

## **My Teaching-Learning Philosophy** **Jasna K. SCHWIND RN, PhD**

Key terms that embody my teaching-learning philosophy are experience, self-awareness, mindful self-compassion, reflection, metaphors, creative self-expression, relationship, mutuality, humanness, person-centredness, respect, caring, inclusivity, safety, holistic education, healing, and growth.

The Latin adage, *Omnia Mea Mecum Porte*, loosely translated to mean, *Everything I am, I carry with me*, encapsulates the premise with which I encounter life, and more specifically my teaching-learning relationships. My teaching-learning philosophy is grounded in Dewey's (1963) assertion that "every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences" (p. 35). My belief that all life events contribute to who we are in the process of becoming, as we live storied lives within the personal-social contexts over time and space (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), further underpins my view of teaching-learning. Additionally, I agree with Dewey's declaration (1963) that "without some reconstruction, some remaking" of our life experiences there is no intellectual evolution (p. 64). Thus, my assumption is that people's relational co-construction of knowledge may be augmented by engagement in focused experiential reflection, which recognizes our unique humanness.

Exploration and reconstruction of my own life experiences through regular creative reflective practices increases my awareness of the stories that inform my way of being, knowing and doing my teaching-learning praxis. By honouring that aspect of myself, I provide the necessary time and space for my students to do the same. To that end I created an experiential teaching-learning tool I call *Narrative Reflective Process* (NRP) (Schwind, 2008, 2016). NRP is informed by Narrative Inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), a qualitative research approach through which I explore and study experience in healthcare education and practice. More specifically, NRP is a creative self-expression tool that incorporates mindfulness, imagination, storytelling, metaphors (Schwind, 2009), drawing, writing, and reflective dialogue. To facilitate access to the creative part of ourselves, I begin NRP activity by engaging students in a mindful breathing activity (Schwind et al., 2017). In my teaching-learning practice, while honoring adult-learning principles, I incorporate NRP and mindful activities in some of the following ways:

- I guide year four nursing practice students through NRP, helping them to mindfully increase self-awareness, and so to reflect on and critically examine their emerging personal and aesthetic knowing (Chinn & Kramer, 2018), thereby enhancing the quality of their personal and professional interactions. The process usually begins with mindful breathing, life stories, life metaphor, drawings, and sharing of 'safe' stories in small groups, all the while engaging in creative and reflective writing throughout the process (Schwind, 2016). This part of the reflective process, when curricular time allows, spans the fall term. During the subsequent winter term, I invite the same year four students to follow a similar process, only with the focus on their professional practice and their role as relational caregivers within professional and therapeutic relationships (Schwind & Manankil-Rankin, 2020). At the end of the second term the students review their personal and professional stories, metaphors, and reflective writing, seeking emerging narrative patterns,

- while accessing scholarly literature to support their exploration. The feedback from the students regarding the value of this process has been strongly affirming.
- With graduate students I use aspects of NRP to help them make more meaningful connections within and across the complexities of qualitative research methods, development of nursing knowledge, as well as advanced therapeutic communication from an inter-professional (IP) perspective. More specifically, I use metaphors and weekly in-class reflective writing prompts to encourage self-awareness, as well as dialogue with peers.
  - I also invite graduate students to work in self-selected Teaching-Learning Groups, which are based on shared course-specific interests, thus upholding adult learning principles of self-directedness and collaboration.
  - Additionally, I begin each of my classes, undergraduate and graduate, with a brief mindful breathing activity and end with a lovingkindness meditation (Miller et al., 2014; Salzberg, 1995; Schwind et al., 2017). These activities, as any other creative self-expression, are always an invitation, respecting the inner wisdom of each person to make an informed choice. In my course syllabi stands the notation on access to professional support, should such be needed as a result of any of the creative course activities.
  - To mitigate generalized anxiety that is often present in higher education, and to further support student engagement in class, I bring to each class crayons and paper, and invite students to colour images of nature during lectures. As a result of the creative in-class activities, anonymous student feedback speaks of their decreased anxiety, increased engagement with the course discussions, and less need to access their personal technology during class-time.

Through these creative self-expressive modes students and I co-construct our professional ways of being, as we expand our consciousness, evolving as persons and professionals over time and in a safe environment, “finding greater meaning in life [and] reaching new heights of connectedness with other people” (Newman, 2008, p. 6). In other words, these experiential teaching-learning approaches augment meaningful learning within professional relationships, thus opening possibilities for both the teacher and the student to evolve toward wholeness.

In order to provide this holistic way of teaching-learning (Miller, 1990), I believe that as teachers we first need to develop mindful self-awareness, before we can guide our students to do the same. To that end I endeavour to support my colleagues, as they too explore ways to include creative teaching-learning approaches to guide their students to greater depths of self-understanding, and ultimately mindful self-compassion (Neff, 2003; Schwind et al, 2012, 2021). As I role-model these qualities with my colleagues and students, my hope is that they will do the same for those in their care, their patients, creating holistic relational person-centred contexts, where it is safe to heal, learn, and grow.

Furthermore, I believe that a teaching-learning relationship is one of mutual respect between the teacher and the student, where the “I-thou” (Buber, 1970/1996) philosophy is lived, and the whole person, mind-body-soul, is honoured for both. This kind of interconnectedness allows care and respect to flourish beyond the teaching-learning relationship to impact future ways of being for the teacher, the student and those we each encounter in our personal and professional lives.

Finally, I see teaching-learning as a dynamic and enriching relationship between two human beings whose storied lives entwine with the program curriculum framework (Schwab, 1969) to give it life and meaning, both on personal and social levels. Through the encounter,

not only do the teacher and the student co-create knowledge, but the curriculum, as a result, evolves and changes reflexively, generating potential futures for new generations. In other words, as a teacher and narrative inquirer, I live the integration of all aspects of my professional life, where my teaching-learning practices are mutually informed by my scholarship of discovery, as well as practice and service. My teaching-learning experiences generate my inquiry questions, and in turn the newly co-created knowledge nourishes my educational situations where person-centred relationships are mutually transformative. In this way, my teaching-learning praxis contributes to our collective evolutionary path of knowledge development in education, research, and practice.

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