

Chapter Four

Digging Deep to Reveal Jesus: Seeking Light in the Hidden Corners

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Abstract

The learning environment is a complex living milieu, with many stakeholders and cultural inputs that impact how a student experiences a curriculum. It includes a hidden curriculum that has the potential to impact a student's learning and experiences in ways that may not correspond with desired outcomes. A teacher or school system wishing to reveal Jesus in the learning environment must face this reality and critically reflect, expose what is hidden and question current practice. Reflection with intentionality, purpose and a rigorous process leads to transformation and improved student outcomes.

Such critically reflective practice requires vulnerability and courage. There are many forces within the learning environment that hinder the change process, including conflicting pressures on time, increasing expectations of compliance, competing demands and a sense of isolation. In addition, each educator has experiences, beliefs and assumptions that can create blind spots in practice and impact their sense of self-efficacy.

In the face of such strong resistance to transformation, how might an educator or educational institution navigate the uncharted territory of critical reflective practice? In this chapter I will introduce a model

of reflective practice and consider the roles of purpose, perspective, process and partnership in digging deep into praxis, seeking solutions within complexity and bringing about change.

What might inspire such intentional and courageous practice? A strong sense of purpose is needed if one is to swim against the flow, and the aim of revealing Jesus in the learning environment is such a purpose. This is a goal that burns deeply in the heart of many Christian educators. We explore this purpose, suggesting both a ‘syllabus’ and a ‘pedagogy’ from Jesus’ own ministry, through which to be more specific about our goals and intentions.

Using literature, personal experience and data from teacher interviews, this chapter makes an explorative foray into critical reflection upon the revealing of Jesus in the learning environment. By questioning current practice, making visible the ‘hidden curriculum’, seeking five lenses of perspective, examining context, considering partnerships and contemplating aspects of process, I argue that educators and educational institutions can be more intentional and humbly authentic in their attempts to reveal Jesus to students.

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Introduction

God makes a huge impact on my daily life. He helps me when I am lost in the world and when I don’t know what to do next. He makes me look back and not be afraid of my past and mistakes. I get stronger and braver... (Year 6 student)

I asked my Year 6 students to write for five minutes on what they had learned about God and what this meant to them. Each response was unique, divulging a glimpse of a journey of faith. My purpose was two-fold. I wanted to celebrate the self-perceived steps of faith, and I wanted an insight into how my intended messages about God were being received.

The revealing of Jesus lies deep within the vocation of Christian educators around the world. With hearts deeply committed to nurturing students towards lives of meaning, purpose, love and joy now and in the future, we share this profound purpose. We want our students to be drawn to the One who loves them best.

Sometimes, they are.

And sometimes, they are not.

Do we simply put this down to student choice and nonchalantly flick the dust off our practice?

Or do we dig a little deeper and consider that our practice might be sending a different message than the one we intend?

This chapter examines the ultimate purpose of revealing Jesus to our students through the multifaceted lens of deepened reflective practice, exploring both the intention of the revelation and its receipt. We commence by digging into this purpose and considering what we might wish to reveal about Jesus. We examine Jesus' ministry and teaching style, putting forward a suggestion of Jesus' own 'syllabus' in regard to His revelation of His Father and His pedagogical choices in achieving His purpose. We contemplate ways in which we might learn from this syllabus and pedagogy as we seek to reveal Jesus in our own learning contexts.

Acknowledging the forces that impede transformational change, we seek greater understanding of how we might question our practice and gain wisdom and insight. A model of reflective practice is proposed as a practical framework through which revealing Jesus in the learning environment might be considered. Within that framework, varied perspectives and assumptions are explored through literature, personal experience and teacher interviews, to discover elements of the hidden curriculum that may undermine our deepest purpose.

Implications for practice are considered, with suggestions that enable educators to dig deep, get inspired and get going (Brown, 2010).

Revealing Jesus

Lord, as I face the onslaught of pressures and demands,
The pulling and the pushing, and endless trite commands,

Keep the fire burning deep within my soul
To share some revelation of Jesus through my role.

It's not a student outcome, a tick upon a page.
I want to introduce them to the God o'er all the age.

No syllabus can cover this, no essay, quiz or test.
To give each one a glimpse of the One who loves them best.
So give me strength and courage to question what I do.
I want them to discover the wonder that is You.

Why reveal Jesus?

Teaching is the art of loving God's children. (Knight, 2016, p. 80)

When asked to share the core goals they have for their students, teachers in a K-12 faith-based school voiced deeply held aims that will resonate with Christian educators around the world.

'I would love for my kids to somehow have a little time capsule of their picture of God and start there and hope there was a bigger more beautiful picture at the end.'

'To show them Jesus' love. That's huge to me.'

'Well, the biggest one for me is for them to have a love for God and to know God as their Saviour. ... yeah, God first definitely, and then self-esteem, confidence...'

'[I'm] determined at least in my own class and my spheres of influence to make the ... development of spirituality ... the priority over content and academics.'

'... whatever we're doing in this room, in some way I'm hoping that that will encourage them to have a deeper understanding of the Saviour.'

Like these teachers, I have long had a deeply embedded purpose within my own practice to reveal Jesus through all that I do. Acknowledging my inconsistencies and imperfections, I have experienced the soul salve of being fully known by my Saviour and fully accepted – just as I am. I believe that the person and message of Jesus bring light to the shadow of brokenness, purpose in the chaos of confusion, value to the alienated and ignored, hope amidst depression and despair and love for the bruised and broken-hearted. I want my students to know this for themselves, and yet...

The life of a teacher is busy, with pulls and pushes, expectations and demands. As I reflect on the realities of my practice, I realise that there is a tendency to major in minors, with most time and energy spent on the daily grind, the essentials, the routines, the compliance

tasks. Very often, I have simply assumed that the big goals would take care of themselves.

Not so.

I now realise that even a deeply held belief can be less than effective without great intentionality.

Many readers will be familiar with the object lesson of filling a jar with an assortment of sand, pebbles and rocks. When the sand is put in first, there is little room for the pebbles, and the rocks are left on the bench. If the rocks are positioned in the jar first, then the pebbles, the sand filters through the larger objects and most of it fits within the jar.

As educators, we need to identify the rocks of our core goals and place them carefully in the jars of our practice first. The purpose of revealing Jesus is such a rock – *the* rock, for many Christian educators. Leaving this rock in the realm of the implicit and unexamined may result in it lying on the bench of practice, separate and ineffective.

For me to reveal Jesus to my students requires me to be in a vibrant, dynamic and trusting relationship with Him. As Joseph Allotta (2018) states in *Discipleship in Education*, ‘teachers who truly worship, who love God’s Word, and pray intently for their students will certainly shine forth from the crowd’ (p. 73). I used to think that this personal commitment was enough; however, in my research on reflective practice, I have come to understand that with great purpose there needs to be great intentionality and an open-hearted courage to critically question both explicitly planned practice and the less obvious yet incredibly powerful implicit or hidden curriculum that impacts a student’s experience. I want to seek understanding in the hidden corners of the learning environment to discover the stumbling blocks and conflicting messages that undermine the revelation of Jesus in my practice.

Revealing what?

Revelation is not something you measure, but Someone you meet. (Rohr, 2016, p. 17)

What is the message, the picture, the big idea that lies at the heart of our desire to reveal Jesus? Are we painting a two-dimensional image of words, framing it with doctrine, and presenting it to our students as a gift that we expect them to treasure and hang on their own walls?

Moving beyond the clichés and platitudes of religious rhetoric, we must ask of ourselves what we expect to be revealing about Jesus. ‘Human experience offers a multitude of interpretations and “living art” requires such interpretation and personal response on the part of those who can see and hear it’ (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 322). Jesus came as ‘living art’ so that we could see God. We, in turn, are a living portrait of what we wish to reveal about Jesus. Our students will interpret our revelation of Jesus through their own lives and experiences. Paul reminds us of this in Ephesians 2:10: ‘For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago’ (New Living Translation). What we offer our students is both propositional and experiential (Hall et al., 2009). The propositional is interpreted through the experiential.

Jesus came to earth to reveal His Father (John 14:9) to a broken, confused world. Our world is also broken and confused. We must take the time to consider what Jesus revealed about His Father and also how he lived out this message. ‘In listening to Jesus, we discover whose voice it is that has echoed around the hearts and minds of the human race all along’ (Wright, 2006, p. 79). We hear Him through His words and His living. ‘God comes to us, disguised as our life’ (Rohr, 2016, p. 17). Our students may hear Him through our words, and will most definitely hear Him through our living, as ‘God [uses] the very wounded lives of very ordinary people’ (p. 17).

After a lifetime of reflection, John, the disciple who was both an eyewitness and a participant in Jesus’ three years of ministry, sums up Jesus’ message as ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16). This is what brought God to earth, what led to a cross and what broke loose in resurrection – three simple words that speak to the deepest part of every soul.

Steve Chalke and Alan Mann (2003) suggest that Jesus revealed God’s love with a message that surprised many and spoke deeply into hearts. ‘The Kingdom, the in-breaking shalom of God, is available now to everyone through me’ (Chalke & Mann, 2003, p. 16).

Love, kingdom, shalom and invitation. This is Jesus’ revelation of His Father, His ‘syllabus’ (see Table 4.1), and this is what I want to reveal to my students.

**Table 4.1 Jesus' syllabus of sacred revolution
implications for practice**

Love	God is love; love God; love your neighbour as you love yourself (1 John 4:16; John 13:34; Mark 12: 30, 31).
Kingdom	The disenfranchised, broken-hearted, marginalised, humble, peacemakers and persecuted find themselves blessed citizens of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 5:1–11).
Invitation	To all who hear, 'Come! Yes, that means you!' (Isaiah 55:1, John 7:37, Revelation 22:17).
Shalom	A peace beyond understanding (John 14:27; John 16:33; John 20:19–20; Philippians 4:7).

Jesus' message was one of revolution, a sacred, subtle, non-violent uprising that shattered social and spiritual norms. He spoke of a kingdom where the 'oppressed and marginalised' flourish and belong (Chalke & Mann, 2003, p. 39) and where justice, compassion, humility and hope prevail (Moore, 2020). 'Come' is the invitation to all: Come if you are thirsty (Isaiah 55:1; John 7:37; Revelation 22:17). *Come as you are. Now. Here. Come. You are my child and I have been waiting for you (Luke 15: 11–31).*

Those who accept the invitation and enter this kingdom experience 'shalom', a peace beyond understanding (Philippians 4:7), transforming struggle into contentment, fractured existence into wholeness, injustice into justice, endless wanting into fulfilment, bondage into freedom and despair into hope (Chalke & Mann, 2003).

'This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life' (John 3:16, The Message). Jesus revealed God's love through words and His life.

Love is what God is,
Love is why Jesus came,
and love is why he continues to come,
year after year to person after person... (Bell, 2012, p. 198)

Jesus lived a pedagogy of love that reached into the hearts and minds of His 'students'. In His miracles, words, actions and

relationships we notice His methodology. Jesus was not teaching in a standardised learning environment. His pedagogy reached into the nooks and crannies of society, the hidden corners that were usually overlooked.

[Jesus] brought God’s Kingdom to earth through healing, teaching, restoring, living out justice, including the excluded, inviting, telling stories, mentoring, praying, living out love, feeding the poor, noticing the unseen, touching the untouchables, and commissioning ambassadors to reach out to the unreached. (Cox & Peck, 2018, pp. 253, 254)

This pedagogy (see Table 4.2) is worthy of our attention, as is the content of Jesus’ message. We need to stop and reflect, deeply and deliberately. What might this pedagogy look like in our classrooms?

Table 4.2 Jesus’ Pedagogy of Love

Miracles	Healing, feeding.
Words	Teaching, telling stories, inviting.
Actions	Living out justice and love, including the excluded, touching the untouchable, noticing the unseen.
Relationships	Praying, restoring, mentoring, commissioning ambassadors.

Reflective Practice

Spiritual formation is not a magical occurrence resulting from the presence of Christians gathered together in the same place ... There must also be intentionality, reflection, engagement, and interaction between and among those gathered. (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 85)

It was through the work of John Dewey that reflective thinking became a focus within education (Dewey, 1910, 1916; Dimova & Loughran, 2009). The concept has continued to be investigated and theorised, remaining a core issue in current research (Brookfield, 2017; Josten, 2011; Mezirow, 2009; Rodgers, 2002; Rodgers & Laboskey, 2016; Schön, 1987). Dewey pointed out the disquiet and disruption often associated with reflective thinking, along with the tension of working through doubt and pushing through the force of the status

quo (Dewey, 1910, pp. 12, 13). He recognised the need for courage in facing problems in their complexity and seeking innovative solutions.

Donald Schön (1987) extends the concept of reflective thinking to that of reflective practice. He also highlights the challenge and discomfort associated with reflecting on complex problems, likening it to descending from ‘the high ground’ of accepting technical pre-packaged solutions to problems that are ‘relatively unimportant’ to the ‘swampy lowland’ of ‘messy, confusing problems’ (Schön, 1987, p. 3). He describes this courageous activity as a form of professional artistry.

In *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, Stephen Brookfield (2017) emphasises the importance of critical reflective practice, ‘a process of intentional and continual scrutiny of the assumptions that inform your teaching practice’ (p. 19). He describes the disruptive and complex nature of seeking to critically examine that which is often concealed behind a veil of respectability and social mores (p. 95). Like Schön, Brookfield (2017) compares such messy and critical reflection with the unquestioning acceptance of current trends: ‘It challenges the innocent belief that by following some neat methodological model you can ensure unequivocal success’ (p. 226).

It appears from these theorists that any excursion into deepening reflective practice is likely to incur discomfort and dissonance. It is an act of courage and intentionality, reserved for the truly important ‘rocks’, i.e. those that are core to an educator’s calling. The revealing of Jesus to our students is such a purpose.

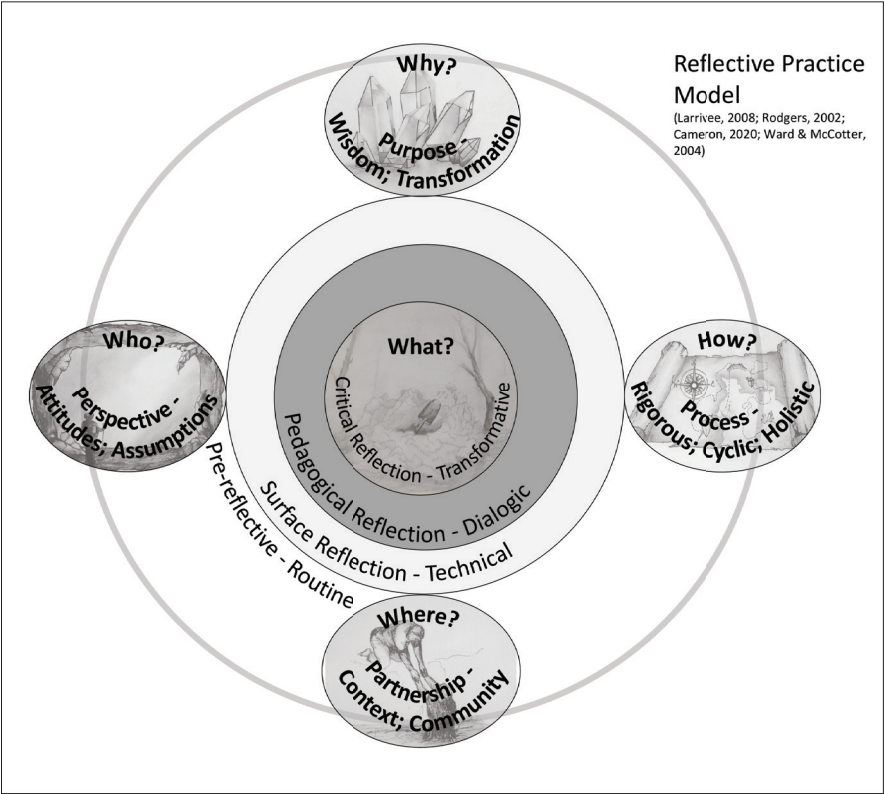
Reflective practice can be rather slippery to define. Its practical understanding can range from an act of compliance (Edwards & Thomas, 2010) to technical problem solving (Dimova & Loughran, 2009; Josten, 2011; Schön, 1987) to a truly transforming praxis. For the purposes of this discussion, reflective practice is defined as an intentional process of seeking awareness and questioning both explicit and implicit curricula, including influential beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and actions within and beyond the learning environment. The purpose of reflective practice is to achieve transformational change and improved student outcomes.

In order to support a shared conceptual understanding, I have developed the Harmonious Model of Reflective Practice (Cameron,

2020), bringing together fragments of theory and research in a holistic representation (Figure 4.1). This model denotes qualitative differences and highlights four criteria through which to consider reflective practice. These criteria, influenced by Dewey and set out by Carol Rodgers (2002), are:

- 1. Reflection as a meaning-making process (pp. 845-849).
- 2. Reflection as a rigorous way of thinking (pp. 849-856).
- 3. Reflection in community (pp. 856-857).
- 4. Reflection as a set of attitudes (pp. 858-863).

Figure 4.1 Harmonious Reflective Practice



Reflection is embedded within the context of practice and, when most effective, purposes to build knowledge and wisdom, resulting in changed beliefs and behaviours (Rodgers, 2002) and the transformation of practice (Cranton, 2011; Josten, 2011; Taylor,

2009; Taylor & Jarecke, 2009). At the core of meaning making lies ‘purpose’.

With deep purpose there is a need for strong intention and rigour, involving ongoing questioning and evaluation, problem framing and reframing, and an adaptive and iterative approach to seeking solutions (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Rodgers, 2002; Ward & McCotter, 2004). This forms a defined, yet flexible, ‘process’.

Whilst reflection is often viewed as an introspective activity, it is enhanced through collaboration, collegial input and ‘critical friends’ (Nilsson, 2013). Wisdom and insight are magnified when we seek to reflect together (Collin & Karsenti, 2011; Larrivee, 2008b; Nilsson, 2013). It is in the merger of introspection and interaction that we create deeper awareness and discernment (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). Reflection is best situated in community, in ‘partnership’.

Rodgers identifies four attitudes proposed by Dewey as essential criteria for reflective practice: whole-heartedness, directness, open-mindedness, and responsibility (Rodgers, 2002). Brookfield (2017) further suggests that there are four lenses through which teachers should view their beliefs and assumptions: ‘students’ eyes, colleague’s perceptions, personal experience, and theory’ (p. 19). Adopting Dewey’s attitudes and utilising Brookfield’s lenses, a range of ‘perspectives’ is sought to provide depth and breadth of reflection (Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

Rather than employing these criteria as discrete items in a linear sequence, the ‘artistry’ of reflective practice involves an overlapping, fractal interplay, embracing the ‘loops and leaps’ (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 80) of reflection before, during and after practice (Schön, 1987). This is acknowledged in Figure 1 through unbroken circular lines.

The Harmonious Reflective Practice Model (Figure 4.1) honours varying qualities of reflection in teaching practice. Edwards and Thomas (2010) suggest that ‘a teacher is, by virtue of their initiation into a living practice of teaching, a thoughtful practitioner’ (p. 407). All levels of reflection are required, though not all will lead to potentiating transformational change. The qualitative differences are informed by the work of Larrivee (2008a) and Ward and McCotter (2004). The levels are represented within concentric circles, indicating varying

yet equally valid qualities. With a purpose of such consequence as revealing Jesus and with the desire to see transformational change, we are seeking to undertake profound critical reflection.

Critical reflection, with its goal of transformation, sits closest to the allegorical picture of digging in Schön's (1987) swamp. This level of reflection is both rigorous and uncomfortable. It requires Brookfield's lenses (2017) to be employed with great purpose. The seeking and questioning involved often include societal, institutional and even political issues (Larrivee, 2008a; Ward & McCotter, 2004). Ethics and values, equity and justice are integral to critical reflection (Hickson, 2011; Shabeeb & Akkary, 2014).

Reflection becomes critical when it is motivated by the desire to be just, fair and compassionate and when it questions the criteria, power dynamics and socio-political structures that frame our practice. (Ramirez & Allison-Roan, 2014, pp. 458-459)

And so, with courage and intentionality, whole-heartedness, directness, open-mindedness and responsibility (Rodgers, 2002), we embark on an excavation of the swamps of our learning environments, searching the unexamined shadows of practice, seeking to bring light to the unseen. We do so with the great purpose of revealing Jesus to those with whom we undertake the learning journey.

Current societal and educational milieu: Seeking the hidden curriculum

I thus consider the enabling sense in which we might invoke 'wonder' for the possibility of thinking... to explore what the pathos of wonderment might offer education—an institution charged with cultivating 'thinking,' and yet constantly susceptible to the thoughtless trappings of technocratic jargon and the mechanical logic of assessment, learning processes, and social reproduction. Can wonder enact a thinking that helps us retain what is educational in education? Can wonder help us to overcome the thoughtlessness that dulls our attention to what we do to each other through education? (Di Paolantonio, 2019, p. 214)

Critical reflection is grounded in an understanding of the context of the learning environment. In whole-hearted wonder we question

the practice, policies and procedures of our context. We also set our sights on social and political contexts. Reminiscent of the prophets of old, we must stand on the outskirts of our culture and call out the injustices, hypocrisies and destructive values and actions that lurk within the accepted ideologies of our society. Brookfield (2017) asserts that teachers must acknowledge that ‘educational processes and interactions are framed by wider structures of power and dominant ideology’, seeking to reveal ‘assumptions and practices that are... hegemonic’ (p. 10) in society and impacting our students.

Postmodernism, post-truth and consumerism are three dominant ideologies evident in western culture that impact how students relate to the message of Jesus.

Jesus claimed to be ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life’ (John 14:6, New Living Translation). Societal dispositions toward truth impact how this might be received by students. Within postmodernism, there is a pervasive sense of relativity and a distrust of any claims of knowledge or truth. It is deemed that truth claims often reflect the ideology of those with power (Duignan, 2020). Postmodernism tends to view the self as fragmented and flexible (Splitter, 2020), leading to suspicion regarding the claims of Jesus and His message (Braun & Potgieter, 2019). The ‘syllabus’ in Table 1 shows that Jesus’ content extended beyond a set of rigid beliefs. Belonging to the Kingdom is not established on the basis of the acceptance of a set of beliefs or even of good standing within the accepted norms of society. It is established with an open invitation for all to ‘come’. Jesus’ message pushes past the suspicion and distrust of postmodernism.

The post-truth ideology moves further into the postmodern distrust of knowledge claims. It is an ‘anti-intellectual cultural and political climate in which facts and rationality are subordinated to familiar narratives that have popular resonance, substantiated only by anecdotal evidence... This is a form of radical relativism indifferent to any distinction between fact and fiction’ (Chandler & Munday, 2020, p. 603). This way of ‘thinking, believing and behaving’ is a stance becoming increasingly common in western societies (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 93; Song-Chong, 2018). Within the ideology of post-truth, the emotions reign supreme (Zembylas, 2020). Whilst Jesus’ parable of the foolish man building his house upon the sand (Matthew 7:24–27) might confront the ‘foolishness’ of the post-

truth dependence upon feelings, His pedagogy of love includes both the relational and the experiential. For students heavily influenced by post-truth thinking, Jesus' message is demonstrated through His actions, touching the untouchable, including the excluded, and living out both justice and love. His stories draw listeners into a world where emotions and critical thinking work in tandem. Our post-truth students have the opportunity to discover that God transcends the limits of both reason and emotions (Song-Chong, 2018).

Consumerism is another pervasive ideology that has great influence in our society. 'The consumer mentality that now dominates American culture seems to have completed the post-truthing of higher education' (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 94). This ideology reaches well beyond American culture and higher education. Consumerism 'depicts human persons as private individuals whose worth and fulfillments are found in the acquisition of new things (and the concomitant disposal of old things)' (Lang Hearlson, 2019, p. 581). It is a way of life that some liken to a religion (Mikko & Arto, 2018). It pervades all aspects of life.

Christy Lang Hearlson (2019) argues that consumerism impacts memory, attention and imagination. With novelty raised to a platform of near worship, consumers become detached from the things they toss away, along with the experiences and stories attached, distorting memory making. 'It dampens self-reflection... It replaces our productive and contemplative skills with skills of acquisition and disposal' (Lang Hearlson, 2019, p. 585). Consumerism also impacts what we value and how we attend to the world around us, influencing attitudes of love, studiousness and wonder (Lang Hearlson, 2019). We are at once distracted from and yet focused upon each new acquisition, which dissipates our ability to savour or feel gratitude. We want, but we don't wonder. Consumerism also replaces imagination with 'unsustainable fantasies' (Lang Hearlson, 2019, p. 590), weakening empathy and feeding apathy.

The Kingdom and shalom of Jesus' syllabus confront consumerism head-on. His Kingdom lifts high those who do not have, His shalom embraces contentment and His love is other-focused. Jesus' pedagogy of love models service and humility, His teaching and stories value the 'lost', the 'little' and the 'last'. He mentored and then commissioned,

examplifying and sending. Jesus was a teacher who sought sinking souls, even those caught in the web of possessions.

‘[The] hidden curricula represent the diverse messages received and lessons learned through students’ actual engagement with processes of schooling’ (McLean & Dixit, 2018, p. 282). Shining a critical light on the hegemonic assumptions and attitudes that hide in the hidden corners of teaching practice can bring to light disturbing, yet unintended messages to our students.

Racism is one such ugly ‘shadow’ message. Along with other elements of inequality and injustice, this message can silently undermine our purpose (Brookfield, 2017; Cooreman-Guittin, 2019; Cox & Peck, 2018; Mosby, 2019; Pittman & Boyles, 2019). Jesus’ syllabus and pedagogy of love place the disenfranchised and alienated front and centre in His Kingdom. Can we say the same for our own learning environments? How can we know? We must seek what is concealed or what might even be missing (Milner IV, 2017) so that we can truly reveal Jesus with wholeness.

‘Acceptance of the Kingdom of God is not first of all about what we judge reasonable and worthwhile, but experiencing ourselves and our world as radically transformed by a love beyond calculation’ (Lang Hearlson, 2019, p. 87). It is our role as educators to bring the Kingdom of God into our students’ educational experiences.

Even pedagogical practices such as how and what we assess (Di Paolantonio, 2019; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018) can send conflicting messages to our students, shielding them from the themes of Kingdom, shalom, invitation and love.

In a culture characterized by rapid and competing social, economic, and political interests, the value and effectiveness of education is often judged by standardized measures and global economic benchmarks that obscure the importance of human values and marginalize any religious worldview... . (Shields, 2018, p. 85)

Scottie May (2003) critically reflects on the impact of the styles of motivation commonly used in teaching Bible memorisation, exposing the deleterious effects of rote learning for prize or privilege. She reports one student’s reflection: ‘The spirit of competition that I experienced killed my desire to meet God through Scripture’ (p. 58).

Such an outcome, from the best of intentions. This reminds us that no hidden corner or shadowed area of practice should be ignored.

Perhaps Jesus is whispering to each one of us, ‘Love one another. As I have turned the universe upside down in love for you, so you must love your students. By this they will know that you are My disciple, if they experience for themselves the atmosphere of love in your classroom’ (John 13:34–35, author’s paraphrase).

Perspectives: Exploring with five lenses

Here they love out loud. (Zygmunt et al., 2018, p. 136)

The above quote is from a teaching student sharing her emotional response and new-found respect after taking part in a program of community-engaged teacher preparation. Volunteer community mentors scaffolded the preservice teachers’ understanding of the community and culture in which they were teaching. With new ‘lenses’, the preservice teachers internalised culturally responsive attitudes and strategies to better care authentically for their students (Zygmunt et al., 2018).

Brookfield’s (2017) four lenses support a greater awareness of assumptions inherent in the practices, policies and procedures that impact our students and their learning. The four lenses – students’ eyes, colleagues’ perceptions, personal experience and theory – will help us see ‘from unfamiliar angles’ (p. 61), thereby defining our picture of practice and student experience with detail and texture. To those lenses I would add a fifth, a ‘God lens’. Trust, humility, prayer and God’s Word provide a lens that will sharpen the focus of the other lenses and also offer fresh perspectives.

‘Building a critical scrutiny of assumptions into our practice and opening up to multiple perspectives is risky’ (Brookfield, 2017, p. 147), exposing our vulnerability and risking hurt and shame, ‘... but this predisposition is the result of a constitutive property of the human being; namely, its openness to the other and the wholly Other, without which neither love nor encounter is possible’ (Cooreman-Guittin, 2019, p. 147). Brené Brown (2013) describes three ‘shields’ we employ to avoid the risky business of vulnerability: foreboding joy – not quite feeling safe enough to immerse ourselves in the delight of our blessings; perfectionism – needing to control the perceptions

of others and avoid the shame and blame we expect our flaws to attract; and numbing – hiding behind busyness, shutting down our emotions, disconnecting and even masking with unhealthy habits and addictions. Each of these shields shuts us away from life in its abundance (John 10:10) and the opportunity to grow, both personally and professionally.

We can lay aside those unhelpful shields and take Jesus at His Word: ‘Come to Me ... Take my yoke upon you ... For My yoke is easy and My burden is light’ (Matthew 11:28–30, New Living Translation). Lean into joy. Soak in the delight of a student taking a small step toward an encounter with Jesus. Be mindful of, and grateful for, the positive relationships we build with our students and those teachable moments when we sense God’s presence. See ourselves through God’s eyes. ‘Appreciate the beauty of cracks’ (Brown, 2013, p. 131) and the opportunities they offer in connecting to those around us, and how they open our eyes to improving our practice. Experience God’s shalom, knowing that He commissions us as we are. Choose to ‘feel’ and be nurtured in our own walks with God and others. Set boundaries, with God in the midst.

‘Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity’ (Brown, 2013, p. 34). Embrace vulnerability. ‘Let go and let God.’

We don’t have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He’s been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let’s walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help. (Hebrews 4:15–16, *The Message*).

With such a mindset, we can seek added perspectives through the five lenses suggested above. Often there will be a prodding from one of these perspectives that alerts us of a need. It may be an absence of response, a surprising student reaction, a trusted colleague’s insight, something we read or hear, an unexplained and surprising personal reaction to an event, or a still, quiet whisper in our souls. Rather than ignore this disequilibrium and allow busyness, defensiveness or the inertia of the status quo to stifle the issue, we can embrace the opportunity to pay attention and seek to learn more through the other lenses.

The ‘God lens’, whilst not acknowledged in secular theory, is a place to humbly approach the Author of Wisdom, the Light of the World, and ask that He open our eyes and help us to examine our practice with shalom. ‘If you need wisdom, ask our generous God and He will give it to you’ (James 1:5, New Living Translation). This lens heightens and focuses our use of Brookfield’s (2017) four lenses, and allows for wisdom and insight beyond our own.

The ‘student lens’ must be carefully applied. In seeking to listen to student voices, we may find ourselves in confirmatory self-delusion. There is a power imbalance in any teaching context that requires acknowledgement. Students may feed back to us what they believe we would like to hear. Is this not how most assessment works? To truly seek student feedback, we need to find ways that are anonymous; over time, as students come to trust that we genuinely and gratefully do listen to their voices, they may find the courage to speak with honesty in personal communication (Brookfield, 2017).

The ‘personal lens’ is both powerful and problematic. It can be difficult to self-critique, to unpack hidden assumptions and notice our biases and failings. There are times when a critical friend might support such introspection (Nilsson, 2013; Schuck & Russell, 2005; Wright & Adam, 2015). This became apparent in my qualitative research. With repeated visits, interviews became professional conversations and eventually those conversations transformed into safe places of mutual self-disclosure and the questioning of practice and personal assumptions. We ended up sitting on the ‘same side of the table’ (Brown, 2013, p. 202). One educator commented, ‘You’ve been able to draw out of us, make us ask questions ... in helping us define what we want to achieve.’ ‘Talking to colleagues unravels the shroud of silence in which our work is wrapped’ (Brookfield, 2017, p. 66).

The ‘colleague lens’ can reach beyond the offering of support as a critical friend. As one administrator from my study mused, ‘[We] need to start working to help each other.’ In this way, we begin to work as a team. For collaborative reflective practice to be effective, we must avoid the perpetuation of groupthink and powerplay. ‘All stakeholders need to find ways to share ideas freely, comfortable with the knowledge that they are genuinely appreciated for their contributions’ (Morris, 2017, p. 129). With a common purpose and

mutual trust, colleagues can explore problems of practice, sharing multiple perspectives, opening out the aperture of the lens and allowing in more light they move past the surface, digging deep and critically reflecting together.

The final lens of our five is that of theory. Seeking beyond our singular context, moving to a wider angle, the lens provided by research, theorists and thinkers can explain what we have observed but not understood. This can provoke new questions, uncover the dark areas and hidden corners of practice and open our minds to innovative problem solving.

There are, however, inherent pitfalls with this lens that we should be aware of. There is a subconscious tendency to seek only confirmation of current beliefs and practices. To move beyond this can be uncomfortable. Brookfield (2017) cautions, 'Theory can also crash into your life in a productively disturbing way by unsettling the groupthink arising from cultural norms and shared experiences' (p. 74). There will be times when the 'theory lens' 'catches you off-guard and skews your world' (p. 75). Parker Palmer (1998) adds, 'To think a new thought in this moment of danger would leave us open and vulnerable, for we do not know what flank it might leave exposed. So we grab an old idea' (p. 113). In this position of dissonance, we have a choice: to discover creative ways to transform our practice or to shake off the disease and settle into sameness.

I suggest that all five lenses are needed to support a meaningful exploration of how we reveal Jesus in the learning environment. In Table 4.3, I propose ways in which each of the lenses might allow certain questions to guide critical reflection of the issue. Whilst my suggestions are by no means exclusive or exhaustive, they provide a sample of starter questions that can intertwine, influence and interplay with each other.

Table 4.3 Jesus' Syllabus: reflective questions

Jesus' syllabus of sacred revolution	Reflective lenses: Sample questions to consider
Love	God lens: How did Jesus teach and live out love? Own experience: What is my love language? Could my intended messages of love be misunderstood or culturally ineffective? Students: How do my students experience love in my learning environment? How can I know? How can I 'listen'? Are there opportunities for reflecting together?
Love	Colleagues: Are there practices, policies or procedures that conflict with this message of love in our learning institution? Theory: What are some common issues in education (e.g. inequality, cultural and family experiences and mental health) that might impact how my students receive and give love?
Kingdom	God lens: What is the culture of the Kingdom of God that Jesus said was near and here? How is the culture of my classroom or our school like or unlike the Kingdom of God? How did Jesus teach and live out the Kingdom message? Own experience: Do I feel drawn to this Kingdom? What draws me? Are there hesitations? Why? Students: Do my students seem drawn to the culture of the learning environment I create or do some feel excluded? How can I know? Are there mixed messages within this learning environment? Colleagues: Are there practices, policies or procedures that perpetuate societal messages of exclusion or convey a hierarchy of value within the student population in our learning environment? Theory: What are some common issues in education (e.g. justice, race and disability) that might disenfranchise students? How could Jesus' kingdom message speak to this?

Jesus' syllabus of sacred revolution	Reflective lenses: Sample questions to consider
Shalom	God lens: How is shalom portrayed in the Bible? How can I build opportunities for shalom in my own learning environment? How did Jesus teach and live out shalom? Own experience: Do I experience shalom myself? What might it look like in my teaching? Students: Do my students experience shalom? Why or why not? What are the barriers? How can I know? Colleagues: Are there practices, policies or procedures that build barriers to shalom in our learning environment? Theory: What can I learn about discontent, anxiety, fear, depression, shame and mental health, to be more aware of the barriers to shalom? Could my practices impede shalom?
Invitation	God lens: Who did Jesus invite into His kingdom of love? Were there surprises? What might that look like in my classroom? Own experience: Have I accepted the invitation? Have I assumed a certain profile for my fellow citizens of God's Kingdom? Am I willing to be surprised? Students: Do my students feel as welcome in my classroom as they are? Do they sense that they are valued and that their strengths are celebrated? Colleagues: Are there practices, policies or procedures that place the value of students within a hierarchy of acceptable traits and abilities? Are all students valued? Theory: What can I learn about growth mindset, varied approaches to pedagogy and curriculum, and student motivation that might make learning more accessible, replace deficit with dignity and support a sense of value for all?

Partnership: The power of community

When in her feelings and concerns, an educator becomes aware of God's loving care, then she knows that she is neither 'just a teacher' nor is she alone. When this consciousness is shared in a small group, a mustard seed is planted and a community of faith grows. (Shields, 2018, p. 92)

The idea of collaboration and community can grow beyond simply seeking other perspectives to becoming a movement, a community of practice, utilising shared courage to translate reflective thinking into reflective practice.

As one of the teachers I interviewed commented, 'You really need a core of people who are going to sit down and come up with, ... "this is how it could work", and then you work from there.' A sense of isolation can stifle reflective practice, as one teacher shared: 'It's difficult to sort of throw ideas across and to, you know, bounce different suggestions around.' Another teacher expressed a concern about 'being left on your own to sort of fumble through or work it out yourself'. Jesus harnessed the concept of communal courage in sending disciples out in pairs as they developed their ministry of outreach and service to others.

Richard Shields (2018) explores the idea further, suggesting that 'revitalization may only begin in the form of a "small Christian community" ... where belonging is voluntary and outside of the official organizational structure of the school, yet remains open to all' (Shields, 2018, p. 92). He goes on to suggest that there is a need for intentionality and sustainability in such a community, including having a clear purpose-based structure with time and space allocated, and a culture of openness and prayer.

'Together, we remember truthfully—a movement of faith. We attend carefully—a movement of love. We imagine empathically and strategically—a movement of hope' (Lang Hearlson, 2019, p. 591). We can strengthen our opportunities to find practical ways to reveal Jesus more effectively when we work in community.

Process: Moving from reflective thinking to reflective practice

Holding the tension of paradox so that our students can learn at deeper levels is among the most difficult demands of good teaching. How are we supposed to do it? (Palmer, 1998, p. 83)

Change is never simple. Changing culture whilst in the midst of teaching involves even greater complexity. When asked to reflect on the process of transformation and change within their school context, one teacher chose an apt metaphor: ‘You’re trying to fly the plane while you’re trying to build the plane.’ Another lamented,

I just feel like you’d almost need... outside of the school... I would love to be a part of you know, a think tank, or for one month you’re just developing curriculum... or mapping outcomes, and establishing, like a well-oiled... but I just don’t know, on top of... how it could work?

The collective wisdom of a number of teachers kept coming back to the need to select small but steady steps and to work with purpose within these. One reflected, ‘It’ll be hard, but, yeah, I think just having little chunks of time, like just work on one task.’ Another mused,

I think people need to see a little bit of success, you know, even a little bit of success... Small steps, so that they can feel like dipping your toe into the river. Oh, okay it’s not freezing or it’s not frying hot or... maybe we can do this. Just a little bit of reassurance.

Revealing Jesus to our students? One step at a time.

Implications for practice: Side-stepping the barriers

The big challenge for leaders is getting our heads and hearts around the fact that we need to cultivate the courage to be uncomfortable and to teach the people around us how to accept discomfort as a part of growth. (Brown, 2013, p. 199)

Cultivating the courage for deepened reflective practice requires that teachers themselves, and leaders, acknowledge that there are a number of very real barriers that will be encountered as teachers navigate the realities and complexities of practice. When teachers in my research study were asked to share recommendations for deepening reflective practice in schools, a number of common themes arose.

One was the need to build a shared understanding of the core purpose and the desired outcomes of proposed changes (Runhaar et al., 2010). As one teacher put it, ‘You can’t sell something to someone else when you don’t know what you are selling.’ If the purpose is not understood, we can so easily settle for the form, or a semblance of change, rather than the substance (Loughran, 2002).

Another theme that arose was the need for a clear step-by-step process. Rather than aiming for a quick demonstration of visible but surface changes, teachers felt it was wiser to brace for a slow, steady, contextualised and effective movement that could actualise lasting transformation (Leeman & Wardekker, 2014; Thompson & West, 2013). Quick and unmeasured knee jerk reactions usually see practice revert to a collective comfort spot, achieving little consequential change (Shabeeb & Akkary, 2014). Jesus’ pedagogy of love brought about a sacred revolution, one personal encounter, one story, one touch, one lesson at a time.

‘It is important for a school to recognize that they need to change, then figure out how to change, followed by what to actually change’ (Allotta, 2018, p. 40). This takes commitment and time. Time is often cited as a stubborn barrier to reflective practice (Le Fevre, 2014; Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Teachers suggested the need for creating spaces in practice, including time, support and resources, to offer scaffolding (Cornish & Jenkins, 2012) and support for this process and bring lasting results (Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018).

Teachers are bombarded with an accumulating load of responsibilities, with pushes and pulls from a range of stakeholders (Shabeeb & Akkary, 2014). A perceived ‘final straw’, regardless of its significance or importance, can lead to either heightened stress or the malaise of mediocrity, but rarely does it bring effectual change. Revealing Jesus is not a ‘tack on’ to a very full or even overstuffed curriculum (Cousins, 2006). As we reflect on Jesus’ pedagogy of love, we seek the opportunity to give the ‘burden’ of our current pedagogy, which may be perceived as overwhelming and underachieving, and take on His ‘yoke’ (Matthew 11:28–30).

In Conclusion

People spark revolutions – through their visions, their beliefs, and through their dreams. (Hattie & Zierer, 2018, p. 166)

As we conclude, I am reminded of Parker Palmer's description of living and breathing the paradox of practice:

[The tension] is a power that wants to pull my heart open to something larger than myself. The tension always feels difficult, sometimes destructive. But if I collaborate with the work it is trying to do rather than resist it, the tension will not break my heart – it will make my heart larger. (Palmer, 1998, p. 84)

Lean into the tension. Embrace the invitation to the Kingdom. Take up the call to reflect. Welcome the opportunity for transformation. Reveal Jesus with your heart wide open.

Come
Come to Me
Come to Me all of you.
All those with heavy burdens, oppressed and left alone,
Shalom is yours.

Seek
Seek to see
Seek to see Me.
In your teaching and your learning, in everything you do,
I will be with you.

Reflect
Reflect deeply
Reflect deeply and critically.
Search the implicit and explicit, the hidden and exposed,
You will notice the important.

Dare
Dare greatly
Dare greatly with courage.
Choose to live with vulnerability, an open heart and mind,
You will grow.

Love

Love the other

Love the other with great purpose.

Love every single student, the easy and the hard,

You will be My light.

Reveal

Reveal Jesus

Reveal Jesus with intention.

Give the invitation to the Kingdom to each and every one,

They will be blessed.

Please note: Quotes from teacher interviews are taken verbatim from raw data associated with a research project I am leading, currently titled 'An explorative case study of one school's journey towards embedding transformational reflective practice within school culture and teacher practice'.

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