



## **Book Review**

### **Learning, Leading, and the Best-Loved Self in Teaching and Teacher Education**

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## Learning, Leading, and the Best-Loved Self in Teaching and Teacher Education

Cheryl J. Craig, Denise M. McDonald, and Gayle A. Curtis

Realizing the importance of “the best-loved self” while teaching and learning, a group of professors in the US introduced this concept to pre-service teachers in universities, provided professional development for in-service teachers, and conducted research. In response to this need, *The Best-Loved Self: Learning and Leading in Teaching and Teacher Education* raises this issue by documenting cross-disciplinary teachers’ discoveries when teaching. As the editor stated, this book provides a wide range of points of view about the need to cultivate teachers’ and teacher educators’ best-loved self in the classroom. The concept of the best-loved self is subtle yet essential in all learning and teaching situations, as emphasized by Craig (2013, 2017, 2020). who has renewed attention to Schwab’s concept of the best-loved self, which was first introduced in his 1954 article *Eros and education: A discussion of one aspect of discussion* (Schwab, 1954).

Schwab’s concept of the best-loved self is closely related to Dewey’s (2005) consummatory experience. However, what distinguishes Schwab’s idea is the critical role that subject matter plays in its development. The best-loved self cannot be disregarded as solely psychological or philosophical, as it is intricately tied to teacher identity development and the teaching of specific disciplines. Indeed, the effective teaching of subject matter is a crucial aspect of teacher education and training, as all teachers and teacher educators have expertise in a particular content area. The Faculty Academy, a cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary knowledge community, is at the forefront of capturing the nuances and complexities of educators’ best-loved selves across all subject areas (Craig, 1995a, 1995b, 2013; Craig, Curtis et al., 2020; Craig, Turchi et al., 2020).

The book comprises 19 chapters with various issues concerning the importance of self-awareness and self-reflection in teacher education and teaching. It highlights the role that teachers play as leaders in the classroom and how their self-understanding can impact their teaching practices and student learning. The book argues that teacher education programs should focus on developing the “best-loved self” of teachers, which involves self-reflection, self-awareness, and a growth mindset. The target readership for the volume will be the ones who open the doors to student learning, such as teachers, teachers of teachers (professors), and learners. However, those from other settings may also find it a good resource that may inspire them to find their passion and know and live their best-loved self.

This timely and laudable book begins with the remarkable opening chapter by Gayle A. Curti, which introduces readers to the book by providing brief overviews of each chapter to facilitate and guide readers to understand the entire contents. Chapter 2 emphasizes the importance of the best-loved self in teaching and teacher education by highlighting the essential links between teacher identity, the image of teachers-as-curriculum-makers, and the best-loved self of teachers and professors. Chapter 3 shares the author's experience of a problematic teaching situation and how it helped them develop and grow as educators. It also explores how others can benefit from similar backgrounds and the role of self-reflection and self-discovery in this process. Written in the form of a personal narrative, Chapter 4 shares the authors’ story of how they discovered their “best-loved self” and what they did to foster it. The authors also reflect on how recognizing and embracing this part of themselves has impacted their teaching practice and overall well-being. Chapter 5 highlights the educators’ reflections and insights based on their experiences in the classroom and interactions with students, colleagues, and other educational stakeholders. The Chapter also explores themes related to teacher effectiveness, student learning, classroom management, and other relevant topics in education.

Moving on to Chapter 6, which examines the qualities of a good teacher, the author saw in her favourite teachers and reflects on her educator experiences to identify those qualities in her practice. In Chapter 7, significant viewpoints about the advantages and difficulties of teacher

mentorship are presented, which can serve as a basis for enhancing teacher education and professional development initiatives. Furthermore, this chapter presents inspirational accounts and examples from teachers who have benefited from mentorship connections. These accounts can inspire and motivate other teachers to pursue such connections and provide valuable lessons on the significance of transferring knowledge and skills to future teachers. Consequently, this can contribute to the growth and development of future educators and strengthen the teaching profession. Chapter 8 presents brief narratives, or vignettes, from individuals who have discovered their best-loved self and share how it has impacted their lives and work. The purpose is to illustrate the power of this concept in a tangible and personal way and to encourage readers to reflect on their own experiences and journey towards their best-loved self. Chapter 9 focuses on how understanding our past experiences can help us identify and cultivate our best-loved self. The chapter encourages readers to reflect on their personal and professional journeys, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and discover new opportunities for growth. It also provides guidance on how to use autobiographical narratives and other forms of self-reflection to gain insights into who they are and what they want to achieve.

Through autobiographical narrative inquiry, Chapter 10 explores the experiences of individuals in higher education, such as students, faculty members, administrators, or staff, and covers a wide range of backgrounds, including academic pursuits, personal challenges, and professional growth. The narratives also explore the role that higher education has played in shaping individuals' sense of self and their sense of purpose in life. Chapter 11 delves into the author's career trajectory as a mathematics education educator and sheds light on the experiences and interactions she had with people from South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The narrative illustrates how even unfavourable experiences can be turned around and transformed into successful career paths that nurture and sustain one's best-loved self. Chapter 12 captures the importance of mentorship in higher education and other settings and highlights the benefits individuals can gain from working with a mentor, such as guidance, support, and encouragement. It also discusses the characteristics of a successful mentorship relationship, such as clear expectations, open communication, and mutual respect.

The following Chapter, Chapter 13, discusses the importance of integrating ethics and human values into STEM education and highlights the benefits individuals can gain from this integration, such as greater empathy, critical thinking skills, and a more profound sense of purpose. It also discusses the challenges of incorporating ethics into STEM education and careers and provides examples of programs and initiatives that have successfully integrated ethics into STEM education. Chapter 14 captures exchanges between a professor and a *teach* HOUSTON student, which leads to the student writing to the professor about how the professor had metaphorically given her liver in preparing her to be a quality teacher. It unpacks the student's metaphor to show how impurities were removed from her teaching and teaching situations. Chapter 15 explores the concept of the "best-loved self" and how it can be discovered and developed through mentorship. It also discusses the importance of mentorship for personal and professional growth and provides insights into the different forms of mentorships, such as peer mentorship, formal mentorship programs, and self-directed mentorship. The chapter also explores the challenges and benefits of being a mentor and guides individuals interested in becoming mentors.

Chapter 16 explores the themes of perspective, relationship-building, and self-discovery. The chapter focuses on the relationship between *Bernardo and Jackie* and examines how their perspectives of each other influence the dynamics of their relationship. In this chapter, the author delves into how seeing the world through another person's eyes can help to build empathy, compassion, and a deeper understanding of others. The chapter also explores how individuals can use this perspective-taking to improve their self-awareness and build stronger relationships with others. Chapter 17 explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the field of education and teacher development. It also focuses on the ways in which educators have had to adapt and adjust in the face of this unprecedented global event and how it has affected their sense of self. In Chapter 18, the authors describe how individuals can identify their strengths, passions, and values and how

these can contribute to finding their best-loved self. The author also explores the role of personal experiences and challenges in the journey of self-discovery and the importance of self-reflection and introspection.

Serving as a conclusion to the book, Chapter 19 offers insights into the future of the best-loved self-concept. In this chapter, the author reflects on the key themes and insights explored throughout the book and offers suggestions for how individuals can continue to cultivate their best-loved self. The author also provides a roadmap for future research on the best-loved self and offers suggestions for how educators and professionals can incorporate the best-loved self-concept into their work.

Turning to evaluation, as every work has its limitations, though, on a small scale, this book still has space for improvement. For example, Chapter 3 needs to adequately address teachers' diverse backgrounds and perspectives, particularly those from underrepresented communities. Chapter 5 focuses on the experiences of only one female educator, which limit the generalization of the findings and insights. It might be better if the author also explores the male teacher experience so that, at least, it can represent teachers' experience based on gender. However, although the concept still has spaces for improvement, the concept of the best love self is a valuable tool for teachers to reflect on their practices and develop as professionals, but it may not be the only solution to the challenges faced by teachers and the teaching profession. Overall, this book is thought-provoking and inspiring, offering readers a glimpse into the best-loved self-concept. Whether reading as part of a larger book or as a standalone chapter, this book is likely to stimulate readers to engage in profound contemplation regarding their personal quest towards discovering their best-loved self and inspire them to take actions that promote its growth.

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