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Book Reviews (editorially-reviewed)

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Reale, M. (2017). ***Becoming a Reflective Librarian and Teacher: Strategies for Mindful Academic Practice***. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. ISBN: 978-0-8389-1529-5.

The book *Becoming a Reflective Librarian and Teacher: Strategies for Mindful Academic Practice* is not as practical a guide on reflection as its title might lead one to believe. Much of author Michelle Reale's purpose for writing could have been summarized in a journal article as opposed to a full length (albeit slim) book. The book takes a considered approach to reflective practice and narrowly applies it to the academic librarian profession. Some patience is required when reading the text.

The author's premise is that academic librarians would be more effective if they intentionally practiced reflection both personally and professionally. Reflection is the key to unlocking our best selves; "without it," she writes, "the way in which we teach, do reference, and collaborate with colleagues suffers" (p. 3). Furthermore, she maintains that if academic librarians do not intentionally practice reflection themselves, they cannot effectively teach the merits of positive reflection to their students (p. 70).

What stands out is Reale's emphasis on keeping a reflective journal; she views it as a transformative tool (p. 34) for growth and change (p. 67). Curiously, she does not offer substantive ways in which to foster reflection beyond the written journal. She argues that an examined life, through the lens of a journal, is one that is better able to respond to problems that arise and that is "effective personally, professionally, and educationally" (p.11). Her repeated call to reflectively journal makes sense, but may weary the reader. That being said, the book's text is well written and attests to the author's disciplined writing life and her desire to improve as a professional.

Chapter five, "The Cycle of Reflection," seems itself to be circular in nature, spiraling almost endlessly. The author appears consumed with reflection to the point of navel-gazing, as though it is the only solution for mindful academic practice. In Chapter six, Reale rails against such criticism, suggesting that as library professionals, "we . . . are the best and most valued resource that our students have, so why should we not look after ourselves and try to understand ourselves?" (p. 54). The author generally seems to

take her library role far too seriously. As well, she often seems frustrated by certain aspects of the profession and finds personal solace in writing reflectively.

Chapter nine seemed to be the most useful chapter of the book, as the author is less introspective and suggests practical reflective exercises to incorporate in the classroom context. When students are reflecting on a research topic, for example, she urges flexibility in thinking and “writing for inquiry” (p. 97). This is followed by introducing students to database searching, keyword searches, and search terms. Reale maintains that these actions are reflective in nature and require “*deliberate attention to process*” (p. 99). Likewise, she encourages students to use a research log to track results, to employ concept maps as a brainstorming activity, and to reflect through an in-class writing assignment, as well as several other techniques.

Throughout the book, the author seems overly introspective, reflecting on her own journey to become a more reflective person professionally. Thus, it seems like the process of writing the book is a cathartic exercise. The final, autobiographical chapter seems unnecessary, redundant and somewhat narcissistic; it seems to be written more for the benefit of the author than the reader.

In sum, Michelle Reale makes a strong case for the connection between journaling and reflective practice. I recommend this book to learn best journaling practices to become a more reflective librarian and teacher. If, however, one is looking for a broader guide to reflective practice in the library profession, Char Booth’s 2011 book *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning: Instructional Literacy for Library Educators* (Chicago, IL: American Library Association), is an excellent choice. I suspect the reader will come away more challenged and with a fuller range of strategies to become a more reflective librarian and teacher, positively impacting the student learners in one’s care.

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