

FROM THE REFLECTIVE TO THE POST-PERSONAL TEACHER

Del docente reflexivo al docente post-personal

Alison M. BRADY
Institute of Education, UCL. United Kingdom.
alison.brady.14@ucl.ac.uk
<https://orcid.org/055-712-1410-2572>

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ABSTRACT

Effective teaching is often connected to reflective practice. Reflection not only involves recording thoughts about what went well (or not) after class, but also to consider examples of potential bias in (re)actions to certain situations, and indeed, to one's own evaluations of educational activities. This relates to the drive towards greater objectivity in education, and an emphasis on making educational practices and their evaluation explicit. In 'Transcendence of the Ego', Sartre (2004) outlines a theory in which a 'pre-personal' self produces itself through reflection. This production is unavoidable, and yet dangerous in how it is conflated with a more fundamental 'pre-reflective' state of being. This 'pre-personal' self, as the very foundation of consciousness, is only experienced in moments when one is fully absorbed in a task, conscious but unaware, uninterrupted by thoughts or reflections that might disrupt this 'raptured' state of being. Complete immersions in the task at hand find their place within educational settings, and thus, what Sartre deems as the move from the 'pre-personal' to the 'produced' self is relevant for teaching. But so too is what comes after that sense of exposure recedes. Such absorption in the task of teaching leads to what might be called a 'post-personal' self and is often when moments of 'good teaching' can be found. But this proclivity for reflective action can disrupt the flow of such immersive events. This is dangerous for two reasons. Firstly, it frames teaching within a particular 'temporality' that fails to allow for the performance of teaching in the present moment. Secondly,

it fails to account for what the experience of teaching entails. This paper attempts to argue for the space and value of such forms of suspension, and to call into question the overly metricised way in which teachers are expected to reflect.

Key Words: school effectiveness; reflective practice; teaching and learning; existentialism; the self.

RESUMEN

La docencia eficaz a menudo guarda relación con la práctica profesional reflexiva. Reflexionar no es solo recordar en los que ha ido bien (o mal) después de clase, también es buscar ejemplos de posibles sesgos en las (re)acciones ante determinadas situaciones y, por supuesto, en las autoevaluaciones de las actividades didácticas. Esto guarda relación con el intento por lograr mayor objetividad en la educación y el hincapié por explicitar la práctica docente y su evaluación. En *La transcendencia del ego*, Sartre (2004) expone una teoría en la que el yo «pre-personal» se produce a sí mismo a través de la reflexión. Su producción es inevitable y sin embargo encierra un peligro por cómo entra en conflicto con un estado del ser «pre-reflexivo» más primitivo. Este yo «pre-personal», pilar básico de la conciencia, solo se experimenta en aquellos momentos en los que la persona se encuentra plenamente concentrada en una tarea, de forma consciente, pero sin darse cuenta de ello, sin ser interrumpida por pensamientos o reflexiones que puedan afectar a su estado mental «obnubilado». En un contexto educativo tiene cabida la inmersión total en la tarea que se tiene entre manos y, por ende, lo que Sartre considera el paso del yo «pre-personal» al «producido» resulta pertinente en docencia. Pero también lo es lo que ocurre una vez disipada esa sensación de exposición. Esa concentración total en la tarea de enseñar lleva a lo que podría llamarse un yo «post-personal» y a menudo es en ese momento cuando es posible encontrar momentos de «buena docencia». Sin embargo, esta inclinación hacia las acciones reflexivas puede interrumpir el transcurso de estos acontecimientos inmersivos, algo peligroso por dos razones. En primer lugar, encasilla la docencia en una «temporalidad» concreta que no permite enseñar en el momento actual. En segundo lugar, no tiene en cuenta todo lo que implica la experiencia docente. Este artículo pretende describir el espacio y el valor de dichas formas de suspensión y poner en tela de juicio la forma excesivamente sometida a indicadores en la que se espera que los profesores reflexionen.

Palabras clave: eficacia escolar; práctica reflexiva; enseñanza y aprendizaje; existencialismo; yo.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, educational domains have been usurped by managerial languages, particularly in how we measure teaching and learning. Such languages relate to wider regimes of governance and accountability, regimes that are often

criticised in the educational literature as leading to inauthentic forms of ‘performativity’ (See, for example, Ball, 2003, 2012; Harris, 2007). This performativity arises from the perceived need of teachers to ‘perform’ in a way that is not only in line with standards or profiles set out in educational policies (such as those relating to teacher inspections), but also in such a way that their practice is reduced to what is conducive to measurement (Brady, 2019).

Much of this can be seen in relation to the ‘what works’ agenda in education, an agenda that is often couched in the language of school effectiveness research. This in turn is related to the drive for evidence-based education, making the question of what is effective (e.g. what interventions allow for more effective forms of learning) is connected to what can be measured. However, the very idea of what is ‘effective’ often does not take into account what it is effective *for*, and *for whom*. Ultimately, this leads to a technological understanding of education, where educational practices are seen to be synonymous with the interventional approaches found in other fields such as medicine or technology. Because the very terminology that is employed indicates that that which is measured (i.e. that which is effective) is dissociated from normative questions around what education is for, what is therefore being measured, as Biesta (2007, 2009) argues, is not necessarily what we value in education. Rather, this turn towards a ‘measurement culture’ means that we are merely valuing what we can measure.

A possible consequence of this drive for measurement in teaching and learning is the idea that all aspects of practices can, and should, be made ‘transparent’ and therefore ‘explicit’. Indeed, in many educational circles, there appears to be an inherent ‘fear’ of subjective judgement, even in those practices where the teacher and the school are expected to measure their own development (e.g. school self-evaluation). This anxiety around subjective bias in the judgement of practice is remedied through the emphatic use of evidence. Evidence often comes in the form of that which is quantifiable. For example, by measuring differences in pupil progress in examinations over time, more accurate and robust judgements of the levels of improvement can be made. Such evidence allows for greater transparency — not only to the wider public towards whom the school and its teachers are accountable, but also towards oneself as a practitioner.

A clear example of this can be found in the emphasis on ‘reflective practice’, which is seen as an effective strategy for teaching. Usually, reflective practice is instrumentally valuable — through reflecting on what went well in class, and what did not, the teacher can explicitly re-orient her practice in such a way that it can be improved. Indeed, reflective practice is all about making things explicit — allowing the teacher to acknowledge her strengths and shortcomings as a practitioner in order to improve some aspect that is being examined. In the more structured examples of reflective practice, the teacher not only ‘thinks about’ what she has done in the classroom, but, in fact, measures it against externally generated criteria for best practices (See, for example, DES, 2012, 2013, 2016). This then requires evidence,

which in many respects leads to clearer explication of one's practices and, indeed, of oneself as a practitioner.

Although much education literature has addressed the performativity that results in the pervasive use of measurement and monitoring in class, this paper instead focuses on what this does in terms of the experience of teaching. It does so through the lens of 'exposure', understood here as the heightened sense of awareness that a teacher experiences, especially in cases where reflective practice is embedded in such experiences. Undoubtedly, this heightened awareness is inescapable in teaching. But so too are those moments when, completely absorbed in the task at hand, the teacher is unaware of (or at least not focused on) herself as a body occupying space in the classroom. Why might this be? What happens as a result? And in what sense might this necessary 'dying down' of hypervigilance be hampered by the pervasive need for reflective practice?

In order to consider these questions further, I will turn to Sartre's earlier essay entitled the *Transcendence of the Ego*. In it, Sartre (2004) outlines a theory in which a 'pre-personal' self produces itself through reflection. This production is unavoidable, and yet dangerous in how it is conflated with the non-essential, more fundamental 'pre-reflective' state of being. As he later argues in *Being and Nothingness*, such conflation leads to 'bad faith'¹. This 'pre-personal' self, as the very foundation of consciousness, might be likened to those moments when one is fully absorbed in a task, conscious but unaware, uninterrupted by thoughts or reflections that might disrupt this 'raptured' state of being. Complete immersions in the task at hand find their place within educational settings. What Sartre deems as the move from the 'pre-personal' to the 'produced' self is relevant here. But so too is what comes after

1. Basically speaking, 'bad faith' is an aspect of everyday human experience that Sartre analyses both in his philosophy texts (such as *Being and Nothingness*) and his literary works (such as the *Roads to Freedom* trilogy, and his play *No Exit*). Often, bad faith is equated with 'self-deception', although Sartre demonstrates that, in fact, lying to oneself is not possible, since lying is always a conscious endeavour, and the lie is destroyed by the very fact that one always *knows* that they are deceiving themselves (and are therefore not really deceiving themselves). Rather, bad faith is better understood as self-denial. For Sartre, human beings are radically free and radically responsible for the choices they (do not) make, or for the ways in which they fail to respond to their 'facticity' (or their situatedness in the world). This freedom is not 'liberating' in the conventional sense, but rather leads to us being always underpinned by a state of perpetual anxiety. Bad faith is a way in which we curb this anxiety by denying the extent to which we are free, or, indeed, ultimately responsible for responding to events or situations we seem to have no control over. For example, we may convince ourselves that we are not free within certain situations (having to go to work every day). Indeed, we see ourselves as completely determined by our situation when, in fact, we are nevertheless always deciding in each instance (I can decide *not* to go to work but since that would mean my getting fired, I decide to go even if I do not want to). Bad faith also relates to a 'fixing' of our identity and who we are, often as an excuse for not having to change (e.g. I am a visual learner, so I will not try to learn in a different way). Bad faith is often seen as the opposite to 'authenticity', but it is important to note that the very term 'authenticity' is barely mentioned in Sartre, but rather, is only implied.

that sense of exposure recedes. Indeed, such absorption in the task of teaching leads to what I argue is a 'post-personal' self in the classroom, often when moments of 'good teaching' can be found.

This proclivity for reflective action can disrupt the flow of such immersive events. This is dangerous for two reasons. Firstly, it frames teaching within a particular 'temporality' that fails to allow for the performance of teaching in the present moment. Secondly, it fails to account for what the experience of teaching entails. Thus, this paper will first outline examples of reflective action in both educational policy and practice, before turning to Sartre and his exploration of the 'pre-personal' self. Finally, some implications for teaching will be drawn, including the notion of the 'post-personal' self in teaching, and what this might mean.

2. REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflective practice is often considered to be a 'common sense' desirable aspect that we hope to encourage in teachers. It is a model for teaching that is highly praised in educational literature, so much so that there are entire bodies of work focusing on how to inculcate a reflective attitude in all teachers (See, for example, MacKay, 2002; Sarivan, 2011; Zwozdiyak-Meyers, 2012). Often, it is couched in the language of capacity and development, the main idea being that by training teachers to undergo systematic reflective practice, they can therefore focus on developing the areas of their practice that need to be improved in some way (McNamara and O'Hara, 2008).

Reflective practice is often highlighted in initial teacher training programmes, as well as continuing professional development. In the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere, it is intimately tied to how teachers and schools are evaluated. In Ireland, the systematic method of 'school self-evaluation' is employed, combining both internal and external review. This model, as implemented in a range of other countries since its recommendation by the European Parliament and Council of the European Union in 2001 (OECD, 2013), places reflective practice at its core. Indeed, school self-evaluation requires ongoing reflective practice in order to deduce both the strengths and the areas for improvement when considering the effectiveness classroom practices. Often this involves the use of profiles or examples of effective practice against which teachers and schools can measure their performance. In order to support and substantiate judgements, evidence is emphasised, partly so that strengths and weaknesses can be clearly articulated both within and beyond the school walls. Each stage of the process requires ongoing reflection as well as a making explicit of the various findings that are deduced from the collection and analysis of relevant data. In this sense, reflective practice is therefore a tool to motivate improvement. It is instrumentally valuable, rather than being valuable in and of itself (DES, 2012, 2016).

One model that has been both utilised over the years in Schön's (2008) reflective practitioner. This model has a clear resonance with the kind of instrumental

reflection that is seen in school self-evaluation (albeit if understood in a reductive sense). Briefly speaking, Schön discusses two modes of reflective practice — *reflection in action* and *reflection on action*. Although it is often the case that we think of reflective practice as something which occurs *after* the fact (i.e. it is work that we do after the class has ended), Schön argues that reflection is also something that good professionals do *during* the practice itself. This form of reflection is spontaneous, often involving unplanned adjustments to what one is doing in a specific situation based on a (re)evaluation of what is happening in that moment. Thus, this means that, for expert professionals, reflection is embedded within the practice itself, as a constant and ongoing endeavour that occurs not only after but in the very midst of the educational moment. It is made explicit through reflection on action. In the case of school self-evaluation, a further step is taken in order to make the reflection more transparent i.e. using the evidence necessary to 'objectively' put forth a claim about how one has performed.

Indeed, reflective practice understood in this way is intimately tied to the notion of transparency. This transparency, however, is not just concerned with accountability to the wider public, but also with the perceived necessity of being transparent to oneself. Practitioners thus need to be continually conscious of what it is that they are doing, as well as the ways in which they can improve on this in the future. In doing so, one is expected to be acutely aware of (and reflect upon) everything that is occurring in each educational moment. Transparency is achieved both *during* (through a hypervigilance of what is going on and what needs to be adjusted), and *after* (through an evidence-based, measurable comparison of one's performance against profiles of effectiveness). Importantly, both ways in which transparency is achieved in part aims at making those practices explicit, since in doing so, teachers and their practices are then more conducive to measurement and improvement.

This, it seems, is reasonable. Indeed, the need for transparency through clear explication appears through the main body of self-evaluation policy literature in Ireland. As argued by the Irish Department for Education and Skills (2013, p. 2), it is essential to:

...gauge how your school's teaching and learning compares with standards of best practice. Unless you measure yourself against statements of significantly strong practice, you won't be able to ask «How are we doing?» and more, importantly, «What should we be doing in order to improve?»

The rationale behind this is relatively simple, since:

...learning how to measure what you value is essential if you are to be confident that school improvement has happened. And, while school improvement sounds impersonal, what it actually means is that teachers can be certain their work has a positive impact, and students can experience a sense of pride in the real, measurable progress they have made (DES -Ireland- 2013b, p. 3).

But what does it actually mean to be transparent to oneself, and is this ever really possible? What actually happens to the 'educational moment' when it is made explicit on this way? And what happens to the teacher? In order to gain a better understanding of what this might imply, let us now turn to the early existentialist thought of Jean-Paul Sartre.

3. THE *PRE-PERSONAL* SELF

Before discussing the experiences that arise from this emphasis on transparency and explication in teaching and learning, a digression of sorts is necessary. In considering the existentialist thought of Sartre, it is important first to gain a clear understanding of what he means, a feat that is by no means easy. Indeed, Sartre's work is undoubtedly ripe with terminologies that are ambiguous and puzzling, jarring from our everyday use of language. Whereas policy documents (such as those that promote 'reflective practice') are clear, coherent and concise, they are also underlined by undeniable 'technicism' — in the use of such terms as 'effectiveness' and 'practice' for example. Sartre is also technical but in a very different sense. Whilst much of his writing is challenging and laden with apparent jargon, or typical Sartrian 'terminologies', his doing so is based on an attempt to describe something that is, in many respects, beyond words i.e. the experience of being human.

Policy documents may acknowledge that what is written is by no means exhaustive, and yet, their writing is inherently reductive. Indeed, the purposes of both forms of writing could not be much more different in this regard — one is to reduce human experience to its simplest and most measurable format; the other is to expand our understanding of human experience through the creation of new terminologies that allow us access to previously unarticulated aspects of human life. This latter purpose does not intend to reduce human experience, but rather, to demonstrate it in all its complexities, nuances, and, indeed, paradoxes; to show that being human is not reducible to an externally, retrospectively imposed scales of effectiveness, but rather, is something which can only be *lived* (in the truest sense of the term). It could also be said that Sartre's writings are ways in which one *can* experience some of these key (but often banal) events of human life, given the way in which his writing can eerily affect the reader in ways that the neatness of policy documents simply do not. Relevant for our discussion here are some key questions that Sartre sets out to explore — what does it actually mean, or feel like, to be a human in front of other humans? How is this experienced? In education, what really makes teachers anxious in such situations? What makes such anxieties 'die down' as a lesson progresses? What, exactly, are teachers and students doing together in the classroom? What happens during 'educational moments', important or otherwise?

Throughout his life, Sartre was heavily influenced by the phenomenological tradition, and in particular, the thought of Edmund Husserl. A thorough explanation of phenomenology is not possible here, but some grounding in its overarching ideas may

prove useful for understanding some of Sartre's main arguments. Broadly speaking, phenomenology can be defined as a 'movement' within European philosophy during the turn of the last century, and, according to Husserl (1964), is the 'only possible form that genuine philosophical enquiry could take' (Richmond, 2004). It represents an attempt to make philosophy more akin to a rigorous science, requiring a shift in the perspective of the philosopher towards that of the 'natural attitude' as opposed to what we might conventionally consider a philosophical attitude to entail (one that focuses on explanation and categorisation, perhaps). This shift involves accepting the so-called 'givenness' of experience and of ourselves as humans in the world. In other words, unlike other disciplines of philosophy, phenomenology does not focus so much on whether or not our beliefs or judgements about the existence of things are 'accurate' (these questions are, in fact, suspended or 'bracketed out' through the phenomenological method known as *epoché*). Rather, philosophers should focus on simply describing the 'things-in-themselves' — how things are experienced, or how they appear to us. Through doing so, Husserl argues that we then have access to a new region of being, namely 'pure consciousness', as that which is necessary in order for us to experience things in the world. Since Sartre's own concerns align with the question of consciousness and experience, phenomenology thus allowed him to illuminate these conscious experiences of the world without 'abstract' or 'dogmatic' ways of thinking. From this arose his existentialist approach to philosophy. Indeed, Sartre was one of the only philosophers who readily accepted the label 'existentialist', and his brand of existentialism thus begins from the human subject and their immediate relationship with the world and with others around them.

A key idea for both Husserl and Sartre is the notion of 'intentionality'. Basically speaking, consciousness (for both thinkers) is always consciousness *of something*. In other words, consciousness is always directed towards something, that it then takes as its 'transcendent object'. Because of this, consciousness continually 'escapes' itself — it is but pure intentionality, pure transcendence, or pure activity. This idea was particularly appealing to Sartre, one that he would remain central throughout much of his life's work. But it was also an idea that Sartre felt was threatened or contradicted by one aspect of Husserl's philosophy that he therefore set out to reject — i.e. that of the 'transcendental ego'.

In his 1934 essay *Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre, in fact, rejects two related understandings of the self (or self-consciousness, strictly speaking) on the grounds that they threaten the idea of intentionality of consciousness. Firstly, he rejects the so-called 'psychosocial ego', an idea that is salient in the writings of La Rochefoucauld, but may also represent our more conventional understanding of the 'self'. The 'psychosocial ego' is premised on the idea that there is an unconscious realm within us driving much of our desire. A belief in the unconscious allows us to posit a 'material self', a self which exists at our very core, which can be extracted and examined, and which can be revealed as that which solicits much of our

(unconscious, and thus unintentional) actions and behaviours. The second sense of self that Sartre rejects is the Husserlian idea of the transcendental ego, and is arguably a less conventional understanding of selfhood. Husserl argues that there must be an 'ego' or 'self' that persists throughout our experiences, one that is discoverable through the aforementioned *epoché* method. It may be thought of as a 'residual ray' that informs, maintains and unifies all forms of conscious experience. This sense of 'self' is related to the material conception of the psychosocial self, but it is a distinct understanding of selfhood nonetheless. The material conception is one that exists in the so-called 'natural attitude' towards the world, as something which we often speak about unproblematically (e.g. 'I am *this person*'). The Husserlian ego is, however, is what is known in philosophy as a 'formal conception' of the self. When we are self-conscious, our consciousness is strictly speaking directed back onto *itself*. For Husserl, in doing so, we reveal a persistent 'self' at the core that makes our entire experience of the world possible. This what is known as the 'transcendental ego'. However, rather than being something necessarily 'fixed' or 'solid' like the material conception of the self, the transcendental ego is purely an *a priori* condition for the possibility of experience. It is *deduced as necessary* rather than as a certainty. The end result is the same for Sartre, however. Indeed, for Husserl, we become conscious of this self through the *epoché*. In doing so, we apprehend an 'ego' at our core, and this, for Sartre, undermines what was most fruitful in phenomenology in the first place — i.e. that consciousness is pure, spontaneous activity.

Indeed, for Sartre (2004, p. 5), the transcendental ego 'cuts through consciousness like an opaque blade' — it becomes, thus, the 'death of consciousness', making consciousness itself 'heavy and ponderable'. It endangers the very notion of pure intentionality, or the pure sense in which consciousness is always a 'directed outwards' towards the world and is thus empty of contents itself. Indeed, for Sartre, consciousness is simply the spontaneous act of apprehending something without it being the thing that it apprehends. For example, we may say (albeit not conventionally) that I am conscious of this chair that sits before me. It would be difficult to argue that this chair is *in* consciousness, however. Rather, it is merely the thing towards which my consciousness is directed. Consciousness itself is purely the act of apprehending the chair as wooden, as brown, as soft or as hard, as something to sit on. Because it is purely the activity of apprehending the chair², it is, as Sartre calls it, translucent and empty, devoid of anything, including a persistent self.

This idea is not easy to imagine. Sartre himself admits that it is nearly impossible to talk about consciousness in this way, particularly about our *own* consciousness. Indeed, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to be 'self-conscious' without revealing a 'me' who is conscious at that very moment. In answer to this, Sartre then puts

2. Or what Sartre calls 'pure spontaneity', since it is immediate and occurs without us needing to 'reflect' on it as such.

forth an idea that is central to the entire essay i.e. the distinction between two forms of consciousness. Firstly, there is the ‘reflected consciousness’, that which ‘produces’ an ego or a persistent sense of self existing at our core, or what might be termed a ‘personal ego’. This, it could be argued, is most akin to our conventional use of the term ‘identity’ (although ‘identity’ itself is multifarious and complex, and cannot be adequately accounted for here). Prior to this reflection, however, is the ‘unreflected’ or ‘pre-reflective’ *cogito*³, something which is also often translated as the ‘pre-personal’ form of consciousness. The ‘personal ego’ is a second-order cognition in the sense that it is produced in the moment of reflection, but this very act of reflection would not be possible without the ‘pre-personal’ form of pure consciousness underpinning it. Ultimately, when we talk about the ‘self’ in ‘self-consciousness’, for example, or when we make a suggestion that in some way indicates the existence of a material or psychosocial ‘me’ at our core, then what we are strictly speaking about is the produced or reflected ego. Importantly, as indicated by its name, this ego is *produced* — it is assigned with meaning, apprehended as a transcendent object in the same way that other objects are apprehended by consciousness. For Sartre (2004, p. 1), ‘it is outside, in the world; it is a being in the world, like the Ego of another.’

...the Ego never appears except when we are not looking at it. The reflective gaze has to fix itself on the *Erlebnis*, insofar as it emanates from the state. Then, behind the state, on the horizon, the Ego appears. So it is never seen except ‘out of the corner of one’s eye’. The moment I turn my gaze on it and wish to reach it without going via the *Erlebnis* and the state, it vanishes. The reason is this: in seeking to grasp the Ego for itself and as the direct object of my consciousness, I fall back on to the unreflected level and the Ego disappears with the reflective act. Hence this impression of irritating uncertainty, which many philosophers translate by seeing the *I* as falling short of the state of consciousness and asserting that consciousness must turn round on itself in order to glimpse the *I* behind it. That is not the real reason: rather, the Ego is by nature elusive (p. 23).

All of this may seem bizarre, in many ways. It may also seem unnerving in the sense in which it suggests that, ultimately, there is no real ‘self’ at our core. There is no real ‘me’ that I can somehow access, since in the moment in which my gaze is turned towards it, it escapes me. What is left is that I produce. Without this act of production, the ‘self’ simply does not exist except as a ‘nothingness’, a pure activity that exists only to the extent that it projects itself outward into the world of objects. This, of course, paves the way for much of Sartre’s later ideas expounded not only in his philosophical texts (most notably, *Being and Nothingness*), but also his literary works (such as *Nausea*, *No Exit*, and *The Age of Reason*). Sartre’s later exclamation that ‘existence precedes essence’ is intimately tied to his rejection of a persistent, personal ego since it implies that, above all, we exist first — thrown

3. In order to avoid materialist conceptions of this form of consciousness, it is important to understand it as ‘cogito’, and in doing so, recognise that it is nothing but a pure activity of intentionality.

into the world, 'condemned to be free' (Sartre, 2003) — and through navigating the world with others, we thereby produce our essences, our identities, or 'who we are'. Since there is nothing essential that underpins 'who we are', we are in no way determined by anything specific, and as such, we are both ultimately free and ultimately responsible for the ways in which we engage in the world, for the ways in which we define ourselves. When Sartre considers the example of vertigo, he reveals that, in such instances, what is really terrifying about walking somewhere up high is that there truly is nothing to stop us from jumping except ourselves. This then shows us that consciousness can only be limited by itself.

But what does all of this imply in our immediate experience of the world? To explain further, Sartre turns to everyday, familiar examples. Say I am reading a book on a train. If this is something that happened yesterday, I could reflect on both the story I was reading and on 'myself' who was reading that story at that time. This is unproblematic for Sartre. During the very moment in which I am reading, I am completely absorbed in the activity. I am, indeed, *unreflectively aware* of what is going on — the story, the 'temporality' of the narrative, the meaning of the words. For Sartre (2004, p. 7), in this moment, 'there [is] no *I* in unreflected consciousness.' If I become aware of what I am doing (e.g. perhaps someone looks at me, and I become more acutely conscious of the fact that I am sitting on a train reading a book), there is then a radical modification in consciousness. Only then am I present as a person at the scene. The activity is interrupted, as is my immersion in it. I no longer apprehend the meaning of the words, but rather, they appear as mere shapes, lines and dots on a page. I become aware of my body and how it is 'placed' at the scene. I become aware of the way I am holding the book. Through this awareness, therefore, I am produced as the *person-reading-the-book*. Before this moment of reflection on what I am doing, I experienced myself not as a person present at the scene, but as a 'suspended person', as the pure activity of immersion in the task at hand.

Any time that I reflect on myself, whether afterwards or during an activity, I am, for Sartre, producing myself as a person. In doing so, I assign meaning to what I am doing, and consider my 'self' as present at the scene, the 'self' that was present at other scenes and activities that I reflected upon previously. When I reflect upon myself in the midst of an activity, I am interrupted in my immersion in the activity itself, and in doing so, I obscure the fundamental form of pure consciousness that underpins this reflection in the first place. Because the activity is always interrupted by reflection, the 'pre-reflective *cogito*' is not accessible through usual conceptual frameworks. It is not accessible, for example, through psychological studies of 'who I am' or 'why I do things'. Rather, it is only accessible through phenomenology. This also means that when we study or speak of anything related to a 'self' or an 'ego' (as that which persists across time and activities) then in actuality, we are talking about

an ego which is *produced by consciousness*, and not the very thing that underpins it which is, by its very nature, evasive.⁴

Interestingly, Sartre writes about his own form of reflective practices in which he produces a 'self'. In his autobiography *Words*, for example, Sartre reflects on the ways in which one creates a self in retrospect, despite not being sure of the sincerity with which one understood the tasks that later defined them. This is especially true of a person in death:

It is no good putting yourself in the dead man's shoes, pretending to share his passions, his blunders, and his prejudices, reawakening vanished moments of strength, impatience, or apprehension: you cannot help assessing his behaviour in light of results which he could not foresee and of information which he did not possess, or attributing a particular solemnity to events whose effects marked him later, but which he lived through casually. That is the mirage: the future is more real than the present. It is not surprising: in a completed life, the end is taken as the truth of the beginning. The dead man stands halfway between being and worth, between the crude fact and its reconstruction: his history becomes a kind of circular essence which is summed up in each of his moments (1963, p. 126).

Many criticisms were raised of Sartre's controversial but, in many ways, groundbreaking understanding of the self. Fellow philosopher, Merleau-Ponty (1955), accused Sartre of being a 'faithful Cartesian', in that the rejection of a transcendental ego aggravates the subject-object distinction that Sartre also claims to reject. He further argues that this leads to an understanding of freedom in Sartre that is so uncompromising that it is untenable. The example of vertigo might serve to show us how consciousness can only be limited to *an extent*, but what about things related to our social conditions, or as Sartre calls it, our 'facticity', conditions that determine who we can *reasonably* be (or be recognised as). This he later admits is true, especially after the war when his Marxist sensibilities grew stronger:

The individual interiorizes his social determinisms: he interiorizes the relations of production, the family of his childhood, the historical past, the contemporary institutions, and he then re-exteriorizes these in acts and options which necessarily refer us back to them. None of this existed in *L'Être et Le Néant*. (1969, p. 35).

Yet, as problematic as the implications of the produced ego might be for understanding the world and our place within it, such criticisms do not adequately offer a rejection to the production of selves. Indeed, Sartre admits that speaking

4. In *Sketch for the Emotions*, Sartre understands this state analogously with a creative form of 'waiting': 'At the very moment when I trace one [letter], I do not pay isolated attention to each one of the strokes formed by my hand: I am in a special condition of waiting, creative waiting, I am waiting for the word — which I know in advance — to borrow my hand as it writes and the strokes that it traces in order to be brought into being'. (Sartre, 1939, pp. 30-31).

about oneself in the 'pre-reflective' sense is impossible in any conventional way. He admits that we readily adopt a concretised version of ourselves as we navigate the world on an everyday basis. Often this is unproblematic. Some level of awareness of what we are doing or, indeed, 'who we are' is important, indeed. Moreover, it is unavoidable. When one only sees oneself in the concretised way, however, we may be in danger of falling into 'bad faith'. Yet even this, it seems, is unavoidable in many respects.

Methodologically speaking, however, the 'pre-reflective *cogito*' raises a number of questions. Sartre admits that he cannot *prove* the existence of this pre-reflective state of consciousness since to do so would be only on the basis on reflection (and therefore, production). Rather, it can only be exemplified and experienced in the moment in which it is manifest. But even then, it is difficult to remain in this 'raptured' state of being without reflecting on our presence as 'persons'. Phenomenology itself is arguably a form of reflective practice, and thus, the very notion of the pre-reflective state comes about through reflection. This, however, is inherently contradictory. Not only this, but Sartre then implies that introspection itself is inevitably dishonest and unreliable since it is not 'pure' as the pre-reflective state is. This then implies a distinction between pure and impure reflections that is difficult to uphold. And all of this then leads to a scepticism towards reflection in general, and if we think about phenomenology as being such a form of reflection, should anything that is written here be understood as reliable in any sense?

Perhaps not. And yet, much of what Sartre writes resonates with our experience of activities to a degree, as explored below. If, indeed, we accept that there is a pre-reflective state necessary for consciousness conventionally understood, and it is by nature elusive and thus inaccessible, then the only thing we *can* access is the produced sense of self. In doing so, we must also accept that this production is contingent upon something more fundamental, and that everything we 'know' about ourselves through reflection is inherently fictionalising. This is not necessarily a bad thing, however, as will be explored briefly towards the end of the paper.

4. THE POST-PERSONAL

So what might all of this then mean for classroom practice, and for teachers in particular? As educational practitioners, it may be possible to think of many examples where one is completely absorbed in an educational moment. It could involve teaching a topic that one is especially passionate about, or perhaps even in the less extraordinary moments — helping a student complete a particularly difficult assignment, for example, where you both become fully immersed in the task to be completed. During such moments, the teacher as a 'person' is not so important, but rather, the activity that the teachers and the students are undertaking together. Such immersions within the educational moments might be even less specific — we are

often unaware of them until the class has ended, until we suddenly realise that the lesson time is almost over.

But this sense of immersion is not always representative of how teaching is experienced. When a teacher first walks into a room full of students (especially for the first time), they are often accompanied by an uncanny sense of anxiety and exposure, a hypervigilance of themselves as a body present in front of others. This heightened sense of awareness is experienced as what Sartre (1958, p. 260) calls an 'irruption of the self'. In other words, this feeling of exposure is experienced almost as if one's 'self' has been put on display, open to evaluation, and a palpable sense of anticipation. Indeed, teaching is always a 'performance' of sorts (as distinct from 'performativity' — see Brady (2019), and as such, an important part of teaching involves an anxiety that that self is now open to the forces of recognition from the students — an anxiety circumscribed by potential shame or mockery, by being seen as an 'imposter' of sorts, but also by being seen as someone who is doing something important and worthwhile, and who cares about *what* they are doing, and *who* they are doing it with. The key here, however, is the very fact of *being seen*.

Oftentimes, however, this feeling of exposure (the heightened awareness of 'being seen') recedes as the lesson progresses, and as both parties become more absorbed in what they are doing, and the educational moment in which both are embedded. This immersion in the educational moment results in a 'suspension' of sorts. Following Sartre's analysis of these moments, if we take it that a good practitioner will always reflect on what they are doing in the moment that they are doing it, then we should also accept that what is reflected upon in those moments is not the 'persons' present in the room. Rather, in these immersed moments, there *is* no reflection taking place, at least not in the form of making things explicit. Of course, this suspension is momentary. It just takes one destabilising moment (understood here as both positive and negative) in order to cause one 'self' to appear. The classroom is thus underpinned by a constant oscillation between the *pre-personal* (a sheer sense of anticipation of what is about to happen, without really reflecting on my 'self' in the process) to the *reflected state* (walking in the room; the destabilising moment) to the *post-personal* (in which there is a momentary suspension of the 'produced ego' due to a full immersion in the educational moment).

The post-personal, thus, is the point at which there is a re-absorption into the educational activity that is taking place once the heightened sense of awareness before the Other (i.e. the students) dies down, entering into the background of things. It is the moment in which personhood is suspended, where the 'selves' undertaking the activities become less in focus. This state of being is necessary for educational activities to ensue. But they can be interrupted. Often, this interruption is both necessary and important. A fight might break out in the classroom, perhaps. A student says something that radically calls into question your beliefs as an educator, and what you are actually doing (and why) at that very moment is therefore

also called into question. But it can also be interrupted by a focusing on that which is not necessarily conducive to what one hopes to achieve as an educator. The extent to which a teacher must reflect (and, indeed, monitor themselves), and the overly-emphatic focus on making everything that one does explicit can lead to such interruptions. The 'performativity' that accompanies this ongoing monitoring means that, anxious about how I appear in front of the other, I am no longer allowing myself as a teacher (or indeed, a student) to get 'lost' in the educational moment. Often, this means that I am anxious about the so-called 'technical' aspects of being a teacher — how I am 'showing' myself to be effective, how I ensure that what I do 'measures up' with what is simplistically exemplified in examples of best practice, how I can make sure that what I am teaching leads to 'effective' learning (understood in the narrow sense). A suspension of such heightened anxieties, and a refocus on the content, the activities, and the conversations in the classroom, the symbolically mediated interactions with students, are important. Much like my immersion within the narrative of a story without focusing on the shapes of the letters necessary to carry it, it is in such immersions that education takes place.

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, we have seen how reflective practice as an instrumental tool for improvement is often lauded as being a necessary component of good teaching. But it can also induce a heightened sense of awareness, especially when coupled with the perceived necessity of 'evidence' and of 'making things explicit'. This is done so that our practices (and indeed, our 'selves' as practitioners) are conducive to measurement, and to feedback for developmental purposes. It is often argued that not everything in education *can* be made explicit, since not everything that is important in education is measurable. Furthermore, perhaps not everything *should* be made explicit for this very reason, since doing so reduces the educational moment to that which is merely calculable, and to that which is thus merely technical in nature.

This paper has focused on what actually happens to the activity of teaching when reflective practice is overly emphasised and enacted. By making things explicit, one is inevitably encouraging a state of heightened awareness. When this heightened sense of awareness is turned upon oneself as a 'person' present in the room, this leads to what Sartre calls the 'produced self'. For Sartre, fundamental to this entire activity is the state of consciousness that is, by its nature, both empty and elusive, a state which does not follow a materialist or essentialist conception of the 'self' as that which persists across our engagements with and experience of the world, but rather, is 'pure activity'. In order to understand this, Sartre invites his readers to think about moments in which we are fully immersed in an activity, an immersion that is interrupted once we reflect upon what we are doing, and 'where we are at' as we are doing it. In the classroom, reflective practice, understood as a continual 'checking in' with oneself, can thus disrupt the ongoing, immersive educational

activities. These activities involve a suspension of the ‘self’ of the teacher (and indeed, the students), where a full absorption in the content, in the material, in the conversation — i.e. in the ‘educational event’ — takes place. It is in such moments that ‘good teaching’ might be found — moments where one is not overly anxious about their performance, about how they appear to Others, about their need to meet pre-set learning objectives.

Does this then mean that we should abandon reflective practice entirely? Not necessarily. But it is nevertheless important to allow things to fall into the background sometimes, to become fully engrossed in the educational moments we share with the entire classroom (including its physical space). Doing so allows us to reshift our focus not towards anxieties around performativity, but to the performance of education itself (Brady, 2019). It also means an abandonment of the proclivity towards making everything explicit in education, something that is seen to be necessary in order to allow for greater objective measurements of educational activities. The ways in which we are produced through reflection allows us to accept that there is always something inherently fictionalising in how we account for ourselves. It is fictionalising because of the ways in which we interact with our past and our present through reflections, where we see ourselves as the summation of the various aspects of the story or history of our experiences. In some ways, we ‘produce’ ourselves as ‘characters’. And yet, this fictionalising need not be understood in a negative sense — through acknowledging the ways in which we produce ourselves, we are also acknowledging what it is we value, and what it is we are committed to. Hence, reflective practice is necessary for this very reason. But such reflections should not be concerned with ‘accuracy’, or solely with making things explicit, since to do so is to assume that we *are* (in a fundamental sense) those characters we produce. What is required, thus, is a closer appreciation of the complexities of reflection itself — and what it might lead to — rather than understanding it merely as an instrument for measuring and encouraging effectiveness in the classroom.

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