CHAPTER 36

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FOSTERING CARE THROUGH CORE REFLECTION

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Care Handbook Topics

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Wellbeing and human flourishing

In the midst of a teacher's busy life, there seems to be little time to identify our unique characteristics and motivations for teaching. However, as Kate, a fourth year teacher in a study by Adams et al. (2013) reminds us: "We teach who we *are* and if we aren't being us, if we're not being true to ourselves, and what we believe, then we're sunk" (p. 67).

Consider this fictitious, although typical post-rehearsal reflection by an experienced teacher:

> *"The first violins still aren't quite together on their eighth-note entrances in the first measure of* Eine Kleine!*," Ms. Smith says to herself as she collapses into her office desk chair at the end of rehearsal. "I could go back to basics tomorrow, having them clap the rhythm while chanting the eighth-note subdivisions. Maybe I should have them play the measure individually to make the point that they need to practice outside of rehearsal?!" An image of Sam and Katy (who sit in the last stand of the first violin section) flashes across Ms. Smith's mind. Sam and Katy joined the orchestra program in 5th grade. They continue to participate in high school orchestra with limited practice outside of rehearsals and neither student takes private lessons, either by choice or due to family finances. Ms. Smith dismisses the image, returning to her reflection on the rehearsal. "I never liked it when my high school orchestra teacher had us play individually in front of the whole orchestra, but we've got to get* Eine Kleine *to the next level since district festival is only one month away!" Ms. Smith quickly decides to first use the "back-to-basics" approach, and if that doesn't fix the issue, she will then use the "playing individually" approach.*

This post-rehearsal reflection is example of "action-oriented reflection" (Korthagen, 2015), based on Dewey's (1910) reflective thinking model. The reflection takes little time as she notices a problem, hypothesizes potential causes, devises solutions by drawing on strategies used in previous rehearsals, and chooses a solution that she will then evaluate for its impact in a subsequent rehearsal. At the same time, Ms. Smith does not attend to felt aspects of the situation (e.g., tiredness at the end of the rehearsal, frustration with student behaviors, and underlying anxiety about the number of remaining rehearsals before district festival) or consider the conflict between the use of "playing individually" and her past experience of, along with her current students' potential response to, this strategy. Moreover, her underlying motivations are unclear, given her fleeting awareness of particular students and mention of the upcoming district orchestra festival.

Music teachers are socialized into a profession where social comparison is a norm (Hendricks, 2018). For many, social comparison begins during middle school or high school with ensemble chair placements or section leader assignments, progressing to extracurricular community-based ensemble auditions, followed by college entrance auditions and subsequent ensemble auditions, studio performance classes, juries, and recitals. Comparison to others can continue throughout a music teacher's career through enrollment numbers, variety of ensemble or course offerings, ensemble festival ratings and peer selection to perform at professional conferences. This comparison can result in self-doubt or fear about being exposed as an underqualified musician or teacher, which is referred to as "imposter phenomenon" (Clance, 1985; Shaw, 2017).

Comparisons between our teaching and/or other programs and teachers often stimulates reflection, although this comparison often exists below the surface of our awareness. On a constant basis, teachers make decisions that are informed by their musical knowledge, students, available resources, and contextual factors. Whereas Dewey's (1910) reflective thinking approach can inform decision-making, it originates from a problem: something that is lacking and needs correction. It also does not take into account the person doing the reflection and how the situation relates to and impacts the teacher and students.

What Is Core Reflection?

Core reflection was developed by Fred Korthagen, professor emeritus of Utrecht University, and associates, to deepen teacher reflection by considering not only "professional" aspects of the teacher (e.g., behaviors and competencies) but also the "personal" (e.g., beliefs, identity, mission/ideal/motive, and core qualities). Core reflection has been characterized as an "inside-out" (King & Lau-Smith, 2013) or "learning from within" (Korthagen & Nuitjen, 2021) approach, designed to promote "meaning-based" (Korthagen, 2015) reflection. Core reflection has been used in various settings including preservice teacher coaching (Meijer et al., 2013), in-service teacher coaching (Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011), school district elementary teacher professional development

(Attema-Noordewier et al., 2013), university teacher education programs (Adams et al., 2013; King & Lau-Smith, 2013; Wilder et al., 2013) and with other populations including elementary students (Ruit & Korthagen, 2013), university student procrastinators (Ossebaard et al., 2013), and teacher educators (Kim & Greene, 2013).

Core reflection is informed by positive psychology, which is focused on potential rather than deficiency and finding a cure (Korthagen, 2013a). From the perspective of positive psychology, "treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 7). For each person, "what is best" are their core qualities that are often connected to a broad-based teaching and learning mission, ideals, or motives that crystalize over time. Core qualities, which are sometimes referred to as character strengths or innate qualities, include creativity, curiosity, sense of justice, precision, openness, persistence, decisiveness, flexibility, patience, enthusiasm, courage, caring, sensitivity, and humor, to name a few.

Core qualities can be compared to the facets of a diamond (Evelein & Korthagen, 2015), which, when taken together, are a collection of characteristics unique to each person and result in a sense of fulfillment when used (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Seligman & Peterson, 2003). They can initially be identified by naming the characteristics of an inspiring person (e.g., "this person is . . ."). Then, the teacher can consider prior teaching experiences when they have had energy and enjoyed teaching, pointing to character strengths used in this situation (e.g., humor, creativity, or enthusiasm). Core qualities can also be identified by reflecting on experiences that had a positive impact on the teacher and students, then noticing what character strengths used by the teacher contributed to the positive impact (Evelein & Korthagen, 2015).

Core reflection principles are incorporated into the five-phase core reflection model. The five phases include:

1. Describing a concrete situation or problem;
2. Reflection on the ideal (in a situation) and core qualities;
3. Reflection on an obstacle (e.g., how do you limit or block yourself);
4. Using the core potential; and
5. Trying a new approach. (Evelein & Korthagen, 2015)

The ideal in a situation is deeper than a learning objective like wanting students to play correct rhythms. Rather, ideals are linked to a teacher's basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and/or relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Because core qualities and ideals are connected, a teacher who, for example, identifies "patience" as a core quality may have relating to students as an ideal or underlying motivation in their work. In the opening post-rehearsal reflection, the obstacle originates from Ms. Smith's limiting belief (e.g., "my success as a teacher is primarily evident in our district festival performance") and a conflict between her core qualities, her ideal/mission, and actions. In phase 4, the teacher realizes the potential of their core qualities by noticing the tension or discontinuity between their core qualities and prior actions. This reflection then leads to phase five, where they design a different approach to the situation (Evelein &

Korthagen, 2015; Korthagen & Nuijten, 2017). It is important to realize that core reflection was not designed to alleviate obstacles, but rather to help the teacher recognize a different approach to perceived challenges (Evelein & Korthagen, 2015). Focusing on one's strengths broadens the "thought-action repertoire," thus helping to promote the use of creative and flexible strategies that can lead to finding new approaches (Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2013).

While engaged in core reflection, the teacher is aware of and cycles through one's thoughts, feelings (which can include bodily responses and emotions), and motivations, which are characterized as "information channels" (Evelein & Korthagen, 2015). The analogy of an elevator is used to remind the teacher to move between each floor (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and motivations) during core reflection. The awareness of thoughts, feelings, and motivations is referred to as "presencing," which is the combination of two words: "present" and "sensing" (Senge et al., 2004; see also Hendricks et al., this volume).

Core reflection necessitates being present in the here-and-now, rather than "downloading" (Evelein & Korthagen, 2015) or having an automatic response that usually originates from merely thinking about an issue. The concept of "presence" is akin to mindfulness-based ideas including "full awareness" (Mingyur Rinpoche, 2007) and "wide-awakeness" (Greene, 1973). "Presencing" indicates the senses and body awareness can be reference points as a teacher probes for what they are feeling and also stays with a feeling (Meijer et al., 2013) as a means for tapping into motivations and ideals in a situation. Furthermore, "presencing" is aligned with a holistic view of the teacher who uses not only their skills and knowledge but also their beliefs, identity, mission/ideals/motives, and core qualities to engage in more effective and more fulfilling professional behavior (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006).

Post-Rehearsal Core Reflection

Let's return to the post-rehearsal reflection from the beginning of this chapter, which has been expanded via additional emboldened text to illustrate a teacher using core reflection. Core reflection concepts have been added in brackets.

> *"The first violins still aren't quite together on their eighth-note entrances in the first measure of* Eine Kleine*!" [core reflection model-phase 1] Ms. Smith said to herself as she collapses into her office desk chair at the end of rehearsal, the last period of the day.* **Ms. Smith takes three deep breaths, followed by a body scan from her feet to her head. During the body scan, she notices tension at the nape of her neck.** *[presencing]* **Ms. Smith then asks herself a series of questions, each followed with a response. "What am I thinking right now? Clearly I'm thinking about the first violin entrance in the first measure! What am I feeling? I'm feeling tension and frustration. What do I want in this situation? Well, obviously, I'd love uniform entrances from the first violins in the first measure!"** *[information channels]* **Instead of thinking about various**

rehearsal strategies used in previous rehearsals [downloading], she next takes a few deep breaths [presencing], pausing to think about what went well in today's rehearsal. "It was really great to see the looks in their eyes, especially from the students in the back of the sections, when they heard for the first time how it sounds and feels to have everyone begin together, playing softly at the tip of the bow. It took several tries, but they hung in there with each other, as did I with them, for us to sound like 'one big violin.'" Ms. Smith says to herself, "That's what I want." [ideal; core reflection model-phase 2] "I'm patient and persistent, and I have a gift for building community in my orchestra classes." [core qualities; core reflection model-phase 2] Ms. Smith then returns to thinking about the first violin eighth-note entrances in the first measure. "I could go back to basics tomorrow, having them clap the rhythm while chanting the eighth-note subdivisions. Maybe I should have them play the measure individually to make the point that they need to practice their orchestra music outside of rehearsal?!" Ms. Smith feels a shiver run down her spine as her eyes tear up. [presencing] "Is this the kind of teacher I want to be, embarrassing some of the students as a way to get them to practice more?" [core reflection model-phase 3] An image of Sam and Katy (who sit in the last stand of the first violin section) flashes across Ms. Smith's mind. Sam and Katy joined the orchestra program in 5th grade. They continue to participate in high school orchestra—with limited practice outside of rehearsal—and neither student takes private lessons, either by choice or due to family finances. Ms. Smith continues to focus on this image, smiling as she thinks about how Sam and Katy have grown to be good kids who are fun to chat with after rehearsals, despite their lack of consistent home practice. [presencing] "I never liked it when my high school orchestra teacher did this (playing individually), but we've got to get Eine Kleine *to the next level since district festival is only 1 month away!" Ms. Smith pauses her thinking, noticing that her shoulders raised as she started thinking about district festival. [presencing] "Hmm. It seems like I might be getting focused on our rating. Perhaps my ego and misguided belief that a rating less than a '1' will lead my colleagues to question my competence and musicianship are getting me off track." [core reflection model-phase 3] Ms. Smith returns to thinking about her strengths as a teacher [core qualities], and what she experienced today during rehearsal, with she and the students focused, working toward a common goal, and having a meaningful musical experience. She also thinks about Sam and Katy, and how her focus on the district festival rating, and her subsequent use of the "playing individually" strategy could create some distance between herself and these students, perhaps leading them to quit orchestra. [core reflection model-phase 3] Ms. Smith ponders these questions as she imagines the feeling in her body as draws on her strengths during rehearsals. [core reflection model-phase 4] "The 'back-to-basics' and 'playing individually' approaches could be modified" she says to herself. "Tomorrow I'll begin rehearsal by talking honestly with the first violins about why I was frustrated with them today. I will tell them I realized, after reflecting, that I needed to take a step back to think about what was most important— our district festival rating or their improvement and experience as an ensemble and as individuals. I'll also remind them that one of the judges will clinic with us for a few minutes after we perform as way to keep all of us focused on festival as a learning experience. I'll then talk to them about continuing to improve during the next few weeks while experiencing moments of 'brain meltdown' focus and 'orchestra family' support for each other during rehearsals. When we rehearse measure 1, I'll start with*

the back-to-basics approach, and if this doesn't fix the problem with the first violins, I'll have them play this measure one stand rather than one person at a time. I'll also be sure to engage the rest of the orchestra in 'finding a smile (something their peers did well) and a question (asking a question about something you noticed that could be improved).'" - [core reflection model-phase 5] Ms. Smith's shoulders lower as a smile comes across her face, accompanied by a twinkle in her eye. "Looking forward to seeing how rehearsal goes tomorrow!" she says to herself as she continues to plan for tomorrow's rehearsal.

The five core reflection phases are evident in this expanded post-rehearsal reflection. The teacher began with noticing a problem (first violins' lack of unified entrances following eighth note rests). For the next few minutes, rather than initially thinking about possible rehearsal strategies, the felt experience of tension led her to consider deeper motivations beyond improved performance (phase 2). As she recalled past instances of student improvement and her connection with students, she named her core qualities (patience, persistence, building community) (phase 2), then realized how her focus on their district festival rating and likely her comparison with other orchestra teachers created an obstacle to the use of her core qualities of patience and building community during rehearsal (phase 3). With core qualities in mind (phase 4), she planned to talk to students at the beginning of the next rehearsal about her frustration as a result of a misguided focus on their festival rating. The use of modified rehearsal strategies would engage students, keep them focused, and create a more positive atmosphere during rehearsals (phase 5). At the same time, Ms. Smith's teaching would be aligned with her core qualities.

Note that "presencing" was one of the first core reflection concepts identified in the second reflection, and was used throughout the reflection. Also, notice how Ms. Smith was aware of both positive (a feeling of ensemble connection) and less comfortable (indicated by her eyes tearing up) emotions. Attending to this range of feelings helped her throughout the reflection to not only identify teaching ideals ("That's what I want!") and the obstacle, but also create modified rehearsal strategies.

In summary, rather than reflecting on problems, the past, and the situation using a cognitive orientation, core reflection is focused on positive meaning making, the present and the future through the use of personal strengths and awareness of one's thinking, feeling, and motivations (Korthagen, 2013b). Initial attention given to one's strengths can be unsettling since in "education, (we are) so used to looking at problems, not at strengths and opportunities" (Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2013, p. 100). However, core reflection can be life-changing for teachers and their students.

Core Reflection and Care

Core reflection might be considered a type of self-care (Hendricks, 2018) given the attention to and incorporation of a person's emotions and motivations in the approach. However, this form of self-care goes beyond attending to immediate emotional and

physical needs as it fosters integration of a teacher's mission—or inspiration that provides meaning and significance to the teacher's work (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2017), identity, and beliefs, along with particular musical passions and interests. Core reflection can result in a teacher feeling less pressure or responsibility to meet external demands because actions and decisions originate from, and are better aligned with, the purpose of their work. Naming one's core qualities and engaging in core reflection fosters wellbeing through continued learning and development. Core reflection has been identified for its potential positive impact on teacher attrition and teacher burnout (Korthagen, 2015), given the transformative learning that can occur in the way teachers adjust their view of themselves and their surroundings (Mirriam et al., 2007).

At the same time, identification of a teacher's strengths, needs, and mission fosters self-knowledge. Teacher self-knowledge is necessary for the creation of authentic connection between a teacher, their students, and music (Palmer, 1998). A teacher who is aware of their passion and enthusiasm for music, for teaching, and for contributing to others' lives by using their distinct combination of core qualities is positioned to foster enthusiasm in their students, which may lead to building relationships and community with and among students. Through teacher modeling of core reflection, their students may, in turn, foster compassion for and connection with others through music experience.

Moreover, core reflection is aligned with a broader definition of effective teaching that includes competence, character, and caring (Obermiller et al., 2012). Teachers "care for" themselves, which, in contrast to "caring about," is action-oriented (Hendricks, 2018, this volume). Core reflection begins with taking the time to be present as one considers various environmental (e.g., school culture, district or state content standards, resources); professional (teacher skills and knowledge); and personal (teacher beliefs, identity, motives, and core qualities) factors. Rather than quickly moving from problem identification to solution as Ms. Smith did in the first post-rehearsal reflection, environmental, professional, and personal layers of reflection (Korthagen, 2015)—along with obstacles experienced as a result of these factor(s) not being initially considered—are taken into account prior to choosing a solution. As evident in the second post-rehearsal reflection, core reflection contributed to Ms. Smith "caring for" herself when she named her core qualities, considered her ideal rehearsal atmosphere, noting the discontinuity between the two. Her flourishing as a professional and human, evident toward the end of the reflection as she looked forward to tomorrow's rehearsal, was promoted as she "cared for" or took into account the self when considering the personal levels of reflection.

At the same time, Ms. Smith's core reflection led to "caring for" her students as she modeled lifelong learning, in this case, her learning about teaching, the situation and the self. Moreover, Ms. Smith's core reflection—where she identified an obstacle that resulted from a discontinuity between her core qualities and a limiting belief about the function of orchestra festivals—resulted in different rehearsal strategies being proposed. These rehearsal strategies might lead to increased teacher–student rapport and continued teacher–student and student–student relationship development. Core reflection

promotes self-care and extends to care of others—as trust, empathy, patience, and authentic connection are developed in music-learning spaces (Hendricks, 2018).

Many veteran music teachers seem to engage in core reflection as they display caring for students via their ability to be present to students, and to remain calm as they consider the "bigger picture" for students' long-term learning from music experiences (Chua & Welch, 2021; Conway, 2021; Robinson, 2020). This bigger picture is linked to a broader goal of creating meaningful lives which "emerges in the intersubjective interactions of shared and fulfilling activities" (Silverman, 2013, p. 36). A teacher who is aware of their core qualities and mission—which are often integrally linked to their particular musical passions—cares for the music being learned, and this care is manifested in enthusiasm shared with students (Hendricks, 2018).

Indeed, core reflection promotes care in the music classroom, and by extension, in the world as the teacher and student adopt mindful approaches to challenges, approaches that emerge from the teacher's unique strengths.

Core Reflection Resources

Core reflection can be used in a variety of settings on an individual basis or with others via peer coaching, professional development workshops, or age-appropriate programs. Several resources exist for implementing core reflection including the book *Practicing Core Reflection: Activities and Lessons for Teaching and Learning from Within* (Evelein & Korthagen, 2015). The activities and accompanying text help the teacher first recognize their core qualities, destructive (limiting) and constructive beliefs, identity/roles, and mission linked to their passions and core qualities. Teachers also learn how to apply the five-phase core reflection model to daily situations. In my experience facilitating core reflection workshops with in-service music teachers,[1] these activities foster self-understanding, which might encourage a teacher to seek out additional professional leadership opportunities or a different teaching position.

Another resource on core reflection, which includes several case studies, is *Teaching and Learning from Within: A Core Reflection Approach to Quality and Inspiration in Education* (Korthagen et al., 2013). Information on recent research studies and core reflection workshops, including videos, are available on Korthagen's website.[2] Particularly useful core reflection coaching resources include the Guidelines for Coaching Core Reflection/Table 9.1 (Evelein & Korthagen, 2015, p. 158) and the Relations Between States in the Teacher's Development, Key Principles of the Core Reflection Approach, and the Coaching Interventions/Table 6.1 (Meijer et al., 2013, p. 90).

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[1] For more information, see https://www.colorado.edu/music/summer-college-music/summer-master-music-education

[2] https://korthagen.nl/en/

Returning to the opening statement of this chapter, recast in the positive, regular core reflection promotes the development of teachers who "teach who we *are* and if we *are* being us, if we're being true to ourselves, and what we believe, then we *float*." This recasting is aligned with Miller's (2013) characterization of core reflection which "is truly an inside-out approach to change. It is only when our deepest values are viewed within a positive frame that we can hope to have an education that is truly inspiring and life affirming" (p. ix). Certainly, core reflection promotes human flourishing as we attend to our—and by extension each other's—thinking, emotions, and motivations. The potential ripple effect as individuals, dyads, music classes, schools, and teacher education program personnel engage in this important and challenging work gives all of us hope as teachers and students care for and about each other via the use of core reflection in the present, and hopefully, over a lifetime.

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