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Editors Judith McVarish and Catherine Milne compiled the book, *Teacher Educators Rethink Self-Assessment in Higher Education* amid a complex time in teacher education. They look at the wide array of requirements for new teachers: a blend of the Common Core Standards (CCSS), the edTPA (AACTE, n.d.), and new teacher certification requirements on the one hand, with preparing students to pass the standardized tests, on the other. Seeking to take a step back from this scenario, yet, still wanting to meet these professional obligations, the editors bring the focus back to the preservice teachers they are charged with preparing. They indicate that the preservice teachers, by and large, need assistance to understand and recognize “what learning evidence really looks like” (p. ix). They hold that teacher candidates can recognize evidence of student learning beyond the standardized tests, yet, in order to do so, preservice teachers must first recognize evidence of their own learning. These beliefs set the stage for McVarish and Milne’s self-assessment...
and self-evaluation model and serve as the impetus for this book.

The editors share their self-assessment and self-evaluation model in a comprehensive manner that allows the reader to thoroughly understand its intent and initial design, beginning with Chapters 1 and 2. Through exploring different assessment models and the benefits of using them in higher education settings, the editors situate their own model. They write that their model is an outgrowth of both the traditional model of assessment and the assessment model with a rubric. As justification for the model, the editors write, “we believe that self-assessment and self-evaluation afford students opportunities to more fully present their learning than would be possible with other forms of summative evaluation” (p. 9). They hold that by gathering evidence to support self-assessment and self-evaluation, the preservice teachers are encouraged to purposefully reflect on their learning, which, in turn, can have a ripple effect back onto their future students. In Chapter 2, authors McVarish and Solloway indicate that through participating in an active, constructivist approach to instruction, such as the model in focus throughout the book, their preservice teachers get ideas to offer in their own classrooms. No longer would we have teachers choosing among student characteristics that they find desirable without substantial evidence to support it. Indeed, a central principle to the model includes the belief in the ability that “all learners are capable of developing meta-cognitive skills” required to think about one’s thinking (p. 11).

Milne and McVarish put the theories introduced in Chapters 1 and 2 into practice in Chapter 3. Thinking about one’s learning and assessing is somewhat abstract and is described as intimidating or confusing to many students featured in this chapter. Milne and McVarish, as authors of the chapter, suggest that this is because many students need to “learn how to reflect” (p. 33). It is intuitive to seasoned educators that students (and teacher candidates) will need a variety of personalized scaffolds to be able to build reflective practice. To address the scaffolds, the authors provide engaging figures and examples from their
own teaching experiences in higher education (such as their use of interactive response cards), thereby modeling the type of responsive comments that can be offered by the instructors to foster the type of reflection needed to deepen the self-assessing.

With the tenets and the practical details of their model established, McVarish and Milne next explore its application across a diverse range of academic disciplines in higher education, including science education, theater arts, early childhood education, and clinical psychology. The reader is thus taken along on an interesting journey of the maturation, and, ultimately, adaption of the model, over roughly a ten-year period. In some cases, the editors author or co-author the chapters. Joseph Salvatore’s theater arts teacher education classroom, in particular, helpfully illuminates the mindset of a practitioner implementing the model, in his writings in Chapters 4 and 8. He seeks to peel back some of the social conditioning of classroom norms and expectations in higher education, especially as they relate to the roles of the instructor and the students. The role-change causes Salvatore and his students to experience a certain degree of vulnerability, which is fleshed out in this chapter and echoed in other chapters. That is to say, what becomes the role of the instructor when applying a grading policy where the students assess their own learning and developing over a semester-long course? In the spirit of constructivist learning, a theory that undergirds the model and, as an extension of it, the book itself, Chapter 4 is written as a dialogue between McVarish and Salvatore, positioning the reader as a silent participant as the two work through the tensions of teaching in the context with students adjusting to the fact that they will be self-evaluating their work for a grade in a college course.

In addition to being co-editor of the book, Catherine Milne shares with the reader her use of the model in a science educator course in Chapter 5. She sensibly scaffolds the model for her students by using the scientific-inquiry type of approach, requiring that her students provide thoughtful evidence to support any claims about their grade, complete with artifacts and narratives. She notes
the interconnectivity between the scientific argument and self-evaluation, and, through the student examples she offers, the connection was not lost on her students/science educators.

Chapters 6 and 7, written by Elizabeth Quintero and Jason Blonstein, respectively, feature narratives from these two seasoned teacher educators based on their different experiences using the self-assessment/self-evaluation model. Quintero and J. Blonstein vary from each other regarding their context and framework for using the model; Quintero uses a critical theory framework (e.g., Freire, 1973) to inform her research and her teachings for early childhood preservice teachers. Through using self-assessments, Quintero encourages her students to first understand their own stories as learners and students as a form of critical literacy. She sees this as a valuable practice in order to connect family histories with stories designed for young children. J. Blonstein writes in Chapter 7 about his extensive teaching history and how, over time, he became more skillful at responding to student work. He notes that self-assessment and self-evaluation are rightfully situated alongside other alternatives to traditional tests, highlighting the learner’s thinking (and learning) more personally. J. Blonstein shares: “I never get so close to how each one [student] thinks […] as I do when I read and respond to their reflections on the class” (p. 98). Blonstein recognizes this as a key feature to meaningful learning, in accord with the editors’ model.

Further support and reflection from educators using the model develop throughout Chapter 9. In this chapter, Cheryl Blonstein walks the reader through her usage (and adaptation) of the model with her psychology graduate students who are training to use psychological assessments effectively. Milne provides bookends to C. Blonstein’s chapter that, in a way, grant C. Blonstein permission to implement the model—not with fidelity, typically expected within a more prescriptive, diagnostic model of teaching, but with integrity of implementation understood to free the educator up to use what matters most from the model, tailored to fit the needs of the particular
setting (LeMathieu, 2011). C. Blonstein shares the belief that in order for her psychology graduate students to effectively use the psychological assessments on their clients, they must first understand themselves as learners. Her students must also be able to learn in a professional context, when/where “flexibility, creativity and the development of clinical skills [are] necessary” (p. 136), similar to the type of thinking required when self-assessing. She also utilizes features of the model to provide opportunities to communicate more personally with each of her students, by responding to their thinking with a greater focus on their learning itself.

The final chapter restates the model’s goals and intentions; the authors’ framing them as an intentional break from the many policies and legislative reform efforts that remain mostly focused on student standardized testing. The break offered by the editors of this book is warranted and justified. Further, through offering examples of application across a variety of disciplines, the authors convincingly contribute to the body of work that supports the value to teachers’ self-assessing and evaluating. The varieties of disciplines that are represented also increase the likelihood that the model can be viable at the readers’ teaching preparation settings. Clearly, though, implementing the model is not easy, requiring a degree of vulnerability and power-sharing among both teachers and students, as suggested by Salvatore in his chapters in the book, as well as requiring careful attention to the nature of the feedback on the self-assessments, shared by many authors of chapters in the book (e.g., J. Blonstein).

In closing, the model holds great potential and the book provides the resources and the tools to try it out in the reader’s own teacher education setting. Overall, the book offers a refreshing perspective from seasoned educators and another way to look at understanding (and assessing) student learning from a viable, alternative method to the traditional standardized test; a welcomed break, indeed.
References


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Raymond J. Ostendorf is a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Texas at Austin in the Multicultural Special Education program. He taught middle school, high school, and transition-age students and supervised preservice teachers for several years in Texas. His research interests include preservice special education teacher preparation, teacher efficacy, and culturally responsive teaching.
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