform their practice.

Although this modality is effective, it needs more rigorous clinical trials and replicability to stand up to evidence-based practice ideals. This process would ensure the reliability of the program. The possibility of using a control group would help in giving the program validity. Surveys that include assessing nonverbal skills and self-awareness for mental health professionals pre- and post-intervention would also add to the validity of Horses for Healers. Gardner (2001) developed a qualitative exploratory survey for self-awareness development that can be used to garner these attributes (see Appendix B).

Learning outside of the classroom experientially often gives students a different perspective and frees them to express themselves in this new environment.

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(Appendix A and B are on the following pages.)

Appendix A

Pre- and Post-Test Survey

Pre-Post Class Survey for Horses for Healers Experience

2017

What amount of knowledge do you have about the following items:
1. High 2. Moderate 3. Low 4. None

1. Do you know the difference between equine-assisted psychotherapy and equine-assisted learning?____
2. Is EAP (equine-assisted psychotherapy) a way for clients to gain confidence by riding horses?____
3. Does EAP use the same psychological theories that are used in in-office settings?____
4. Do you think that EAP is similar to pet therapies that utilize dogs or other animals?____
5. Who does EAP work better for, children and adolescents or adults?____
6. Is EAP covered by most insurance companies?____
7. Must EAP be conducted by a mental health professional?____
8. Should EAP be restricted to rural areas?____
9. Do you anticipate that you will learn about yourself through this experience?____
10. Do you think EAP is a valid method of doing psychotherapy?____
11. How important is nonverbal communication for dealing with patients?___
12. How important is nonverbal communication for dealing with horses?____
13. Have you ever experienced cognitive behavioral group therapy?___
14. Do you think it is the same as CBT for individuals?___
15. If no, do you know in what ways it differs?___

Comments: _____

Appendix B

Gardner's Self-Awareness Survey

The questions covered the following areas in a semi-structured interview format:

-Did your attitudes, values or beliefs change as a result of doing the social work course? If yes, how did they change?

-Were there any changes in your level of self-awareness, i.e. your ability to reflect on and be aware of your feelings, values and attitudes? If so, what sort of changes?

-What, if anything, were the factors in the course that brought about these changes?

-What in the course encouraged self-awareness?

-What in the course discouraged self-awareness?

-What changes would you suggest to encourage the development of self-awareness in students?

-Should we assess self-awareness and if so, how?

The interviews were taped and transcribed. I then started to draw out common themes using a matrix or chart so that I could identify the relative importance of the themes. (Gardner, 2001, p. 31)

A Focus on Becoming: Reflections on Teaching

Meagan A. Hoff

Abstract: Teaching in diverse contexts can be a challenge for teachers who strive to create classrooms that respect the diversity of students. Among many skills, teaching requires a critical consciousness of the ideologies that shape the pedagogy within a classroom. As a white, American teacher who speaks English as her native language, the author brings multiple perspectives of privilege to her teaching practice. In this narrative, she reflects on her experience with ideological becoming as she critically examines her experience while teaching a summer camp for teenage girls who came to the United States as refugees.

Keywords: teaching, refugees, ideological becoming, critical consciousness

> *"This 1 millionth child refugee is not just another number. This is a real child ripped from home, maybe even from a family, facing horrors we can only begin to comprehend."*
> *-UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake*

Every year, millions of people are forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflict and persecution (Alazroni, 2017). As the quote above from Anthony Lake reminds us, these millions are not numbers, they are people (as cited in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2013). On some level this seems obvious, but when these abstract figures became people in my life and students in my classroom, the true weight of what I did not know became increasingly apparent.

On paper, my teaching education and philosophies were marked with the tenants of humanizing pedagogy. I had read Freire (2005) and Darder (2012), and I believed in the transformative power of education. This was an easy façade to maintain while working with students who looked remarkably like me and who lived by similar narratives. Despite being a student of cross-cultural education, I had yet to fully understand the concept of culture in practice. Rather than existing as a definitive entity, Benhabib (2002) described culture as "a constant creation, recreation, and negotiation of imaginary boundaries" (p. 8). Individuals create unique life stories that are informed by established narratives of a culture. My narratives were rigid, and they defined how I saw students, how I taught them, and how I responded to them. It would take a summer of teaching and learning with a group of young refugee girls for me to understand the limitations of my own worldviews and begin to challenge them. As a student, I had done some research on the ideological becoming of pre-service teachers. Bakhtin (1981) described ideological becoming as "an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions, and values" (p. 346). Looking back on the experience that I recount below, I can see now that this was a story from my own process of ideological becoming and how hard it was to see from the inside.

I walked to the door. Two girls with scarfs loosely wrapped on their heads peered out between closed curtains. That was my destination. Before I could knock, an older woman swung the door open. She smiled, and I smiled back as the two young girls dashed in and out of my sight. I said good morning, and the woman nodded in return. Their mother and I continued to smile across

the door frame as they gathered their items and joined me outside. I introduced myself and asked the girls their names. They responded quickly and succinctly. I asked where they went to school and what grade they were in. A long silence followed, broken only by their smiles. They had no idea what I had said. The three of us laughed nervously. As we walked to the next apartment our conversation continued in the same way, me asking questions, them smiling in return. I knew nothing about them: the language they were speaking, how old they were, where they were from, or what they had been through before coming here. I was their first teacher in the United States.

At the next few doors I knocked on, no one was home. The two girls followed as we walked through a maze of buildings in an apartment complex that housed a large number of the girls registered for summer camp. Finally, I approached a door where an audible hum of excitement radiated. My knock revealed a room full of girls wearing tightly wrapped floral hijabs. Many of the girls had gathered together to wait for their teacher to arrive that morning. They chattered excitedly, eagerly trying to talk with me, soon giving up and chatting amongst themselves. And, so, we walked together to school, in a hum of linguistic isolation. It would take me all summer to start to understand these girls. They may never know the extent of my doubts, my conflicts, and my frustrations; I will never know if it was worth it for them.

I was teaching a summer camp for refugee teenage girls in central Texas. The summer camp was based on a similar program in Illinois that focused on holistic support for adolescent refugee girls and that was designed to help them develop autonomy, language, and social-emotional habits. The summer program was organized around themes of world peace, health, and women's rights. My social justice-oriented curriculum was out of reach for the girls. As I introduced our lesson on identity, my words slowed down and became more deliberate, each syllable more clearly defined. "We are going to make a timeline of our life," I explained. "Where do we start?" In the face of silence, I backed up. "What does the word *life* mean? Hmm, *story*?"

A large portion of my class had recently come from Syria. They would spend the summer being taken to doctor and dentist appointments, being sick, taking care of sick family members, and more. They would not spend their days dutifully coming to camp, and this fostered in me a great amount of frustration. In reality, I faced pressure from the camp organizers, who in turn felt pressure from donors who required girls in seats in return for the necessary funding. In reality, the girls had doctor and dentist appointments to make up for living years with limited access to such services. As I dutifully made calls to their homes, I met their reasons with apathy—I had seats to fill.

My frustration every morning as I took attendance was not a direct cause of their empty seats. It was more the combination of their empty seats, the expectations bestowed upon me to fill those seats, and a powerful desire to help them. I was in constant conflict over whether to focus my teaching on the girls who came every day, essentially leaving the other girls to sink or swim, or to constantly backtrack on the material. I gravitated toward the first option. Those who missed class would struggle, and I hoped it would serve as a reminder of the importance of showing up. I felt like a bad teacher when they struggled. I felt like a bad teacher when I saw their empty seats. These tensions were constant frustrations. Tensions like these are also the foundation of ideological becoming (Gomez, Lachuk, & Powell, 2015). Tensions and conflict around daily

choices create cracks in our narratives so that we can see, and perhaps question, our assumptions, beliefs, and values. Because I acted on a narrative that students did not want to come to school, I saw students who missed too much camp rather than girls who came as often as they could. If I had questioned my assumptions in the moment, I might have responded from a more compassionate place. I might have seen that they were happy to be there. Amy (when possible, the girls chose their own pseudonym) would come each day with a new friend in tow. For me, each friend became a rotation of faces who I would never see again. For her, each friend was a means to come to camp since she could not walk there alone.

I had two responsibilities as the lead teacher: teach whole-group thematic lessons and teach guided reading in small groups. When the pre-test results came in, I learned that I would have a group of girls who had never learned to read. Their schooling had been so disrupted that they had reached ages 14 or 15 without receiving an adequate primary education. For some girls this was very obvious; for others, it would take me weeks to realize that they did not understand me. I was frustrated because we could not communicate and they did not show up consistently enough for me to see the pattern. Perhaps I had not listened.

The camp served refugee girls from around the world. Among them were 10 Syrian girls that came and went over the course of camp—some for a day, some for a week, none consistently. When they came, they were tied to their phones and to each other, but not to me, their teacher. When I tried to mix up the groups, they would groan—a sign of dislike that transcends language barriers. I wanted to instill independence. I wanted to challenge them to try and speak English. One girl, Kay, spoke excellent English, and she became the translator for her friends. When she came to camp, she was a force in the classroom; she was very intelligent with a magnetic personality. She had the air of a popular girl; she had confidence, style, and friends. When she did not come, I assumed it was because she had something more interesting to do. When I saw her, I saw my own version of an American teenage girl. I defined her through my own narratives that told me students did not want to come to school. I thought I could see right through her.

In the inner circle with Kay was Rosa, another 16-year-old girl who had been in the United States for less than two months. I will never know how much English Rosa understood. She had scored quite high on the English assessment. She would come to camp occasionally, chat with the others in Arabic, and listen to music on her phone. When I talked with her, she responded with a smile. When I asked her to put away her phone, she responded with a smile. She needed to listen in class and participate. She needed to learn English; what was more important than that?

Rosa's older sister, Patty, would join us occasionally, just infrequently enough for us to give up on her before she would return for a day. After fleeing Syria, their family had gone to Jordan, then to Egypt, where Patty had started a degree in business at the university. She would have to start over in the United States. The courses she had taken did not transfer. When Patty broke her leg during one of our field trips, we lost her and Rosa for good. I was their teacher. They had been through so much, but I could not protect them. The day the accident happened, Rosa had been inconsolable. Everyone was upset, but their reactions varied. Some girls cried, some sat in silence. We gathered in a circle, some more willingly than others, and talked about how we felt.

We shared stories of being scared, of being hurt. I encouraged everyone to share. What did I know? Many of the girls were resistant, so I gave space. For others, this was the first moment when they began to share their stories. It also marked the first day that I realized how much more I needed to simply listen. It was time to let go of narratives in which the teacher had all the answers. In that moment, surrounded by tears, I had no answers.

My authority on what was best for these girls was bestowed through curriculum, objectives, and assessments passed down to me. I assumed that my interns and I knew what was needed to be successful in American schools "dominated by standardized and technical approaches to schooling that reinforce assimilation" (Salazar, 2013). The goal was assimilation, to blend into the students around them. Did they need to think, talk, and act like their American peers? In retrospect, what did assimilation even mean? They needed to value their education over their families and their attendance over their health. For many of the girls in my classroom, full assimilation was unattainable. Their hijabs told their story for them along with their accents.

Although there is no consensus on the optimal age of language acquisition, research has shown that the majority of language learners will retain an accent (Moyer, 2011). Language is not the only trait that we ask refugees to forfeit in return for opportunity. On field trips, the girls were confronted on streets and buses about their style, their timidity, and their beliefs. I would sit nearby and try to redirect the conversations. As a man relentlessly tried to talk to the two shy sisters, I tried to divert his attention by asking him questions. I politely told him that they did not want to talk. When that did not work, I tried to talk to the girls to keep them distracted. Every time the man talked to them, they would silently look at one another with nervous smiles. He made me uncomfortable even though I was not the center of his attention. The ride took almost an hour, and I felt powerless to protect them all. I could not even stop one man's comments about their clothes and language.

Back in the classroom, we used assessments to measure progress for our funders. This brought money, but standardized approaches fail to address the needs of students who have been forced to flee their homes and who may have been stalled in a refugee camp for years or born in a refugee camp where basic education is no guarantee (UNHCR, 2016). The real danger is that standardized approaches assume there is a norm against which we can measure and define all students. In looking back, I can see that the norms and assumptions guiding my practice were informed by authoritative discourses—assumed truths passed down to me in cultural narratives of teaching, education, and students (Bakhtin, 1981; Benhabib, 2002). Authoritative discourses eventually come into conflict with internally persuasive discourses that are informed by cultural norms and by personal experiences. I felt tensions between my desire to create a classroom that truly valued all languages and the pressure to immerse the girls in English.

One day, four weeks into camp, none of the Syrian girls came to class, and we needed signed permission slips for the next day. I drove around the city to each girl's door to ensure everyone had the form needed to participate. Tina's younger sister opened the door while a scuffle of activity went on inside. The door was closed and reopened. I slipped my shoes off and kicked them into the pile by the door. When I stepped into the apartment, I was surrounded by people in a space that felt too small to fit us all. I said hello to the parents. Looking around for a familiar

face, I saw Tina for the first time without her headscarf. She gave me her familiar smile. In her home, she seemed eager to communicate. Her words came out fast as she introduced her family. As I stood there, out of place in her home, my resentment that she had not come to camp that day began to melt away. It was only after visiting the girls in their homes that I began to understand that they had a much larger obligation to their family than I had experienced as an American teenage girl. They looked after their younger siblings and helped their mothers cook and clean. They could not venture out alone, so their mobility was limited. My view of their needs and responsibilities felt insignificant in the face of what their families expected. Their lives, informed by different narratives, had been hidden behind my own assumptions.

I had spent all summer feeling personally slighted when they skipped camp. I envisioned them hanging out with their friends and watching television. What I failed to account for was that they came from different family structures. They were the caregivers of the family; they cared for younger siblings, and they had limits on socializing with friends. They could not walk to camp alone, so if one girl had to stay home to help the mother, another did too. Furthermore, these girls had been exposed to violence and chaos that I simply could not comprehend. The cell phones that caused me to feel jealous for monopolizing the girls' attention were their connection to the people they had left along the way.

After visiting their families, I realized that I was judging these girls and their actions by my own upbringing. When they looked at me, I interpreted them with my own biases. Did Rosa really glare at me, or did she look at me intently as she decoded my words? Were these girls more interested in chatting than in my lessons? Did they just not understand? Were they simply helping one another? For the first time, I reflected with empathy and tried to see situations from their perspective. Suddenly, Tina's silence became complex. I merely assumed that it had been indifference, but it may have been a sign of her own frustration, her effort to overcome a language barrier—her disengagement was a result of misunderstanding, her gravity to friends was comfort. In the place of empathy, I had met her silence with contempt.

On one field trip, the interns and I decided we would force English by drastically mixing up the groups. Girls from a local high school taught everyone how to code robots, and they made a series of mazes for the robots to navigate. I saw Tina, arms crossed, at the table as her group went to test their robot. Moments before she had seemed interested, but as her team came back, I noticed how lost she looked without her friends while trying to make sense of code in a language that she was still learning. Instead of speaking more English, she seemed isolated. I had been a student of cross-cultural education and thought of myself as an educator devoted to creating a climate conducive to diverse learners, and somehow I had failed in that moment.

I wanted to teach with the tenants of humanizing pedagogy, which Freire described as a response to the diverse needs of students that "builds on the sociocultural realities of students' lives" (Salazar, 2013, p. 128). Humanizing pedagogy challenges deficit ideologies, focusing instead on additive approaches to teaching. Contrary to the humanizing pedagogy that I had hoped to embody, my undeterred focus on what was best for Tina, Rosa, Kay, Amy, and Patty was pushing assimilation and robbing them of their personal experience, their culture, their history, and their values. What I had not understood was that humanizing pedagogy was just one input in

my worldview, and for the first time, I felt the tensions between what I believed and how I taught.

In reflecting on my teaching that summer, I can now see the moments of tension with more clarity. I see how these moments have come to shape my practice and moved me toward humanizing pedagogy. This story is a snapshot from my own ideological becoming. The process of becoming is lifelong, constantly reflecting on the past to make changes in the future. More importantly, if I want to study the ideological becoming of other teachers, it is essential that I also turn my gaze to my own teaching experiences. My own lack of empathy and the influence of larger hegemonic forces had impacted my relationship with the girls from Syria. At the beginning of camp, I was conscious of my position on native languages. I was very supportive of native-language use, hoping to inspire authentic English use while not devaluing the native languages that my students brought with them. This position came under attack from my interns, who started questioning my approach, insisting that I was doing a disfavor to my students by not enforcing English-only rules. From my perspective, not providing access to their native language threatened to alienate students who had no other way to communicate. Which was correct? The conflict between what I believed and what was widely believed to be true had created tensions on the field trip as in other lessons. By giving way to a sink-or-swim approach, I had isolated Tina. Thus, I found myself caught between my personal philosophy and conceding to authoritative discourses.

What have I learned from my summer with these girls? To start, I should have questioned my own narratives and entered the classroom with a beginner's mindset, especially given my limited knowledge of the experiences that had led each of the girls to central Texas. At the beginning, I had been aware of how little I knew about the experiences of refugees, but they were not just refugees, they were unique individuals. Knowing students on a personal level is an important part of the teaching role. Humanizing pedagogy focuses on the relationships formed between educator and student, addressing the needs of students beyond academic objectives, and also knowing their stories and challenges, creating a safe space, and facilitating connections. Both students and teachers bring with them their own personal and cultural narratives, and the classroom should be a space where these can intermingle. As an educator, I believe it is also my role to model patience and kindness.

Looking back, it is easy to see my shortcomings as well as how reflection and change arose through conflict and tension, moving me closer toward humanizing pedagogy. In ideological becoming, the different discourses I have acquired are put in conversation and enacted in my teaching. In the process, ideologies evolve. Progress is not linear and has no endpoint; rather, it is iterative and reflective. With each reflection, I find faults in my practice and faults in the system, and I encounter obstacles that seem insurmountable. To give up in the face of such obstacles would be to give up on Kay, Rosa, Patty, Amy, and Tina—many times I wanted to, but I never did. I may never know what they learned that summer in my classroom, but my honest reflections on my teaching practices can help inform educators and my own practice about the journey to critical consciousness.

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To Bracket or Not to Bracket:
Reflections of a Novice Qualitative Researcher

Bibi Baksh

Abstract: Qualitative research is a useful method for social work research and continues to be part of the core curriculum in graduate social work education. This paper summarizes the author's engagement with an initial qualitative research project, which she undertook with four colleagues as part of their PhD research methods course. They used critical race theory as their theoretical framework and phenomenology as their methodology to explore aspects of racism in the classroom setting at their university. In this paper, the author reflects on her experiences and considers the impact of her personal epistemology as she grapples with the concepts of bracketing and reflexivity. The insight gained from this process would be useful for students and teachers in social work programs who are contemplating the use of qualitative research and/or group work in research projects.

Keywords: qualitative research, racism, epistemology, phenomenology, bracketing, reflexivity, critical race theory, intersectionality

Introduction

Mirror, mirror on the wall, can you tell us who we are?
When we go further into the researcher's parlour,
What is acquired, assimilated, excluded, rejected in our knowledge construction?
Race, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Religion, Ethnicity, Age, Nationality
Can we ignore our individual diversities--bracket our personal epistemology?

Who are those people looking back? Should we listen to their story?
Reflections, deflections, refractions, distortions
Pain, grief, anger, appropriation--aching afflictions!
Souls in turmoil to protect the story of their anguished history!

As we venture forward with our research call, what do we see?
Is it reproduction of knowledge with dominant epistemology?
Contradictions, conflicts, confutations, paradoxes,
Us and them and you and me: How can this be?
We are reflections of each other, are we not, dear mirror?

As part of a PhD course in applied qualitative research methods, my colleagues and I were required to complete a research project on a topic of interest that we thought could have some utility beyond the classroom. This project was shaped by course requirements and protocols, including university standards and our professor's specific guidelines. Although the professor left us with room for creativity, one of her stipulations was that we work in groups. Our group of five racialized students--with a range of identities and backgrounds spanning four continents--evolved around our interest in the topic of racism.

For our methodology, we decided on phenomenology, an approach that facilitates the study of experiences, structures, essence, and consciousness common to a group (Creswell, 2007). An exploration of racism based on our experiences as racialized students seemed to be a good approach for exploring the phenomenon of racism in the faculty. "Bracketing" is an essential tenet of phenomenology that requires researchers to set aside personal theories, research presuppositions, inherent knowledge, and assumptions as separate from what is observed in the research process (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Creswell, 2007). A challenge for me was thinking of bracketing juxtaposed with the highly encouraged practice of reflexivity in qualitative research, which requires researchers to be aware of their personal ontology and its impact on the research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Berger, 2015; Creswell, 2007). How would our personal experiences of racism impact our decisions to engage in research using phenomenology? Would we bracket, given that we had all experienced racism on varying levels and in multiple contexts? As we undertook a project that involved a foundational part of our experiences, how would we set aside memories and knowledge that were embedded in our consciousness? Could we avoid reflexivity in this particular project of knowledge construction?

I found myself contending with the tensions between bracketing and reflexivity while simultaneously struggling with issues that surfaced for our group. Contemplating our differences, I imagined looking into a mirror and seeing my colleagues and myself as novice researchers occupying a space that was filled with uncertainty. How would we decide to "bracket or not to bracket" our unique diversities? What would be revealed to me through this process? What would be exposed to my colleagues about me? The verses above echo some of the struggles I encountered as I focused on myself as a researcher, as a colleague within the group, and as a participant in the research. I experienced the merging of these roles as I positioned and repositioned thoughts, feelings, anxieties, and concerns. Moving between my "self" and my work with the group generated an emerging awareness of my consciousness, grounded in experiences past and current, yet taken for granted that these experiences often evaded me.

My "Self" Within the Group

Since my immigration to Canada in 1982, I have experienced racism of varying intensity. I have often heard comments such as "Go back home!" and "You are in Canada now!" I presume this to be based on my appearance, made visible by my brown skin and my *hijab*. Other less subtle experiences that intensify when Muslims are unfavorably portrayed in the media included my home being egged and our community mosque being vandalized. Although such occurrences are sometimes overt in the community, they are more subtle and covert in academia.

My personal epistemology and ontology are rooted in religious beliefs and practices. I identify myself as Muslim. I am a student in a PhD program at a Canadian university worked on a research project with a group of colleagues. Our project employed qualitative research, a method that accepts (even embraces) a researcher's personal opinions and attitudes in the process of knowledge production (Lambert, Jomeen, & McSherry, 2010). Considering my personal epistemology and ontology, coupled with the diversity within the group, I grappled with the idea that we may be ill-equipped to engage in research using the phenomenological approach because

of the embedded nature of our experiences with racism. Further, I worried that we may be incapable of separating our participants' experiences from our own as we reviewed the data. Then there was the question of reflexivity: How would we engage in reflexivity? Despite these concerns, I felt a sense of safety as part of the group because of our identities as racialized students.

For the first time since I had been in Canada, I was in a classroom with a majority of racialized students; of the seven students in our class, five were minoritized. Although we differed in social, cultural, religious, professional, biographical, and personal attributes, I felt a sense of belonging. Our group came together after an in-class brainstorming session during which students were articulating what might be of interest for their research project. I suggested that, given the ongoing media coverage of racism and the Equity Survey (Dunn, Hoang, Landry, McKean, & Granke, 2013), racism would be a suitable phenomenon to research. In retrospect, I wonder what prompted me to make that suggestion. From a social work standpoint, the xenophobic climate in North America was a compelling academic incentive to explore racism, but was it the only reason? Does my desire to grasp perspectives on racism go further back in time? Would I uncover unanticipated connections to my past?

In addition to myself, four minoritized students from our cohort were interested in the opportunity to work on the project--we all had our personal experiences to draw from and contend with, as racism had touched all our lives. However, the group ended up larger than anticipated. I sensed some hesitancy from colleagues about the group size, particularly given that the other group consisted of only two members, and based on my personal experience with large groups, I had my concerns, too. Additionally, the literature on group work recommends three or four members as appropriate (Csernica et al., 2002) and suggests that challenges including participation and conflict among members are associated with working in larger groups (Burke, 2011). My ambivalent feelings about the group size caused me to develop a lingering sense of anxiety.

The first challenge for us was to establish defined roles and expectations. We were unable to successfully negotiate this, and it became unclear about who would take the lead. As a result, we experienced some degree of what Burke (2011) describes as "group dissonance" arising from a situation where groups "lack motivation, strong leadership or simply have personality conflicts" (p. 98). This initial incident was significant enough to affect subsequent interactions within the team. Moreover, personality differences surfaced, and, eventually, the group fragmented. I experienced discomfort with the conflict that surfaced. Was there conflict or was I looking for it? Did this only exist in my mind? My personal albatross!

My aversion to conflict emerges from my personal and professional life. I migrated to Canada from Guyana at a time when my homeland was fraught with conflict. Interracial and political unrest was abundant and manifested in plutocracy and civil war, with severe consequences for the majority of the population. Poverty was ubiquitous. Family conflict led to violence that plagued much of the society. Poverty. Racial tensions. Conflict. *Avoid conflict*. Professionally, the adversarial role of a child protection worker further developed my aversion to conflict: child welfare is saturated with situations in which conflict is pervasive and child protection workers

are frequently at the center of conflict. Child welfare. Addictions. Family violence. *Avoid conflict.*

I see myself. Both feet anchored with big weights. Attached by heavy chains. Chained. Immobilized. Conflict has grounded me. I struggle to move--forward, backward--but I am riveted. Can I escape? That was long ago, far away. Now I must find a way to engage with conflict, redefine the word, do some unlearning. What can I pull from my past? What is too heavy? What is useless? Here I am in a new place. Much time has gone. Time and space--temporal things--inform my consciousness, contribute to the shaping of my being, yet I often ignore them. My past is here with me. I cannot escape myself!

"No Matter Where You Go, There You Are."
-Confucius

There I was, engaging in research with colleagues. My peers seemed to accept the situation as safe and reasonable, yet I experienced discomfort. I theorized that failing to establish well-defined individual assignments for group members and a clear communication process had in some ways impeded our progress. Davis (1993) uses the word "slacker" to describe group members who are not participating and engaging adequately with the group. I felt like the slacker, not because I did not want to engage, but because I wanted to avoid conflict. Previous debates with colleagues had been productive, intellectually stimulating, and inspirational, yet I felt powerless, incapable of speaking up.

Why was this experience different? I was at an impasse. However, as I reflected on my understanding of conflict and the way it shapes my thinking, I realized that there could be something positive to it; after all, none of my colleagues voiced concerns. I eventually realized that our individual approaches to conflict hinged on our personal epistemology. Maybe some in the group saw it as something to be sought. I, however, remained paralyzed by the thought of conflict. How would this paralysis impede me? When conflict surfaced previously, there were deleterious consequences. What would happen now? The voice in my head made me cower!

There are the voices from within. I want to tell the group that bracketing won't work with racism, at least not for me. Conflict! My fear of conflict rises again. I am safe here, right? After all, we are five minoritized students drawn to our research topic because of a systemic power/privilege issue. Could power be an issue among our group of five? Hierarchy in racism? Intersectionality? No!--That voice screams--It's a reflection of your weakness, your lack of courage. The mirror reflects distortions.

My experiences within the group and the thoughts and feelings it evoked reflect the realities of minoritized students in many universities. Although some Canadian universities have anti-racist or anti-oppressive policies in place, a number of institutions continue to perpetuate structural racism (Drolet, 2009; Dhamoon & Chan, 2011). Further, the literature on racism in academia points clearly to various forms of racism experienced by minoritized students. For example, Dhamoon and Chan (2011) report a variety of racist experiences such as linguistic racism, curriculum silences, and stereotypes. My personal experiences are in line with the research.

Based on my appearance, assumptions about my accent and level of competence in English are made before I even speak. I recall a memorable conversation with a professor during my master's program. He commented on the privileged position of minority students who had made it into the master's program. The underlying opinion that the "higher you go, the less you are discriminated against" was made clear.

While I agree that education is a means of social mobility, it has been my experience that barriers faced by minoritized students can impact their educational endeavours and outcomes. I think of our first epistemology course and remember that despite the professor's attempts to be inclusive in readings, there were mostly the dominant Euro-Western perspectives presented. I wondered about how I know what I know and realized that Islam was central to my personal epistemology, yet it was absent from the curriculum.

Wait, I hear the voices again! Or is it the woman in the mirror? What about before you came to Canada? Did you not know of racism before? Had you not experienced civil strife that resulted in chaos? I go back to my childhood. Growing up in Guyana in the 60s. The white man left. Racism did not leave with him. We got our independence. That did not change our conditions. The fault line of the two major political parties was race. PPP. Indian. Coolie. Sons and daughters of indentured servants from India. PNC. African. Black. Sons and daughters of slaves from Africa. We were united against the white man. Coolie man and Black man. Brothers in the struggle for independence. No longer. Now fighting for power. Dichotomized. Even though my best friend was a beautiful soul housed in an Afro-Guyanese body, and even though we shared everything, we could not agree on this. Yes, we were children who did not care about ruling parties and race, but somehow it was there. Fuelled by colonization, by politics, by institutions, by systems, by poverty. It was everywhere. Racism.

Theoretical Directions

As I wrestled with my memories, our project took shape. We had consensus in some areas and were able to refine the research topic to "experiences of racism within the university classroom." We decided that our faculty would be the research site. Working with the group became more complex as deadlines loomed and personal anxieties about the group size and our ambiguous role assignment lingered, but we made crucial decisions about theoretical perspective and methodology to guide our project.

Given the topic, we all agreed that critical race theory (CRT) would be the best fit for our project. CRT evolved from the civil rights movement and critical legal studies; it examines the centrality of race in perpetuating oppression (Harris, 2012). Race and racism are used by the dominant culture to support their interests and are experienced by people of color, such that material benefits are lost to them and usurped by the dominant group in a system of "white over color ascendency" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7). Focusing on a tenet of CRT that critiques structures that systemically exclude voices and histories of racialized people (Quinn & Grumbach, 2015) would help us understand the experiences and impact of racism by our faculty on graduate students.

The decision to focus on CRT was supported by our combined experiences and available literature on racism in higher education (Cabrera, 2014; Harper, 2012; Pilkington, 2011). We started off on the premise that racism in the classroom is likely to affect racialized students' program completion and career advancement, and it also causes psychological harm. Our discussions included concerns about curriculum content and classroom dynamics. After brainstorming a number of research questions that we could address, we decided to focus on the effects of racism in the classroom on racialized students. Nevertheless, there was an inherent challenge in the general use of "racialized" as a category. Considering my own identity (Guyanese immigrant, woman, older, citizen), how was my experience different from my colleague who was young, male, Christian, Ghanaian, and an international student?

I decided to consider the above question in the framework of intersectionality, an area of CRT developed by Crenshaw (1989, 1991). Intersectionality as an analytical tool allows one to examine oppression based on intersections of identity, including race, gender, and class, taking into account historical, social, and political contexts in which the multiple biological and social categories of personal identities operate to create axes of differentiation (Cole, 2009; McCall, 2005). Given the diversity of our group, intersectionality became useful in my understanding of how experiences of oppression and racism differed for all of us. Overlapping structures of oppression and the intersecting aspects of my identity caused me to reflect on the limitations of my own inclusion.

Using intersectionality to analyze my experience, I realize that the most significant factor for me is being Muslim; I attribute this to the current sociopolitical atmosphere. The addition of "religion as racism" is highlighted by the fact that racism can exist in situations where the reality or concept of race is not present (Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). As a Muslim woman who wears *hijab*, race is present in the fact that I live in a brown body and also in the reality that I am covered. Stemming from orientalist ideas that are aptly captured in Razack's (2008) analysis of Muslims being "othered" and effectively evicted from social and political participation, I consider my circumstances and see the reasoning behind Kundani's (2014) suggestion that *hijab* is a racial signifier.

I am sitting in a café working on my computer with books and papers on the table. Concentrating on the idea of cultural hegemony. Grappling with questions. How does cultural hegemony work? What does it have to do with racism? I hear a voice. Oh, the dreaded voice in my head. This time it is pleasant. "Good morning." I look up to a middle-aged white woman and respond, happy to take a break and engage in social conventions. She has a question for me. In her pleasant, confident, paternalistic demeanor she asks, "Are you trying to learn English?" Yes, I suppose I am, because if you are culturally or religiously different, you are by default uneducated. Again, what is cultural hegemony?

Methodological Approach

We agreed on phenomenology as an appropriate methodological approach to our study and anticipated that it would assist us in developing a reflexive understanding of racism as a phenomenon through comparisons of our lived experience. However, the approach brought on

the debate of bracketing. Bracketing requires the researcher to deliberately put aside beliefs and experiences of the phenomenon before and during the research process (Carpenter, 2007). By doing so, a researcher is able to "mitigate the potential deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the rigor of the project" (Tufford & Newman, 2012, p. 81). How could any of us--five visible minority students, personally struggling with issues of racism--put aside our positionalities and subjective experiences? Even more complicated, how could we bracket while interviewing fellow students who were sharing this very experience of racism?

The idea of racism is not an abstract academic topic that we, who have experienced it, can detach ourselves from or objectively observe. Creswell (2007) points to a difficulty with implementing bracketing, as "interpretations of the data always incorporate the assumptions that the researcher brings to the topic" (p. 83), and Parahoo (2006) discusses the idea that researchers' unaware assumptions unintentionally influence their concept of the phenomena. Another complicating factor for me was my professional experience. Being a social worker was a defining part of my identity. I was trained to be emphatic and engaging, and I saw every interview (sometimes every interaction) as an intervention. Would this impede my success as an objective researcher? Would I be able to take off my social worker hat and put on a researcher's? Given the intersections of my identity and the topic, I anticipated struggles to remain objective in the role of researcher. Crucial questions surfaced for me: How would my assumptions/experiences influence my research? Would being a racialized student make me too close to the topic, and, therefore, disqualified to continue with this inquiry? Would my contribution be biased by my insider status, or would this be considered authentic knowledge?

Qualitative research uses the ontology of the researcher in the process of knowledge production by engaging reflexivity (Berger, 2015). Researchers, therefore, need to focus on their personal knowledge and develop awareness of their social positioning to facilitate the understanding of the role of the "self" in knowledge production (Berger, 2015). Aside from the theoretical, ideological, and political influences pertinent to the researcher's social positioning are matters such as race, gender, immigration status, language, beliefs, and personal biases (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010). In tandem with the researcher, the participants' lived experiences and their perceptions of their experiences are honored in the knowledge production process.

In addition to the awareness of a researcher's role, reflexivity includes the concept of cocreation of knowledge. The researcher and the participant are engaged in a mutually constructive process that is continuous (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Pillow (2003) questions the capacity of researchers to truly understand an experience (outside of their actual experiences) even when practicing reflexivity. We thought this gave us an edge, as we were all minoritized students facing racism and discrimination and were, therefore, able to share our perspectives. However, we faced the challenge of being on both sides of the research dyad and, therefore, in the center of the insider/outsider debate.

Through the process of the research, I began to think more about the dual role we had taken on as researcher-participants. Upon reflecting on myself as a researcher within the group, I realized that my underlying assumptions on racism, though impacting my life, were somewhat latent. As

I thought more about it, the ways in which I was different from other racialized students became more evident. I experienced some anxiety around my visibility as the only Muslim student in our group, an aspect of my identity that could easily hinder anonymity. Although the implications were not necessarily concerning, I was guarded about the information I divulged because of the social, political, and cultural context of our faculty, which was a microcosm of society. I experienced similar levels of ignorance and stereotypes of Muslims in other institutional and social contexts. I consider myself to be particularly cautious in general, as the constant burden of having to interact with people judging me based on who they think I might be has taken its toll. It remains a challenge to wear a particular hat as a researcher, which is divorced from being a Muslim.

Insights Gained

This project gave me the opportunity to experience the research process, increased my appreciation for the complexity of group dynamics, and improved my understanding of personal experiences of racism. To begin, I was intimidated by my lack of experience in using qualitative research, an inherently complicated system that allows for innovation with an emphasis on the researcher as an important tool in data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007; Russell & Kelly, 2002). I had to work through my inhibitions as a racialized person from a colonized country who now works in Western academia. My epistemology included silence and acceptance; as such, it was a challenge to find my voice and use it, even with colleagues within my research group. As a novice researcher with no previous exposure to reflexivity in academic work, I found the process daunting in many ways. Maybe part of this is inherent in my experiences of racism that systematically erases voices of color from history, a tenet of CRT discussed by Salas, Sen, and Segal (2012). I also found it to be a liberating and exhilarating process that allowed me to find my voice, albeit a very tentative voice, and to hear it and listen to it.

Another important learning that emerged for me was the challenge to my concept of reflexivity and bracketing as binaries. I came to appreciate that bracketing is also a process that attempts to access a researcher's level of consciousness through different phases of research. It could be considered "a process of self-discovery whereby buried emotions and experiences may surface" (Tufford & Newman, 2012, p. 85). To bracket, I had to bring into awareness my experiences, feelings, and emotions and consider their impact on the research process. I found that thinking about bracketing itself allowed for reflexivity; it required me to contemplate assumptions embedded in my consciousness. The memories that surfaced for me resulted from both bracketing and reflexivity. In tandem, these two practices allowed me to interrogate the impact of my past on my present and speculate about the future as I continue to think about a point raised by Savin-Baden (2004) about the relationship between a researcher and her research as it pertains to her past, present, and future.

I also gained a better understanding of myself and why I am interested in researching the impact of racism. I have been socialized to accept racism, or at least live with its consequences, both in my past in Guyana and here in Canada. I found that people who are affected by racism have a genuine interest to make improvements in the system, not only for themselves but also for others who are exposed to racism. This became evident when research participants made references

about "others" more likely to suffer, such as international students or visible minorities with English language difficulties. I am left with more questions: Will research result in actions that lead to changes? What action can I take on the issue of racism in higher education?

And in the End

Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Show your reflection to us all.
Researcher, researched, emic, etic,
Participants, colleagues--whatever we call,
Those who help us in our knowledge search.

Your story, my words, my story, woven into one,
Narrated, told, retold, divulged, never shunned.
Reflection, replication, reproduction,
Revisited, reviewed, reworded until we are done.

Your story, you… expressing your word,
Epistemic violence: excluded, eliminated.
Researcher's findings, participant's voice.
Knowledge production--we have the choice.
To build knowledge that represents us all.

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A Night to Remember: An Autoethnographic Window into Facilitating a *Dinner and Stories* Event for Healthcare Workers

Susan Breiddal

Abstract: In this autoethnography, a counsellor from British Columbia, Canada shares her story of facilitating a *Dinner and Stories* group intended to respond to the documented need for emotional support for professional healthcare providers. Arising from a research group intended to assess the value of sharing significant moments of awe or despair while providing palliative care, authentic dialogue was used. The purpose of this piece is to show the skills needed by the facilitator, which include but are not limited to: setting the tone; establishing rapport; building a safe container for emotion; providing physical comfort and nourishment; creating engagement; and modelling intimate conversation. With these skills, a facilitator can create an atmosphere in which participants can be intimate and vulnerable, and can explore issues in a supportive environment. This research will be of interest to those wanting to promote emotional well-being and support in healthcare settings.

Keywords: self-care, palliative care, healthcare, creative writing, group work, culture of care, autoethnography

In a palliative care setting, my colleagues and I attend to the needs of the dying and their social networks. It is also part of our everyday experience to witness death itself, which can unfold, at times, in a beautiful way that connects us to all people throughout history who have, like us, been challenged to accept that death occurs. However, in other instances, death comes under extremely difficult, stressful, and ugly circumstances that challenge every person present and cause each of them to wonder why life can be so painful and why some people have to struggle so much.

Volunteers and those who work in healthcare settings where death occurs--nurses, counsellors, care aides, front desk staff, spiritual care providers, floor cleaners, bookkeepers, porters, and fundraisers--are, of course, personally impacted by the intensity of emotion that surrounds them. Given the intimacy and connection they feel toward those they serve, it is clear that self-care for those working in such healthcare settings is paramount (Breiddal, 2013; Dechamps, 2011; Jones, 2005; Papadatou, 2009; Wainwright, 2011) and that all levels of an organization, from frontline staff to management, must participate in attending to staff well-being (Breiddal, 2012).

Dinner and Stories is one strategy to prevent burnout by using a creative process to build a culture of care in a workplace where staff can be overburdened with grief from caring for the dying and their social networks. The purpose of the group is to normalize intense responses on the part of staff members by encouraging them to be vulnerable in order to be supported in what are often private moments of despair or awe. In identifying the need for emotional support and providing a safe place and structure to bear witness, the team as a whole can be strengthened. While research into the *Dinner and Story* event has shown to have a positive effect (Bruce, Daudt, & Breiddal, 2018), more qualitative research into programs that use creative processes to address emotional stress is needed.

In the following story, the counsellor has invited an interdisciplinary group of professionals, who work or volunteer in healthcare settings where death occurs, to share a meal and a written story about their work. The story of this group is revealed through autoethnography. "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 138). Autoethnography is similar to an autobiography, but rather than commenting on personal experience, it reveals the culture of a specific group (Ellis et al., 2011).

In this piece, the skill of the counsellor in creating a safe and nurturing space is shown through dialogue, plot, and detailed description. Reliability was assured by using authentic dialogue taken from detailed notes over the course of six dinner and story groups. As is consistent with autoethnography, the story shows rather than tells.

"Hello," I say warmly as I open the front door to my home. I see a young woman, perhaps in her early thirties, standing with a big bag and a folded paper in her hand. I'm guessing that the quilt I see peeking out is the "something wonderful" that she was asked to bring, and the paper is her written story of an event at work that has stayed with her. She looks a bit unsure but introduces herself as Sadie.

"Come on in," I say. "Welcome."

"Should I take my shoes off?" she asks a bit hesitantly.

"Oh, heavens no, not unless you want to," I respond.

"Come, let me show you where we'll be tonight."

I take her through the glass doors off the hall and into the living room, where I have placed the down-filled couches in a tight, intimate circle. They are arranged so that participants can see and hear each other clearly--a distance ideal for low, sensitive conversation.

Sadie notices my home and tells me that she has just bought a turn-of-the-century vintage house. "This is what mine will look like when it grows up," she quips. I think she might be referring to my stuff: paintings, sculptures, musical instruments, and an array of family photos. The collection makes for many conversation starters.

There is a certain kind of vulnerability that occurs when we invite people into our private spaces. My decision to host *Dinner and Stories* night in my home was a deliberate choice, and I believe an important one. Although meeting rooms at work can be private, they do not promote intimacy. In my home, participants see a part of me that is usually reserved for my closest friends and family--glimpses of a bed through an open doorway, family photos, and mementoes. Since I am both a colleague, facilitator, and the hostess, I cannot fully be myself, but by opening my home, I am inviting everyone to move away from the mask of professionalism and toward a more personal way of being. It is my way of subtlety communicating not only that I trust my

colleagues enough to reveal something of my private self, but that they too can trust me with *their* private selves. Through my words, actions, and demeanor, I am making a statement that I am willing to be vulnerable and that I care.

"Please make yourself at home," I say, indicating for Sadie to help herself to hors d'oeuvres, which are spread out on the table beside a pot of hot lemon, ginger, and honey tea. While she occupies herself, I answer the door as several more people arrive at the same time.

"Come in, come in," I say, as I throw open the door.

I notice that both Denise and Peggy, who have just introduced themselves, are instantly drawn to the mandalas that hang in the wide front hall, forming a perfect gallery.

"Go ahead and look, if you like," I say. It's important that group members have a chance to connect, and in this case, their mutual interest in the artwork is a non-threatening way to get a sense of each other.

I move back into the dining room and make sure that the others who have arrived are helping themselves to food.

"You must be Jake," I say, as a tall, active-looking man reaches out to firmly shake my hand. "And you've probably guessed that I am Susan," I add.

"Yep," he says with a broad grin.

I notice that Candice has let herself in. I've worked closely with her, so I know quite a bit about her.

"Hey, Candice, guess what? Jake here is as passionate about windsurfing as you are. I think you'll really like him. Jake, meet Candice. Candice, meet Jake." They immediately enter into enthusiastic dialogue about windsurfing.

I see that everyone is engaged in looking around or in talking to each other. Since most people don't know each other or me, this is a time for them to assess the situation, even if subconsciously, and settle themselves. I find that some people like to have extra time to arrive. After a few minutes, I encourage everyone to grab a plate of food, and we all settle into the couches.

"Please feel free to adjust the cushions so that you are comfortable, and put your feet on the furniture if you want. We're pretty casual around here." I want everyone to know that it is okay to take the time to make themselves comfortable and safe. I pause while everyone positions the down cushions behind their backs, under their feet, or in their laps.

Once they are settled, I say laughingly, "Ah!! Being comfortable. It's so important!"

Peggy gives a big sigh and says, "I've really been looking forward to this." Others nod their heads.

I say, "Well, you are all pretty brave. It takes courage to come to someone's house and to write and tell a story. You don't really know what will happen. So, thank you."

"Yeah," Jake says. "When I told my wife about where I was going, she said, 'Wait a minute, you are going to a stranger's house to meet with people you don't know to talk about death? Sounds like a thrilling evening.'" Everyone laughs in understanding.

Sadie tells us that when she saw the poster for the *Dinner and Stories* event, she felt like the universe was answering her call for something that would help her to process some recent events at work.

I realize this seems like the perfect segue into outlining what's about to happen, so I begin. "Sometimes, if you are feeling a bit nervous, it helps to know exactly what will happen, so maybe I can take a few minutes to lay out how the night will look." Everyone seems amenable to that idea.

"First, I want to take care of a few things. The expectation is that what we say here tonight is confidential. It's important that we agree to not identify who has come or anything that group members talk about. You can, however, talk about your own experience. Is everyone okay with that?" I see agreement as everyone nods their heads.

"The bathroom is down the hall," I say as I point in the right direction. "Please feel free to get up and get a drink or more food whenever you feel the need, or to use the toilet."

"I'd like to hear from each of you about what drew you to come here tonight, where you work and what your role is there, and how you're doing at this moment. Then we can further introduce ourselves by sharing something wonderful. This will be followed by dinner"--I point to the adjoining dining room where the table is prepared and is complete with flowers, candles, and a bottle of wine--"and just enjoy each other's company." I continue, "After that, we can come back to the living room and take turns reading stories, followed by a discussion of each one and whatever the story has evoked. And, believe me, that will take up our whole evening."

At that moment, I catch the slightly sweet aroma of garlic, mushrooms, and cheese that is drifting in from the kitchen. It smells so good! I've asked the participants to let me know ahead of time what they like, and I've custom-made the dinner based on their responses. I think they are really going to enjoy the meal, so I'm excited.

My attention is drawn back when Candice speaks out. "That sounds good, but I have a question," she says, covering her body with one of several soft mohair blankets that are distributed among the couches. "What got you started on this project?" I was going to talk about this later, but since she asked, I might as well explain. When I look around the room, others seem interested in hearing my answer.

"Great question Candice," I say. "I've always been interested in the subject of self-care, but I have often found the current literature to be pathetically trite"--I pause--"in my humble opinion, that is." I laugh. "Take a bubble bath, go for a walk, laugh with friends! Is this the best advice they can come up with for people who see pain, suffering, and death every day?"

Okay, stop ranting, I say to myself. I pause and take a breath.

"While we do need sleep, exercise, and good food, we need a lot more than that. I believe, and research agrees, that creative processes can help to contain and express the big emotions that we carry, so I decided to bring together things that I love--group work, stories, cooking, and, of course, palliative care--hoping that I would encourage all of you to work toward building a culture of care in your workplaces. And what I mean by a culture of care is a work environment where it is understood that emotional responses to pain and suffering are normal, to be expected, and worthy of support."

Now I'm wondering if I have gone on too long. I feel very passionate about this subject, but I know that I need to wrap it up.

"I think it's a great idea," says Jake. "I'm really happy to be here." Others nod in agreement.

Wanting to shift the mood before going into introductions, I spontaneously decide that this might be a good time to tell my story. I want to show my own willingness to be vulnerable and to set the tone for the night, maybe giving others permission to feel strong emotion, and, above all, to create a sense of sacred space.

"Before we start with our introductions, I just want to take a minute to acknowledge--and maybe feel, or take in--what's happening right now. Since we are telling stories tonight, I want to tell you one about a man that I met-a man I'll call Brad."

Brad was a patient at hospice, and I was asked to see him because his nurse said that "he just seemed sad." I went into the room and saw a man about my age, very small in the bed, and with huge blue eyes that looked out at me from behind heavy glasses.

I introduced myself and asked if he wanted to talk. He did. He began to tell me about his wife, about how wonderful she had been right from the beginning of his illness. Then there was a long silence, and we just sat quietly together. After a while, I asked him what he was thinking about.

"You know, Susan," he said, "all my friends and family are coming now. They want to say goodbye. They come in here and we talk. I'm so lucky, really, to have so many people who care about me."
His voice trailed off and I waited.

"They leave here and they go back to their lives, and I…it's just that…"--he struggled to keep his composure--"…it's just that…Well, it's…such a privilege to be alive." He began to sob, and then after a very long silence, he quietly said, "I really get that now."

I look around the room and make eye contact with everyone. "Like Brad, I feel like it's a privilege to be alive and to be here with you, and I don't want to let the moment pass without acknowledging that. Palliative care teaches us to notice and appreciate the present moment, and I think that when people share who they really are, it's sacred, and that's what we're about to enter-a time that is both special and profound." I feel my own emotion rise to the surface and need to pause for a moment in order to collect myself.

"I am sensing from what you all have said, and I'm feeling it myself, that we share a mixture of excitement, apprehension, awkwardness, and anticipation as we begin. This makes sense because we don't all know each other yet. One thing that comes from my experience working with groups, though, is that by the end of the night, I'm pretty sure that we are going to feel close and warm toward each other. It seems, at least from my experience, that a feeling of connection happens when people are authentic and allow themselves to be vulnerable."

Although what I have said is what counsellors refer to as a hypnotic suggestion, it is also what I know to be true-a fascinating phenomenon that delights me every time I'm part of a group like this.

I continue, "When people feel safe, being in a group creates magic. I don't know how it works, just that it does. And I'm pretty sure that it will happen for us here tonight. So let's go around the circle and hear a little bit about each of you."

After introductions, I pause to see if anyone has a question, but everyone seems content.

"Would anyone like to begin by showing us something wonderful?" I ask.

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