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Pelech, James. (2013) *Guide to Transforming Teaching through Self-Inquiry*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

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The book, *Guide to Transforming Teaching through Self-Inquiry* written by James Pelech, is true to its title, guiding educators through self-inquiry via purposeful, holistic, authentic, and reflective processes. The Constructivist teaching philosophy Pelech subscribes to intends for teachers to 1) understand the essence of their experiences in teaching, 2) examine underlying assumptions, 3) create new schemes for new situations; and, 4) place new knowledge into action (p. 20). Pelech shares that all effective teachers reflect and student learning is the most important reason to teach (p. 14). Reflective processes range from being as simple as keeping a daily professional journal all the way to action research.

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Each chapter of the book includes a summary at the end. Diagrams, figures, and relevant examples gracefully permeate the text. Artifact examples are shared beginning in chapter four. One example used shares the way an artifact (reflection) is used to identify an intuitive problem of uneasiness that led to further analysis.

Self-inquiry foundations are covered at the beginning, culminating with portfolios toward the conclusion of the book, all part of a transformational process (p. 129) according to the author. Activities that can be placed in the portfolio are explained earlier in the text, along with graphical and narrative examples of portfolio content arrangement. Artifacts are the visual representations of professional standards met (p. 135), and should be in the professional section of a portfolio. Portfolio sections can be future-oriented in scope (p. 141). A list of possible uses is given.

One process comprehensively covered in the text is action research. Its implementation can be derived from a critical reflection, such as finding out a specific best practice that is actually hampering learning. The example given is that cooperative learning, considered by educators to be a best practice in education, actually stifled the learning of a group of math students who got confused when listening to others in their group. Here, action research is part of the self-reflective process.

The reflective process leads to change when an issue is uncovered that needs further examination. Change happens through a number of explained Constructivist strategies in the book. One Constructivist activity sheet used as an example was developed by Kurt Lewin (p.44, 2013; Shy-Mark, 2011).

When speaking about journals, the author takes a risk as speaks of journal in the open sense, suggesting that a goal of educators should be to share experiences through an interactive journaling process that allows another educator to offer comments. The same can be done in a teacher-student interaction as examples in the text reveal. The author cautions of issues associated with the interactive form of reflection, citing gender and personal liberty issues. Despite these disadvantages pointed out regarding

author-shared research, the author shares the many advantages that, with adequate trust built into the human element of relationships, makes the process worth it. Samples of this process, and others are provided. The text offers Constructivist-based strategies for K-12 through adult learning, and can be taught through the lens of various disciplines. It also offers advice on comportment during conferences. Further, professional development is touted as an important aspect of growth with benefits for educators and students since what is learned at a conference can be applied to educators' core values (p. 114). An example of the process is provided.

To reflect, the author often provides sample prompts within the text for ideas. Sometimes, these reflections that lead ultimately to transformation might be the result of intuition. Chapter seven provides various prompts, for instance. Prompts include emerging questions.

The reader is introduced to the definition of action research, a "systematic...research process done in the context of one's practice...to improve teaching and learning" (p. 68). Components of action research are expressed. Though similarities with traditional research methodologies are mentioned such as the formation of a research question, the process taken is quite unique in the sense that the one shared took weeks and in lieu of months, not requiring any special permissions outside of school administration. An action plan is established and a note was sent home to the parents as part of the communication plan that explains the project. A unique component of action research is the *communication plan* is to ensure that certain assumptions are not overlooked such as the assumption of the automatic transference of knowledge.

The author considers this more of a "communication" component, which he suggests is vital for stakeholders. He delivers a thoughtful text divided into thoughtful sections that can be followed by fellow educators. A middle school example of action research conducted during his tenure at a school in Chicago is provided (p. 77). Consisting of a number of different components, the project utilized a survey to find out which method of learning students preferred. Action research is accompanied by a preliminary plan. The project described begins with a

literature review process along with examples; and it was preceded by a pilot study before it became the action research project. One component is the data collection, for example. Though the connection is not clear, the author seems to suggest presenting the information in the part of the book that addresses conferences and educator as a presenter, using helpful tips like providing handouts for readers who may find themselves in that role. The Constructivist presenter is defined as both a motivator and a facilitator (p. 128).

Metaphors are used to provide depth in reflection Pelech's aim here is to include self-reflective thought into virtually everything in education; however, this book's overall goal seems to be the creation of a better teacher. A better teacher appears to be the teacher that will analyze lessons through one of the activities (p. 127). In fact, Pelech finds that "teachers bring a special orientation to learning" (p. 102). An example of a metaphor from the book is the *Autonomy – Be Captain of Your Ship* one that looks at teachers' personal traits and theories to discover critical assumptions and values (p. 28).

Disequilibrium is introduced as an unexpected surprise to an event that could very well explain problems with adult learners who often want practical explanation integrated into learning (p. 103). Because this happens in education (and other professions), the author makes the reader aware of its existence as part of the reflective process. Pelech contends that a teacher must be adaptable, recognizing the importance of his or her interactions in certain situations. "Adapting...to student needs...are activities requiring effective teachers to actively reflect upon their teaching" (p. 10). Pelech believes this sort of self-reflection is transformational in teaching and learning, and it begins by asking open, honest questions first. Next, the educator has to be willing to address internal processes and external processes like values that essentially impact teaching in the classroom. Reflection, therefore, is done in real time.

About the Reviewer

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