

Whitney L. Wichman

## BOOK REVIEW

# *The Art of Reflective Teaching: Practicing Presence*

## Presence and Reflection Are Key

*Whitney L. Wichman recently graduated from Montana State University with an Elementary Education degree. She is eager to start her teaching career in Montana.*

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Have you ever considered how present you are in your classroom? Do you find time to reflect at the end of the day, taking the time to think about yourself, your students, and the learning environment? In her newly published book titled *The Art of Reflective Teaching: Practicing Presence*, Carol R. Rodgers (2020) shares details about the responsibility today's teachers have to be present in their classrooms. Delving into her own raw and vulnerable experiences, Rodgers reflects on how she would now approach some of her past teaching experiences differently. She draws on her diverse teaching experiences and how they shaped her to be the educator she is today. Rodgers uses her personal stories and builds on philosophical ideas to guide the reader through what it means to be a present and reflective educator.

The book is composed of five parts, and each of the parts is dedicated to an aspect of being present in the classroom. Rodgers starts with an introduction to presence by drawing on John Dewey's ideas of aliveness, recognition, and perception. She shares how these concepts form the foundation for presence and reflection. Additionally, Rodgers touches on the idea that "teaching is a response to learning" (Rodgers, 2020, p. 8). Teachers must perceive what is occurring in

the classroom and how students are responding before they move forward with their teaching.

The next portion of the book is used to define presence through different lenses such as attitude, inquiry, and love. She again draws on Dewey's ideas to share crucial attitudes teachers must develop. These include directness, open-mindedness, and curiosity. Inquiry in the classroom involves the teacher being open to new possibilities. Emphasis is placed on the idea that rather than quickly jumping to conclusions as situations arise, teachers should embrace the unknown to be more present. Lastly, she shares love in the classroom includes loving the learners, loving the subject matter, and loving what is not always visible to the physical eye. Rodgers sees these different lenses as concepts that are linked to presence.

In the third part of her book, Rodgers closely examines how teachers, students, content, and the environment interact with each other to impact presence. She presents a diagram of these factors to give the reader a visual idea of how these factors coexist in the classroom. After providing an in-depth exploration of presence, the book moves on to address the various parts of reflection. Rodgers describes each of the four phases of the reflection process: (1) experience, (2) description,

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(3) analysis and interpretation, and (4) taking intelligent action. The reader takes away the idea that it is important to consider the whole situation and different ways of responding before taking action. Teachers need to be thoughtful when they act, and they can consider the ideas presented as they implement the reflection process in their teaching practice.

To conclude the book, Rodgers shares different activities and readings she has used in her higher education classrooms to prepare her students to be reflective educators. She offers methods that educators can utilize to develop the skills of presence and reflection. One method involves teachers taking note of the intricacies of an object. In the activity she describes, teachers are asked to select one leaf from a pile and spend 30 minutes recreating that leaf using their choice of media. Once finished, each teacher must try to select their chosen leaf after it is placed back in a pile of leaves. Rodgers shares that teachers get to “know” their leaf very well in the time spent with it, so they look for small and often unnoticeable details when finding their leaf in the pile. Through this process, teachers learn that closely examining an object can reveal much more than simply glancing at its surface. The activity teaches the importance of truly being present with each student and taking the time to know each student on a deeper level.

This book could be a valuable resource for a student just starting out in a teacher education program, a pre-service teacher getting ready to student teach, a newly graduated teacher, or a veteran teacher. Rodgers shares content in this book to help teachers at all stages in their careers to grow in their practice. She emphasizes the importance for teachers to also be learners. One way that teachers can do this is by reflecting on teaching experiences. Any teacher who reads this book will take away something new. It might be related to what it means to be present in the classroom. Others might be inspired to dedicate more time to reflection. Still others might be

interested in the activities and readings mentioned in the last part of the book and do further research on their own about these topics. There is truly something to take away from this book for each person who reads it.

I would recommend this book for teachers who are looking to improve their practice. It inspired me to take a step back and look at the whole picture. Present educators truly consider all the factors of a situation before responding. This book has motivated me to slow down and be present to all of the factors impacting me, my students, the content, and the classroom environment. I’ve noticed that since reading this book, I’ve been able to work on not getting caught up in the moment. Instead, I try to consider potential causes of different situations and reflect on what I can do differently next time to make the learning experience even more valuable for my students and myself. As I get ready to become a teacher, I am looking forward to using what I learned from this book during my experience. Being present will help me connect better with my students, and in turn I will be able to be a more effective educator.

For anyone who would like to learn more about what it means to be a present and reflective educator and who wishes to improve their teaching practice, I would recommend reading *The Art of Reflective Teaching: Practicing Presence* by Carol R. Rodgers (2020). An educator who reads Rodgers’s book and works to implement her ideas and practices about presence and reflection into their classroom will not only grow and develop as an educator but create a more positive experience for their students.

## References

Rodgers, C.R. (2020). *The art of reflective teaching: Practicing presence*. Teachers College Press