

CHAPTER 1

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

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By the end of this chapter you will have

- developed your understanding of reflection and critical thinking
- gained an overview of the relationship between the reflective practitioner and professional learning
- been introduced to the core competences and skills of the reflective practitioner
- developed your understanding of the role of professional learning conversations and the mentor in deepening reflection on practice

An introduction to the reflective practitioner

Perhaps, by the time you open this book, you have already come across ideas such as *reflective writing* or *evaluation of teaching and learning* or *problem-based learning*. You may have discovered how reflective practice can widen your understanding of teaching in educational settings or, indeed, in other work places where you have been

able to consider and evaluate an aspect of your work. Some of us, as keen promoters of reflective practice, can point to its particular role in professional activities and value how reflective practice contributes to professional learning and development (Harrison, 2004). All the authors of the chapters in this book anticipate that it will help you to make sense of what you do and to help place value on the knowledge and experiences that you already have, and will gain, during your early professional years.

Some other professionals you meet may be rather more critical of the reflective process and may think that engaging in reflective practice can be a somewhat superficial activity – just another hurdle to jump across in the training process, or to be seen as a bit of a chore. If it does seem to have become a somewhat repetitive exercise in your training programme, then we hope that, by reading this chapter and engaging in some of the activities, you will be helped to re-focus on its benefits.

What is a reflective practitioner; what is reflective practice?

These appear to be simple questions and, initially, any answers might appear to be rather obvious to the reader. Surely all professionals think about what they do and adapt their ways of working as a result of such thinking? Certainly reflective practice is talked about in teacher education, as well as in other professional settings such as nursing and social work, so it has gained credibility as well as criticism as a much over-worked expression.

To support reflective practices, various strategies have been designed within many professional programmes, such as storytelling, learning journals, using metaphors, conducting analyses using videos of teaching sequences, modelling and using reflective frameworks. Thinking about *reflective practice* as a concept is crucial since we do need to be clear about what it means. Whether we are beginning teachers, university education tutors or school mentors involved in school-based training, it is important to have a chance to clarify what we understand by it and what we expect it to entail. The starting point in this chapter is that it is much more than simply *thinking about teaching*.

Asking questions

Reflective practice can be thought about in terms of asking searching questions about an experience. Most questions you are already asking do not form out of thin air. They come from the contexts in which you are working, or in response to situations in which you find yourself. Pause here and jot down some questions that have already occurred to you as a result of your work, or of your experience, in an educational setting. Here are some examples:

- For teachers (me) and for students (Year 9), what are the different ideas of what is fun or exciting in a science lesson on *climate change*?
- How can I make clear my expectations and guidelines for students to know how to act and learn?

- What are the different ways that I can plan for a (practical) lesson that takes account of the fact that some students have particular skills, and others do not?

Alternatively, many education headlines in the media lend themselves to the formation of questions. Look at some of the following taken from *The Times Educational Supplement* and identify a question for each headline:

- ‘Diverse classes “can be less tolerant”’ (15 April 2011) www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6077929 (accessed 3 November 2011)
- ‘Ofsted brands careers advice for girls “weak”’ (15 April 2011) www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6077927 (accessed 3 November 2011)
- “‘Stretch and challenge” A levels “too easy”’ (8 April 2011) www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6076715 (accessed 3 November 2011)

Investigating

John Loughran (2002) describes reflective practice as ‘a lens into the world of practice’ (p. 33), recognizing that it offers a chance for questioning of often taken-for-granted, assumptions. In other words it provides a chance to see one’s own practice through the eyes of others. It is through both questioning and investigating that reflection has the potential to lead to a developing understanding of professional practice. Brookfield (1995) talks about our ‘assumption hunting’ (p. 218) as we learn about and experiment with, different approaches to our teaching practices.

Being a reflective practitioner at any stage of teacher development involves a constant, critical look at teaching and learning and at the work of you, the teacher. Some of this investigation might be done through your reading of the relevant literature (for example, when you are asked to produce a review of the professional or academic literature in a chosen area, resulting in a written critical summary). This activity can help highlight important gaps in your professional knowledge. Some investigation might be done through your talk with expert teachers and so comparing different sorts of evidence of practice (for example, you might be expected to present your learning orally to your peer group in a small group seminar on the chosen issue). Some investigation might be done individually through your private framing and reframing of episodes of teaching (learning journals/diaries can assist with this process), or more publicly by inviting someone into the classroom to view the experiences using another set of eyes (professional conversations which enable further analysis to take place are important part of this way of working).

What does this mean for beginning teachers?

Reflecting on aspects of teaching practice is usually fairly instinctive for most beginning teachers. You focus mentally on particular problems or dilemmas that are to do with how a particular teaching session went. Perhaps with the aid of a lesson evaluation form,

you identify what went well during the teaching session, and what did not go according to plan. You are then encouraged to go on to think about what might need changing in the next teaching session, or to identify what could be tried out in other types of teaching sessions. This process takes you from an essentially routine kind of reflection towards a more technical/*practical reflection*, in which you begin to examine the interpretative assumptions you are making in a particular situation or aspect of your work. The focus for your reflection shifts *from* what you as teacher might be doing *towards* what your pupils might be doing, and why. In exploring a situation, you become more open to consider new ideas and you actively seek the views of your peers, the pupils or others. A deeper, *critical* level of this hierarchy of reflective practice (van Manen, 1977) is where, as your teaching career develops, you begin to critically reflect on broader societal, ethical or political dimensions of your work and to consider its wider educational goals. There may be in time a reframing of your perspective with a more fundamental change in your practice. These ideas are developed further in this chapter.

The practical and critical levels are less instinctive to most beginning teachers. Indeed you may feel frustrated that, while you are being encouraged to discuss theoretical issues, you have a more immediate need to master the day-to-day aspects of teaching: for example, how to get your students to listen to you, how to establish authority, how to teach about *cells* as the basic unit of life in a meaningful and engaging way, and so on. This is why we want to encourage you to try the activities in this particular chapter and consider critical reflective practice as part of your professional study. The practical levels of reflective practice, and the sorts of skills and attributes we would wish you to develop at the beginning of your teaching career, are explored later in this chapter.

Reflective practice and professional knowledge

It is in its relationship with professional knowledge and practice that deeper reflection becomes such an important feature of reflective practice. If reflective practice stays at a technical level, restricted to the evaluation of teaching and learning strategies and classroom resources, it would be difficult to stress its overall importance in teacher development. However as reflective practice is used to explore more *critically* the underlying assumptions in our teaching practices, then we can begin to build our understanding of learning and teaching and add to our professional knowledge. Teachers who are unreflective about their teaching tend to be more accepting of the everyday reality in their schools and 'concentrate their efforts on finding the most effective and efficient means to solve problems that have largely been defined for them by some collective code' (Zeichner and Liston, 1996: 9). In other words, such restricted ways of thinking do not allow problems to be framed in more than one way. A fuller rationale for critical reflection and teacher professional learning is given in Harrison and Lee (2011: 200–201).

There are a number of eminent writers and researchers who have contributed to the complex thinking that surrounds reflective practice. Dewey's (1910) book *How We Think*

was seminal and clearly influenced the later work of both Schön and Kolb. Dewey's view was that reflective action stems from the need to solve a problem and involves 'the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it' (1910: 6). He proposed a five-step model of problem-solving, which included suggesting solutions, posing questions, hypothesizing, reasoning and testing. Together these form a sequential process for reflective thinking.

Dewey's work has been extended by others. Van Manen, as we have noted, highlighted, at the highest level of reflection, a moral dimension to reflective action in which the 'worthwhileness' of actions can be addressed (1977: 227). Carr and Kemmis also speak of this higher-level reflection as involving teachers as the central actors 'in transforming education' (1986: 156). More recently Pollard has stated, 'reflective teaching implies an active concern with aims and consequences as well as means and technical competence' (2005: 15).

There are clearly particular skills and dispositions associated with being a reflective practitioner. Dewey drew attention to particular qualities that could be linked to ways of thinking. These include open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness (1933). Others such as Brookfield (1987) tried to describe critical thinking in relation to **pedagogy** and have advocated ways of provoking critical thinking.

Brookfield (1995) coined the term 'critical lenses' and identified four perspectives that such lenses might provide when reflecting on practice:

- the practitioner (you, the beginning teacher)
- the learners (your students)
- colleagues (for example, your mentor)
- established theory (as found in the educational and other academic and professional literature)

Brookfield explored all those things that we do, the things that influence what we do, and the things we never stop to think about or ask questions about, and asked that we should try to unpack the assumptions about what we do in the classroom. Through such critical reflection on practice we should then be able not only to examine the *technical* aspects of our teaching, but also look *critically* at issues, both within the school as a whole, and outside, that might impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Some forms of **action research**, professional enquiry and **self-study research** have grown from these roots of reflective practice. As beginning teachers you might wish also to observe your own university tutors in their work as teacher educators. How do they create experiences for you to gain access to their thinking about, and to their practice of, teaching?

Alternative conceptions of reflection

Schön (1983, 1987) recognized that professional knowledge lies in the *doing* of the job. Many experienced teachers cannot actually articulate what they know – they just *do it*.

Schön argued that in these situations professionals use their knowledge and past experiences as a frame for action – it is a form of ‘knowing in action’ which comes with experience, and therefore it differs from Dewey’s conception of routinized action. Schön argued that if professionals can begin to separate out the things they know when they do them, then they become more effective in their work. Part of this re-framing involves *setting* as well as *solving* problems, ‘a process in which interactively we name the things to which we will attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them’ (Schön, 1983: 40). He proposed two sorts of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. It is useful to explain these terms further.

Reflection-in-action is the almost unconscious, instantaneous reflection that happens as a more experienced teacher solves a problem or dilemma. Schön described this as drawing on their *repertoire* of knowledge, skills and understanding of a situation so that he or she can change direction and operate differently in the classroom. In other words, rather than randomly trying any other approach, the teacher is using the accumulated experience and knowledge to seek alternatives in the classroom in response to the needs of the pupils.

Reflection-on-action takes place after the event or teaching session and is a more deliberative and conscious process. There is more critical analysis and evaluation of the actions and what might have happened if a different course of action had taken place. Since it involves looking back at an event it is a form of retrospective reflection. It can involve the actual writing down of what happened and why (critical analysis and evaluation) as, for example, on a lesson evaluation form.

However, in attempting to separate *thinking* from *doing*, Schön gained a number of critics. Day (1993) and Solomon (1987), with others, have pointed to his lack of attention to the role of conversation or dialogue in teachers’ learning, arguing that reflection is also a social process requiring the articulation of ideas to, and with, others to allow the development of a critical perspective. The importance of detailed conversation with a mentor in order to jointly analyse and evaluate what happened provides further opportunity to examine professional knowledge and theories-in-use. Time is also needed for separate reflection *on* action. Carr and Kemmis (1986) argued that Schön’s narrow focus on the *individual* neglects any consideration of wider social settings. Thus we need to find ways of tapping into, and supporting, time available for such learning conversations and the improving the quality of these.

Experiential learning and the role of a mentor

There are several theoretical approaches which have been used to try to explain the relationship between experience and learning – sometimes referred to as *experiential learning*. One of the best-known models is that of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984), which has formed the basis of several mentor training manuals (see Moon, 2004; Harrison et al., 2005). Kolb’s theory is that people learn from their experience, and the

way this happens is through (1) reflection on the things we do (concrete experiences); and (2) experimentation (action) in similar situations at another time, in order to gain further experience; reflect again, and so on. It is this cyclical process of reflection that allows us to learn from experience.

Experiential learning also acknowledges that much informal learning takes place outside formal educational settings and this is as true for learners in initial teacher education as it is for students in schools. In this way reflective practice allows the learner to make sense of all learning, both formal and informal, and to organize and evaluate it.

The knowledge and theories that beginning teachers learn in the workplace (in this case, schools and colleges) are as valid as the knowledge gained through more formal qualifications (such as in a first degree in a specialist subject area, or a professional qualification). In saying this, Argyris and Schön (1975) argued that there are two types of theories that professionals use in their workplace and distinguished the two as follows. First, there are the *official* theories of the profession, to be found in text books, codes of practice and so on. There are plenty of these examples in the subsequent chapters of this book. Such theories gain an established place and are endorsed by professionals – the teachers, and others. Then there are the theories-in-use – the *unofficial* theories of professionals, which are the ideas and concepts that professionals actually draw on. They are the professional's own ideas and theories about learning and teaching.

Activity 1.1 'Official' and 'unofficial' theories in education

Work on this within a small, mixed curriculum group of beginning teachers. Look at the *theories* listed as bullet points below:

- (a) First, each of you should work on your own. Try to annotate each theory with either 'U' or 'O':
 - 'U' is an 'unofficial' theory of a teacher
 - 'O' is an established 'official' theory in education
- (b) Then, compare your annotations and the reasons for your choices, with other members of the group.
 - Boys don't enjoy writing as much as girls.
 - People with dyslexia are lazy and don't attempt to overcome the difficulty of acquiring and using **literacy** skills.
 - Teachers don't eat in the classroom in the presence of the boys and girls – it gives the students the wrong idea.
 - The parents I need to see most at parents' evening are the ones that stay away. They lack the motivation or skills to support their children's education.

- The main point of '**constructivism**' is that humans actively construct their knowledge rather than receive it fully formed from external sources.
- Children learn in different ways. That is why we need different ability 'sets' for subject teaching. Mixed ability classes just don't work.
- Intelligence is fixed and is something that can be measured.
- Caring relationships in a classroom are an important medium for supporting students' learning and socio-emotional development.
- Collaboration is essential for an inclusive climate in school.
- The 'zone of proximal development' is the difference between what the child can do by himself or herself and the more he or she can do with assistance from an adult, or a more knowledgeable peer. There are sensitive periods in a child's development for learning particular skills.
- Vocational courses are for students who are ill-equipped for academic courses.

Thus, it is through reflective practice that teachers can begin to tease out the different types of theories, select and apply them to advantage. The pedagogy of constructivism (see Chapter 2 for more on this concept) forms an important part of most teacher education courses and professional expectations are that 'knowledge is ... created rather than received, [is] mediated by discourse rather than transferred by teacher talk, [and is] explored and transformed rather than remembered as a uniform set of positivist ideas' (Holt-Reynolds, 2000: 21). This acquisition of knowledge is similar to the process of building or construction and Vygotsky's work (1962, 1978) is important, not only in identifying the particular role of discourse of practice, but also in pointing towards the particular importance of mentoring or learning conversations in support of experiential learning (see also Chapter 2). Structured suggestions for ways of exploring and transforming ideas and promoting critical reflective practice during formal mentor conversations can be found in Harrison et al. (2005).

There are many issues raised in the rest of this book which should provide you with opportunities for critical reflection in this widest sense. For example, you might start with your own classroom practice and examine how well your students responded to your use of *small group* activities within a particular lesson (see Chapters 3 and 4 for more on grouping). Afterwards ask yourself some specific questions such as:

- To what extent did the activities empower independent learning or a more democratic approach in the classroom?
- Did all students respond in the same way?
- Was your class briefing satisfactory?
- Were all students ready for a lesson that was less structured and expected independent learning?

Identity matters for teachers

Looking in the *looking glass*

Teaching is a public practice which bears some similarities to the process of acting. This is because teaching involves constant vigilance of the audience, with the teacher making regular efforts to imagine how he or she is coming across, and regular evaluations on-the-job of whether attempts at communication are being understood by students as intended. This comparison with acting stresses the *looking glass* nature of teaching. It is one in which Cooley, as early as 1902, emphasized the essentially reflective nature of identity in his articulation of the *looking glass self*. You will find yourself reflected in a variety of mirrors: your colleagues, your learners, their parents, the government and media, all of whom provide multiple, often idealized, images of teachers' professional identities. These images may compete frequently with your personal identity, may distort your self-image, and bring about a need for self-reflection. It is now recognized that identity in the workplace is not fixed and singular but is multiple, changing and provisional in nature (Weick, 1995). Identity construction is always a social activity; it involves a continual constructing and re-constructing of relationships with others in the workplace.

Nias (1989) has also made important contributions to debate about teachers' developing identity. In her longitudinal study of primary school teachers' lives and identities, she identified a distinction between the personal and the professional elements. She found that incorporation of the identity of 'teacher' into an individual's self-image was accomplished over long periods of time. It follows that it is highly likely that you, as a beginning secondary school teacher, are experiencing a *substantive identity* (that is, your stable, core identity – *you*) as relatively independent of your presentation of yourself within professional setting such as a school (that is, your *situated identity*, or professional self – *teacher*). You may be into your second decade of teaching before you will have fully incorporated your professional role into your self-image and can identify your substantive identity as *teacher*. Nias concluded that being yourself in school was less to do with the practical aspects of teaching young learners, skills and information, and more to do with generating a sense of community and integrating personal and professional connections between teacher and learner.

Thus the central idea is that constructing identity (here, your professional or situated identity) involves you, first, in *making a pattern of experiences* that have consistency over a period of time. You gradually acquire, and accept, characteristic patterns of decision which, in turn, determine your choices and decision-making in the workplace. This second process of *integration* which Nias describes is very challenging particularly to beginning teachers because there are so many mirrors available in which to examine your professional identity. While each of these mirrors may have a distorting effect in terms of providing competing messages about teachers' professional lives, it is important to begin the process of describing each new professional self throughout

the training process. The third part of the process involves a *disruption* or *inconsistency* in identity (see Warin et al., 2006). There will be plenty of instances that you, and your peer group, will experience, in your learning of how to teach, where your own pedagogical beliefs (for example, about the importance of learner-centred education) may not coincide with another teacher's beliefs in more teacher-centred methods; or where your perceptions about your subject's status may differ from those of teachers of other subjects.

For further reading, you might look at some publications arising from the VITAE project, a four-year study conducted by the Universities of Nottingham and London. The book *Teachers Matter* by Day et al. (2007) presents strong evidence of the complexities of teachers' work, lives, identity and commitment in relation to their sense of agency, well-being, resilience and student attitudes and **attainment**.

Self-awareness

The humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers noted that, 'if I can form a helping relationship to myself – if I can be sensitively aware of and acceptant towards my own feelings – then the likelihood is great that I can form a helping relationship toward another' (1967: 57). Developing your self-awareness is therefore an essential tool for teachers and is central to developing your reflective practice. At this early stage let us think about the reflexive practitioner as the teacher who is attentive to him- or herself in practice.

Activity 1.2 Developing your self-awareness as a new teacher

This is an individual/small group activity.

(a) You are very new to the teaching profession.

After some very early experiences in the classroom, think about your answers to the questions below. Then share your thoughts with other beginning teachers after attempting to answer the following questions:

- What kind of status does teaching have?
- What does it mean to you, personally, to take on the mantle of 'teacher'?
- What public images are there of teachers with which you can identify?
- How might new teachers begin to combine their personal and professional identities? (Accept that, for some, this might be experienced as the inability to be oneself.)

(Continued)

(Continued)

- What is your overall philosophy of teaching and learning?
 - What assumptions (implicit or explicit) about the nature of students' learning are inherent in your approaches to teaching?
- (b) Try to return to the final two questions in three and, then, six months' time and answer them again.
- What changes to your philosophy and your assumptions have taken place?
 - Specifically, have there been any changes to your general approach to teaching and learning, for example in terms of you 'reaching out' to *all* the students in your classes?

To begin developing your self-awareness, try using metaphors in your *storytelling* about your teaching experiences, or in your journal writing. You could start this with a sentence which begins, 'Teaching is like ...'

Francis (1995) provides examples from her beginning teachers' reflective journals which illustrate the mismatch for some, between their espoused theories of practice and their choice of metaphor. Here is one from a beginning teacher who claimed to have adopted a constructivist approach to teaching and learning:

I see myself as a teacher who is like the current flowing through an electric circuit. Each student causes a resistance and a subsequent withdrawal of energy from the teacher The source of energy which the teacher relies on eventually runs down and needs to be recharged if the light bulbs are to continue to glow brightly ... (Francis 1995: 238)

The flow, or movement, metaphor used here is clearly at odds with notions of constructivism. Thus, by constructing such metaphors, beginning teachers can become more aware and be helped to examine any inconsistencies between their teaching beliefs and their actual practice.

Some beginning teachers struggle to understand teaching and to know how to work in realistic ways. Schools, as workplaces, often provide complex contexts that can produce confusion and stress. They can generate, very quickly, feelings of vulnerability. There is an urgent need for you to learn about yourself and how to best engage with your students and their difficulties and there will be many questions about the precise role of schools, for example within multicultural communities. Activities (such as 1.2) can provide a bridge between feelings and realities, and can open up questions about difficult experiences. This is reflective practice. The place of emotional intelligence is as important in teacher education as it is in student learning. To learn more of the concept of emotional intelligence and how it is developed in secondary schools go to

www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/KS3-4-PSHE-Emotional-Intelligence-6047708. (accessed 3 November 2011).

The following exercise grows out of the work of Luft and Ingham in the 1950s. They created the 'Jo-Hari Window' for their work on group process (1963). The Jo-Hari Window is a technique that allows people to understand themselves better, and to learn more about themselves from feedback given by other people and from the types of information communicated to others. It is a four-section window that helps the person to map out different aspects of the self in the categories shown in Figure 1.1.

The first area is the *open* area. These are the things both you and others know about you; these are public and are also obvious to you. Where there is a lot of feedback from others, together with sharing with others, this window would be large in proportion to other three areas.

The second area is the *blind* area. These are things that others know about you, but things of which you may not be aware. The blind spot can be reduced by asking others for more feedback.

The third area is the *hidden* area. These are things that you know about yourself, but that others do not know about you. The hidden area can be reduced by letting others know more about yourself.

The fourth area is the *unknown* area. Neither you nor others are aware of these things here. Some things in an unknown area can be reached by offering more feedback or providing for more disclosure among people; group interaction often brings up old memories and experiences that were forgotten. However, there will always be some unknown and secret area of ourselves.

	Known to Self	Unknown to Self
Known to Others	Open	Blind
Unknown to Others	Hidden	Unknown

Figure 1.1 The Jo-Hari Window (based on the original work on group processes of Luft and Ingham, 1963)

Activity 1.3a Representing your Jo-Hari Window

This part is an individual activity.

- (a) On paper, create an intuitive map of your own Jo-Hari Window. Arrange the squares as they appear in Figure 1.1, but adjust their actual sizes once you have explored part (b).
- (b) Think about yourself and ask yourself if you have a large open (public) area or hidden area. Give some general proportions to your own window, and consider what it indicates about the public and private aspects of your life.

If you have a large *unknown* area, this clearly offers you the least potential for self-awareness, since you may not be accustomed to much interaction with others. Conversely, a large *open (public)* area offers great potential for self-awareness that is based on your open sharing and receiving feedback that has happened in the past.

Activity 1.3b Examining your Jo-Hari Windows

This is best carried out with some beginning teachers who tried Activity 1.3a.

Work with more than two, but not more than five peers.

- (a) First, have a look at the four types of personality types listed below, which reveal themselves when working within a group.

Open area: *Open and attentive* (i.e. gives and takes feedback)

Blind area: *Bull-in-a-china shop* (i.e. gives, but does not take feedback)

Hidden area: *Interviewer* (i.e. takes, but does not give feedback)

Unknown area: *Ostrich* (i.e. does not give or take feedback).

A personality type is represented by each window (as shown in Activity 1.3a). Some people characterize each area as a set of *attitudes* that will show up when a group is interacting.

- (b) Referring to your own representation of the *size* of each of your windows (based on Activity 1.3a), work out the degree to which *you* are capable of exhibiting each one of these four types of personality. Share your thoughts with others in the peer group.

- (c) This should follow any further group discussion. On your own, you should try to explore the degree to which you are willing to know and learn things about ourselves from others. Distinguish between your willingness to learn from *giving* feedback, and the willingness to learn from *asking for* feedback. Consider the importance of the intention behind feedback (here, sharing information for a professional learning process), and how it can be done directly, honestly and as concretely as possible. Remember, too, that feedback is not final and absolute. Further feedback can always be sought later as part of your developmental learning process.

This initial representation of your framework of windows is not static. The general proportions of your windows are likely to change with time, depending upon your actions. As you share more information with people, both the *bidden* and *unknown* areas should decrease. As you receive more feedback from people, the *blind* and *unknown* areas should decrease. The shaded area in Figure 1.1 represents the uncovered creative potential that you have. The aim would be to reveal as much of this as possible through self-disclosure and feedback from others.

It is worth noting at this point that the person-centred approach of Rogers (1980) has been very influential in education. His focus on the development of the learner led to a model of learning that places the learner at the centre of the learning and teaching process. The role of the teacher in this approach is to facilitate learning.

Reflective practice in work place learning

Notions of reflection and reflective practice are now well established in a number of areas of professional education. As has been demonstrated in this chapter already, reflective practice is essential in the capacity to integrate and make sense of the ongoing story of self in the face of the many images of the profession today.

Schön (1983) saw the risk that reflection-in-action could become stale and routinized and argued that *reflection-on-action* prevents this by revisiting previous judgements in a more analytical way designed to make hidden knowledge more explicit. It also allows for more deliberative judgement after the event: decisions (in your teaching) that were made quickly, in the heat of the moment, are revisited, and a wider range of options and theories can be considered.

Reflective practice has been readily accepted by many professional communities since the late 1980s because it provides for an individualistic view of learning and provides a useful framing device to help conceptualize some important processes in professional learning. The use of *individual action planning* involves a systematic *review* process with another, more experienced teacher, and ends with some agreed *plan* and

target setting. It is a formal structured process which can provide the time needed for reflective practice. It forms the basis of our own initial teacher education course. It also forms the basis of termly review meetings with the Induction Tutor whom you should encounter during your first year of teaching (Induction year) in England. The Career Entry and Development Profile is a structure for you to make an Exit Action Plan ready for your first year of teaching (TDA 2011).

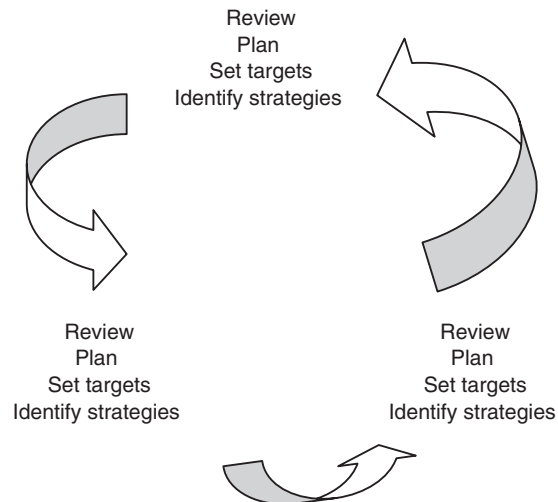


Figure 1.2 Individual Action Plan (IAP) cycle

It is important to question the nature of professional practice, and in turn of the types of education and training that support developing professional practice. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (2005) provide a description of the several stages they have identified through which someone moves from being unfamiliar to becoming an experienced practitioner. Some professional educators wish to view reflection within the context of those settings that have more orientation towards a group, or a team of professionals. Think how you might collaborate with other staff inside a classroom, inside the whole school, or between staff, parents and other professionals in the community. For example, where students with 'special needs' are in regular classrooms, the regular teacher can begin to consider with these other staff (teaching assistants, support staff or other adults) how effective the system of individualized support for these children is in practice in this classroom.

As the contexts for professional practice change, teachers will rarely work alone. New teachers will be expected to be part of collective decision-making rather than making autonomous decisions in the classroom. New teachers will also be expected to work as part of an inter-dependent group of people, often containing participants from different professions or occupations. Cressey and Boud (2006) have described the particular concept of *productive reflection*. They argue that, on the basis of insights into what happened previously, productive reflection leads to interventions into work activity that change what is happening. In other words productive reflection leads to *organizational* as well as individual action.

In teaching, therefore, not only do professional practices change, as we shall see when working with other adults in classrooms, but also the professional identities of the partners in such settings are subject to change. As our professional identity shifts, we might also begin to regard our own students as involved in the co-construction of knowledge about themselves and their own situation (see Chapter 3 for more on personalized and student-centred learning).

In conclusion, as teachers in the next decade you will find yourselves increasingly working in mixed settings that change over time, and in groups that form and re-form for particular purposes related not only to the school but other organizational settings. These groups will require you to be able to work collegially with others, not simply as multidisciplinary groups but as groups that cut across traditional disciplines in an attempt to place children and young people at the very heart of everyone's practice.

What now follows in this chapter are four sections to help you develop the skills of reflective practice, each with Activities for you to try out. The first section explores what we might mean by professional identity with tasks to help you develop your self-awareness and engage in the use of *storytelling*. The next section provides tasks for you to consider five core competences for a reflective practitioner: **observation**, communication, judgement, decision-making and team working. Within the fifth competence (team working), there is also a brief introduction to forms of professional enquiry and action research. A further section presents particular features of critical reflection on practice and illustrates these as a two-stage process: (i) changes in awareness, followed by (ii) changes in practice.

The final section provides a summary of the whole chapter, with important words of caution about the use of reflection as a disciplinary regime, as well as identification of its potential emancipatory power as a form of learning in the workplace.

In summary we hope that, by engaging with the work in these next sections, you can gain the confidence to use critical reflective practice in your everyday work in classrooms, and can embed it in your wider professional training covered by the remaining chapters of this book.

Developing the skills and attributes of a reflective practitioner

The five core competences thought necessary for good practice as a reflective practitioner are presented in turn: observation, communication, judgement, decision-making and team working. All are important professional competences and are applicable to *all* stages of teacher learning, including initial teacher education.

Observation

The skills of observation take account of noticing your own feelings and behaviours (see also the section 'Self-awareness' in this chapter), and include *noticing*, *marking* and *recording* in order to distinguish some *thing* from its surroundings. You can find

numerous practical exercises for developing these skills, designed for both individual and small group work, in Chapter 2 of John Mason's book (2002) *Researching Your Own Practice*.

Noticing involves recording brief but vivid details which allow you to recognize the situation for itself. There are various ways in which you might do this: through writing, drawing, or video- and audio-recording, and even photographing an artefact or product of your teaching. As Mason writes,

... so all that is needed at first is a few words, literally two or three, enough to enable re-entry, to trigger recollection. Then the incident can be described to others *from* that memory, together with any significant further detail that may be needed. Brevity and vividness are what make descriptions of incidents recognisable to others. (2002: 51)

In learning how to teach, the noticing and recording of *critical moments* can be helpful in relation to developing the skills of reflective practice. Some practical suggestions are given In Activity 1.4 for you to try. One method may be more appealing to you than another. Try a few ways and then stick to ones that you enjoy and find useful.

Activity 1.4 Noticing and recording your critical moments – an autobiographical approach

Try this activity on your own.

- (a) Describe a brief and vivid significant moment from your new life in teaching and learning your subject. Most people tend to record critical moments that are negative incidents. You don't have to choose one of these.
- (b) If you plan to keep a *learning journal* the following guidance might be helpful to you. A *diary*, a *blog* or *electronic discussion forum* might also be used to contain isolated fragments of critical incidents.

When first asked to keep *personal accounts in a journal*, there are three standard formats that you might employ, in various mixtures and levels of detail:

- *Critical moments summarized in a few, rather generalized words*
Remember, if you make a general summary, you might quickly lose contact with the incident itself. All that remains are generalities. Find a way to follow this up in a more detailed oral description to someone else.
- *Critical moments recounted in detail, including actions, feelings, thoughts*

Be wary, however, that excessive details, with attempts to justify or explain what actually happened, can block your further development. You should try to record immediate 'trains of thought'.

- *Critical moments recorded as conversations*

If you record dialogues, you may be replaying 'talk in the head' after the event, often over and over. Bear in mind that there may be other important details to add, such as gestures, postures and tones of voice.

One frequently used activity in teacher-training programmes to encourage reflection is the use of the reflective-writing assignments. These allow you to draw from and enlarge upon examples of the critical moments which you might have recorded in your journal or diary. Sometimes these reflective assignments might involve the writing and analysing of a *teaching case*. You could be asked to identify a dilemma you are experiencing in the classroom and write a narrative or story about this event or situation. Its intention is to help you highlight the complexity of problem-solving and decision-making in learning and teaching. It also provides a way of observing and analysing your own teaching, rather than relying on relatively infrequent observations by others. Another purpose is to help you uncover beliefs and assumptions about teaching.

Written case-study accounts such as these might then be shared with others through a *case conference*. This allows a collaborative analysis and discussion of *the case*. A group of beginning teachers reflect together on the embedded dilemmas, identify the range of possible solutions and, in so doing, each can relate another's case to their own teaching experience. There is some research evidence (Lundeberg and Scheurman, 1997) to show that beginning teachers do benefit from a second reading of a case analysis in that it helps them connect theoretical knowledge with practice.

Another possibility is for you to stop a moment and step into another person's shoes (e.g. a student, parent, social worker) and consider how that person's perspective might be different from your own. What differences might there be? How does knowing about the differences change your own perspective on a situation or event? In this way you can start to consider the role of race, class, ethnicity and gender with regard to teaching dilemmas.

To encourage critical reflection you might identify two students on whom to focus your reflection – one for whom the lesson and being in school is a positive experience; one for whom the lesson content and being in school is a problem. In addition, one of the students could be of a gender, race or culture that is different from your own. Each student can then 'sit on your shoulder' and 'whisper' what went well and what did not.

You will find it helpful to audit your strengths and areas for further development from time to time during the training year. Such self-observation can be supported by systems such as the SWOT analysis or sentence completion – see Activities 1.5a and 1.5b for frameworks to support these approaches.

Activity 1.5a Assessing your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT analysis)

This is an individual activity. Conduct a SWOT analysis for your own professional development.

Arrange on paper a table of four cells, labelling each as:

(S) STRENGTHS	(W) WEAKNESSES
(O) OPPORTUNITIES	(T) THREATS

You can do this analysis using bullet points to provide the key information. For each cell, try to identify at least one critical moment which has, in turn, provided you with evidence for your judgement. This activity also provides opportunities:

- to make explicit to yourself how you perceive your current state of preparation for the teaching to be done, with your goals, aims, desires and so on;
- for your self-assessment of the level of support and possible courses of action of which you are aware.

You will express your frustrations as well as noting things that appear to be hindering your progress.

Activity 1.5b Assessing your likes, hopes and fears using sentence completion

Part (a) is an individual activity. Part (b) can form the basis of discussion with a mentor or peer.

(a) Complete a sentence for each of the sentence stems below:

What I most like to do (in my work) is

My biggest difficulties (in my work) involve

My greatest successes (in my work) are

My greatest pleasures (in my work) are

My greatest strengths (in my work) are

My biggest weaknesses (in my work) are

- (b) You will need to be prepared to share the evidence you have that underpins each of your completed statements (remember, these are your judgements). Think of particular critical moments that will have provided you with evidence, insights and feelings that gave rise to your completed sentence.

Once you have made your own judgements and selected the evidence on which you have based these, you need to conduct a reality check with a teaching colleague or your mentor. For example, you could ask them to complete the same sentences in order to indicate their judgements about *your* progress. You can then compare how your perceptions of your own progress actually match another's perceptions of your work.

Finally, do ask yourself if you might be setting yourself too high a standard for 'good enough work' at this stage of your teaching career. Any gap between your current state and your personal and professional goals does provide the *window of opportunity* for further development. That gap needs to be wide enough to be sufficiently disturbing that you want to do something about it. However, it should not be so wide that it feels impossible to achieve.

Communication

Your communication skills in relation to reflective practice can be developed in a variety of ways: through the keeping of a personal learning journal or diary, or through a more formal professional portfolio, supported by a system of formal tutorials with a mentor.

Learning journal, diary or professional portfolio

Since critical reflection on practice is an active and conscious process (see Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991), you can start by asking yourself a series of open questions about a particular teaching episode or a critical incident within that episode, and jotting down your impressions using one of these ways of recording:

- What have I been doing/What am I doing?
- What has happened/What is happening?
- What led up to this?
- And why?

By doing this regularly you will be helped to reflect on and learn more about your practice. By sharing some of your reflections with others, you will learn more about yourself and your practice, your strengths and your limitations.

As we have noted already reflection can also be a *critical activity*. If you ask yourself ‘How do I improve my practice?’ you are actually questioning what you do, how you currently do things and the value of what you are doing. Asking a fundamental question like this will assist you in thinking more critically about why a particular practice of yours is a success (or a failure, or something in between). Remember that *being critical* is not a negative activity. It is about trying to see things differently and doing alternative things.

Formal tutorials with a mentor or university tutor

A key issue for a mentor, working in ITE, is how they can develop the beginning teacher’s expertise in engaging in *reflective conversations* in more structured ways. In the past the **General Teaching Council of England (GTCE)** has referred more broadly to the role of the *Learning Conversation* in bringing about teacher development, claiming that it can ‘encourage access to a diverse range of opportunities and activities ... It is designed so that all teachers through performance management review and in other ways, may choose a route that matches their professional needs’ (2004: 8).

We have seen that, through engaging with Activities 1.4 and 1.5, there is the opportunity for a follow-up dialogue to assist reflection on practice. Activity 1.4, with its focus on critical moments or critical incidents, provides a route in which professional development can be supported through a reflective conversation with a teacher, or mentor, who has a good working knowledge of the contexts or situations in which the described event has taken place. For Activities 1.5a and 1.5b, the dialogues might be more general and based on more open-ended questions such as ‘How far are these observations ... about what actually happened? ... about your personal feelings? ... about your personal and professional identities?’

A reflective conversation is therefore a process of bringing improvement forward. Crucially, it is the *quality of the conversation* that is important and so you and your mentor might need some structure for the best use of this conversation time. A 30-minute review meeting might be arranged along the following lines.

Guidelines for a structured reflective conversation with a mentor

- Looking back and reviewing significant features in a recent critical moment or event
- Sharing some of your remarks in your own records of practice such as your learning journal, or diary
- Celebrating some recent success
- Identifying one thing that you could still improve whatever your level of **achievement**
- Deciding together how best to bring the further improvement forward
- Agreeing more precisely your next step
- Ending by setting a date for your next review meeting
- Aiming to keep your own brief record of the conversation and the main agreed targets

All learning conversations are two-way dialogues where meaning is being constantly negotiated by both participants. At best they become learning and teaching situations for both parties. Sometimes, for the beginning teacher, the dialogue can be potentially both supportive and threatening since the power relations with the mentor may be imbalanced. Beginning teachers often feel that they would like more opportunities to explain their views and perceptions of a lesson, and that they prefer tutor's feedback to be constructive, and delivered in a friendly, supportive and encouraging way, rather than in a more challenging way. The dialogue will quickly close down if they feel powerless to intervene.

Tutor interventions may be thought of as either *directive* or *non-directive*. Table 1.1 illustrates these categories further. It can be a useful reflective exercise for mentors, occasionally, to record on tape or digital recorder (with your permission) their dialogues with you. This will allow them listen to recordings analytically, to ask to what extent the beginning teacher has been given a chance to make their own views known and to explore any other agendas of their own. In other words, reflection on practice is important for teacher educators too.

Although it is clear that different interventions can be used at different times and for different purposes, the *catalytic* category (see Table 1.1) has been shown to be crucial for professional learning. Heron suggests that 'it is the linchpin of any practitioner service that sees itself as fundamentally educational' (1990: 8).

Table 1.1 Types of (A) directive and (B) non-directive tutor interventions

(A) Types of directive intervention	Its purpose	Example of tutor intervention
Prescriptive (telling)	Directly informs beginning teacher about what to do; gives instructions or suggestions	'When you want the class to measure out the chemicals accurately, stop the class work. Ask them to watch you do a demonstration, focus on the careful use of the dropping pipette and use of the measuring cylinder ... That is why I asked you, "What are you trying to achieve?" If it is the development of the practical skill of measuring accurately, ask them to count how many drops they use to get 10 ml. of water into the measuring cylinder.'
Informative	Provides information to the beginning teacher	'A double lesson is crucial for conducting some practical activities; you wouldn't be able to get the class to do these otherwise.'
Confrontational	Challenges beliefs or behaviour of the beginning teacher; asks for a re-evaluation of some action	'I observed one task throughout that part of the lesson. It was just "question and answer", and it went on too long. I was expecting something else. What else could you have done on your plan to help bring about deeper learning?'

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Continued)

(B) Types of non-directive intervention	Its purpose	Example of tutor intervention
Cathartic	Allows the beginning teacher a chance to express thoughts and feelings	'You let me see the lesson plans for that class for the whole week. You had some broad aims for the whole set of lessons. Some things did happen differently in the lessons. How do you feel now you have taught these lessons?'
Catalytic	Helps the beginning teacher become more self-aware and reflective	'We have agreed that managing behaviour in a practical lesson is very important. Is there anything else you could have tried, in terms of control? 'What were some of the students doing while the others were taking the measurements? Did you notice, at each workbench, what was happening?'
Supportive	Tries to boost beginning teacher's confidence by focusing on what they did well	'I have noticed some crucial things in the lessons this week. You have dealt very well with some students when they give you certain answers. Shall we try together to summarize what was working so well?'

Source: adapted from Heron, 1990

Judgement

In order to analyse a classroom event or situation, we should try to be absolutely clear what that event or situation consists of. If we, too, are involved in that event or situation then this view of the event needs to be impartial. This is a difficult process – to see ourselves as others see us. Remember also that we often see in others what we dislike in ourselves.

Just describing what happens during the event can be problematic as well. We might, rather skilfully, combine details of the event with our judgement, or with additional explanations and theories. It would then be difficult for another person to begin to discuss our analysis and say whether they agree with the analysis, or not. Mason (2002: 40) has helpfully distinguished between an account *of* a situation and an account *for* it. Thus, if we wish to *account for* an occurrence, and particularly if we expect another teacher to agree with our analysis, we must first explain the thing precisely that we are trying to analyse (the *account of*). By doing this we can begin to recognize that when we give an *account for*, we are also giving a justification, a value judgement, a criticism, or an attempt at an explanation.

Accounting for means, first, asking 'why' and, second, providing an interpretation. Mason draws on an example from Tripp (1993: 18) and this note from Tripp's reflective diary, kept as a practising teacher, is useful to include here: 'John didn't finish his work today. Must see he learns to complete what he has begun.' What are the possible answers if we begin to ask why John is apparently not finishing his work today? That first sentence might have to be rewritten: 'John finished work on parts one and three

whereas most others worked on parts one through seven; John was still working on part three when I stopped them working' (Mason, 2002: 42).

The crucial issue in the account above is about what constitutes 'finishing work'. Mason argues that, by asking further questions about how students see classroom tasks, and by thinking about the student experience of engaging in the given task (as opposed to the teacher's perceptions), then we are more likely to find out about the personal circumstances for a student such as John before we label him as a 'non-finisher'. Tripp (1993: 19) suggests asking the following line of questions,

- Why did John not finish his work?
- Why should he finish it?
- What was his view of the tasks demanded of him?
- Are the tasks of the right kind, quality, and quantity?

Activity 1.6 Developing your skills of judgement

This can be carried out with a small group of your peers (a maximum of three).

- (a) Each chooses a recent segment of their teaching (such as the one about *John*, described on the previous page).

Use the prompts or questions given in columns one and two of Table 1.2. These will allow you to focus on the events that might have led up to the situation (before or during the lesson), to think about the judgements and actions you had to make or take, and to note what happened afterwards in any discussions about the situation.

Write in the third (blank) column of Table 1.2 your answers to the key questions given in column two.

- (b) Join two other beginning teachers and, in turn, share what each of you has written. While one speaks (*Talker*), one other can use appropriate prompts to elicit meanings and thoughts which underpin your writing (*Critical Friend*). The third should keep brief notes of the key discussion points (*Observer-Scribe*) and share these for further discussion after all three have taken each role.
- (c) **Plenary.** In your trio, draw some conclusions about the process you just engaged in:
- How far were the conversations about 'what happened'?
 - How far were the conversations about 'feelings' and emotional reactions?
 - How far were the conversations about teacher identity and the extent to which you were able to distinguish between your personal and your professional identities in this situation?


Table 1.2 Some key questions for 'Learning Conversations'

Area for exploration in a learning conversation	Key questions(for you to use to critically reflect with peers; or for your mentor to use to help your critical reflection on practice)	Your answers
Stimulus	What led you to make this judgement? What went on beforehand?	
Responsibility	Who made (or did not make) the judgement? Was it you, or was it made by a group?	
Ethical Issues	How far was your judgement made in someone's best interest? Did you take steps to safeguard their privacy, or gain their informed consent to share information?	
Information	To what extent was your judgement based on sound and valid data or information?	
Consequences	How far were the consequences of your judgement justified?	
Consensus	To what extent was there agreement on your judgement? Or was there disagreement, or conflict?	

Skills of decision-making

It is important to think about how you make sense of your learners and classroom events. From a constructivist point of view, Uhlenbeck et al. described teacher learning as 'organizing and reorganizing, structuring and restructuring a teacher's understanding of practice. Teachers are viewed as learners who actively construct knowledge by interpreting events on the basis of existing knowledge, beliefs and dispositions' (2002: 243).

There are, as we have noted already, several types of activities that can encourage reflective practice: reflective writing assignments form one of these. Another involves the writing and analysis of a *teaching case* (see earlier in Chapter 1). This, as we have discussed, has the potential to exert tremendous influence on your perceptions of teaching and learning. The following analysis is taken from a research study (Alger, 2006) in which the author classified six types of classroom-based *case* presented by her beginning teachers, and concerned with **behaviour management** in the classroom. The 56 solutions which the beginning teachers described in their cases were categorized as follows: 'teacher behaviours for seeking compliance' (28); 'curricular and pedagogical solutions for gaining student compliance' (15); 'help-seeking strategies to gain student compliance' (eight); and one 'other'.

Alger followed up her analyses by conducting interviews with these beginning teachers at the end of the year, in order to track the development of their reflection over time. The beginning teachers were asked to re-frame, or re-state, the original

behaviour management problem they had described, and re-evaluate the strategies they had tried in order to solve the problem. She found that these beginning teachers' understanding of the solutions to the problems (that is, the way they made their decisions) had changed substantially, as did their nuances of the dilemmas. There were shifts:

- away from *behaviourist* approaches
- towards greater *relationship building*
- involving greater use of *effective classroom strategies* to manage behaviour.

You will find more discussion on behaviourist approaches in education in Chapter 2.

For many of the beginning teachers in Alger's study reflection was a two-step process. The first step occurred at the planning stage when, for example, they tried to *visualize the lesson* based on the plan, asking themselves, 'What might work, what might not?' This process clearly involves drawing on previous teaching episodes to speculate on the effectiveness of the **lesson plan** in question. This is a form of reflection. A second step took place after the teaching, by asking oneself, 'What went well, what did not go so well?' This reflection might involve a mental review only, or recording in note form the evaluation, with further ideas for changes might be made on the next occasion.

Thus, these types of reflective practice strategies are important in that they should allow you to see, and cope better with, the complexities of teaching and help you make decisions for further actions. In addition the reflective practice itself is helped, through case analysis, to promote analysis and evaluation at a deeper level. The approach taken by Alger allows reflective practice to be both *deliberate and intentional*. Its power, as with other reflective practice strategies, hinges on the support provided by a mentor to help you probe the strengths and weaknesses of a lesson more deeply through dialogue and critical reflection on practice.

Team working

We know, increasingly, that schools as institutions and the individuals within them have to be flexible to respond to rapid changes of pace. Etienne Wenger, a socio-cultural theorist, focused on notions of networking in the workplace and developed a key concept with Jean Lave: **communities of practice** (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). As we have noted in an earlier section of this chapter on workplace learning we can no longer think about a teacher or a school existing in isolation.

It is now recognized that professional expertise has to be networked, integrated or joined up. As is explored in Chapters 3 and 6, you will find yourself working in a number of teams from the start of your teaching career: your subject or curriculum team, your pastoral team and cross-curricular groups working on particular issues such

as **personalized learning** and aspects of assessment, and so on. The following subsections introduce you briefly to some collaborative ways of working in schools.

Co-teaching

This way of working provides experiences which revolve around collaboration and the sharing of ideas and perspectives on practice to help in the re-framing of earlier ideas (Schön, 1983). Co-teaching provides two teachers (mentor and beginning teacher; two beginning teachers) with access to possibilities for learning that are not so likely when working alone. This can have the advantage of providing a safer haven for more risk-taking and experimentation, such as introducing new types of practical activities into a science lesson; managing a role-play; taking students for out-of-classroom activities. As Loughran has written, 'collaboration and teaming in ways that provide professional support for one another leads to improvements in practice as the sharing with, and learning from, one another offers meaningful ways of framing and reframing existing practice' (2006: 57). In other words all partners, experienced and inexperienced, can benefit. Co-teaching offers the opportunity to ask much of your partner:

- What is the purpose of this teaching session?
- How does what we do today link with last week's lesson?
- Why are you choosing to use that teaching strategy with this class?

Questioning one's own learning or thinking about one's own thinking is a form of **meta-cognition** (see Chapter 2). Co-teaching provides a vehicle for becoming more aware of one's thoughts and actions that influence the development of understanding of a situation. It also offers the possibility of insights into teaching and learning which might be very different from just being told what to do and how to think.

Collaborative practitioner enquiry

Enquiry is the response we make to a desire to find something out. Kelly (2006) has argued that teachers who identify closely with instrumental practices are likely to have cognitivist views of expertise and learning. In contrast, teachers with more reflective and discursive identities may, through an on-going conversation with their practice, adopt stances which respond to their learners' difficulties, and seek to collaborate with learners and colleagues. They *look for ways forward* in professional guidance and through research, using their learners and colleagues as starting points in their enquiry, and adopting complex measures of success.

There are some parallels here with the ways of conducting *academic research*. These also require systematic enquiry but are done less for oneself and more for reporting to other people so that conclusions can be criticized, challenged or taken up by others. This is a form of constructivism. For any research to be convincing the research

questions have to be well formulated (these may be the hypotheses to be tested), and the chosen methodology (types of observations, other types of data collection and methods of analyses) has to conform to accepted standards.

Action research

This way of working tends to fall between ‘academic researcher’ researching other people and ‘teacher practitioner’ researching their own actions. *Action research* is an approach that has become widely used in research into education and schooling. It takes several different forms, one of which is systematic enquiry. Often beginning teachers, regular teachers and support staff work together and the enquiry is designed to produce practical results which can improve an aspect of, say, learning and teaching. It is a well recognized form of social science research.

Your choice of research topic with colleagues can be affected by your combined interests, values, any funding you have available, and so on. Using descriptive approaches, you might support, observe and study the effects of other people. In some cases you may be the *actor-researchers* using a more analytical approach to make a strategic change in your collective practices. You might start by asking, ‘What can we do to improve our practice?’ You could then pursue one of the action research routes illustrated in Figures 1.3a and 1.3b.

When you begin to research classrooms and schools in these ways, and small action research activities may start in your training year, you will probably need to read more widely about some of the concepts associated with these ways of researching classrooms. The *Handbook of Action Research* (Reason and Bradbury, 2005), *Learning and Teaching at M Level* (Bryan et al., 2010) and *Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher* (Mills, 2000) are good reference books for Master’s students. By using action research approaches in these ways we are acknowledging the long-standing value of collaborative approaches to critical reflection on practice (Stenhouse, 1971, 1975) and teacher research in general (Elliott, 1991). Such approaches provide for close partnerships between schools and higher education institutions. On a more cautionary note, Kelly (2006) reminds us of government-led initiatives, such as the Best Practice Research Scholarships (DfEE, 2001; DfES, 2002) through which, he argues, the policy makers were exploiting the particular purpose of implementing some central policy. With a few exceptions, the wider research outcomes of such practitioner research do reside largely within the target school, and are not generally widely shared elsewhere.

It is also clear that, by enabling teachers and beginning teachers to work alongside each other, we can provide for shared knowledge and collaborative learning. All parties can benefit. Finally, it is possible through on-going initiatives for all teachers in their professional development to provide forms of support to develop teacher identities that are more rooted in reflective, discursive, collaborative ways of working, and which allow teachers to be more deliberate in their actions in their working lives.

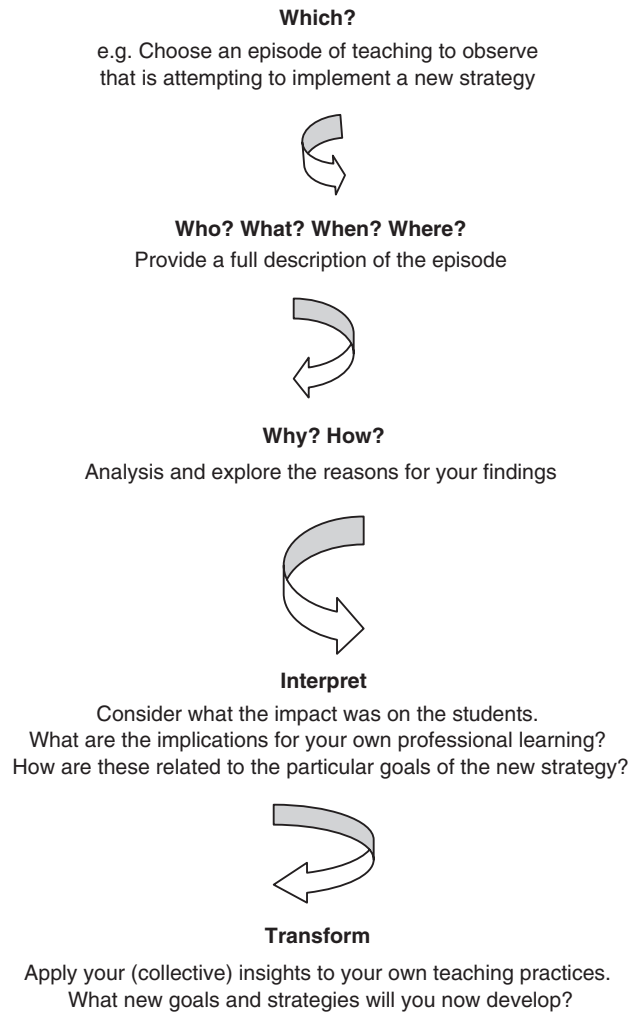


Figure 1.3a An evaluative approach to action research (based on Levin and Camp, 2005)

You may prefer a more methodical, formal problem-solving sequence, such as:

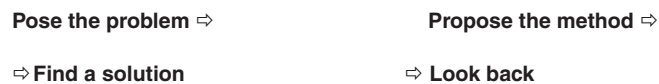


Figure 1.3b A problem-solving approach to action research (based on Polya, 1945)

Reflection as a critical activity

One pitfall with the idea of reflective practice is that it has tended to become a catch-all term. The terms *reflection* and *reflective practice* are now seriously over-used buzzwords, and are likely to mean different things to different people. Zeichner, in 1994, was already pointing out the separate and distinct interpretations of reflective practice, only some of which could be called *critical*.

The process of reflection can be in danger of reductionism – to a set of procedures; a skill to be learned. So far this chapter has tried to show what reflective practice can look like, but with a caution that it should not be reduced to some standardized competence. If that were the case, reflection would become an end in itself.

The questions that must remain are those concerning the purpose or focus of the particular reflection. It is these questions that are important for critical reflection. We have talked about reflection as a habit; one that is deliberative. Reflection and action run together if you wish to change the world around you. Therefore, critical reflection can create the conditions under which you as teacher, or your students as learners, can become more aware of the power of agency and the possibilities for action.

The sorts of questions that can progressively unearth deeper assumptions illustrate the process of critical reflection on practice. The process is transformative because it focuses on dominant assumptions which may influence our practice unwittingly (Brookfield, 2000: 12). From this perspective, critical reflection on practice enables an understanding of the way (socially dominant) assumptions may be socially restrictive, and has the potential to bring about more empowering ideas and practices. Critical reflection on practice provides a freedom to the individual and to groups to change the operation of the social environment at the level of their personal experiences. The process of critical reflection on practice can be thought of as a two-stage process, moving from changed awareness to changed practice. Activity 1.7 is designed to link with the sort of enquiry or action research approaches you might be using in order to reach M level.

Activity 1.7 Seminar to prepare for an Action Research project

- (a) In a seminar setting (5–8 people) each participant brings a description of piece of their practice for reflection in two stages: a reflective stage, and a clear linking with the next stage with the intention of changing professional practice.

Example A:

Stage 1. How can I help my students improve the quality of their learning?

Stage 2. I would like the improvement to focus on the particular action.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Example B:

Stage 1. How can I respond to pupil diversity in my class?

Stage 2. I will present to the seminar a particular incident in my classroom experience as a new teacher which involved issues of diversity.

- (b) Group members can help each person reflect on their chosen situation, by using a set of questions, such as selecting from those listed below:
- What does your current practice imply about ...?
 - What are you assuming when ...?
 - How do you influence the situation through your presence/your perceptions/your interpretations/your assumptions?
 - What are your beliefs about power and where do they come from?
 - What perspectives are missing?
 - What types of language do you use and what do these patterns imply?
 - What is your own thinking and what is the result of any power relations (e.g. gendered, cultural, structural)?
- (c) Following this probing and discussion with others, work out in detail how you personally intend to bring about some changes in practice. Use the following example to help you.

To move to the next stage (that is, planning for changes in my practice) I decide to take the following steps through Action Research:

- *Focus on responding to the diversity of student strengths and needs as a teaching concern.* I will examine the positive and negative impacts of student diversity on their learning. I will aim to understand better the importance and skill of adapting the curriculum and the learning environment to include every student.
- *Develop ideas and skills during teaching practice.* I will plan ways of getting to know each student better and of adapting the curriculum to meet their particular needs. I will reflect on the various methods of learning and teaching that I try, and evaluate the impact that these have on the students' learning.
- During the process of implementing and reflecting, I will collect evidence of the effectiveness (or otherwise) of my particular attempts to respond to diversity. I will ask two key questions. How well are all the students engaged in the new lessons? What progress does each student make?
- *Critical evaluation using theoretical frameworks.* I will access and use wider academic reading on models of teaching and learning and research literature in connection with pupil diversity.

Fook (2000) has shown that, in a social work setting, this process of critical reflection on practice within a deliberately reflective group structure is one of *critical acceptance*. It is conducted in a climate which balances safety and challenge. It is participatory, non-judgemental, and open to new and other perspectives. It involves the responsibility not to blame, the right to draw limits, and acceptance of multiple contradictory views. It provides a focus on the *story*, not the person, and on the *why*, not the *what to do*. It is non-directive.

Two very accessible texts for you to read further in this somewhat complex area are by Stephen Brookfield (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* and Jennifer Moon (2004) *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning*.

A Reflection Framework for critical incident analysis

Brookfield (1995) and others recognize the unsettling and emotional demands that critical reflection can make in challenging your existing norms and assumptions. For some teachers this can lead to scepticism, anxiety, a loss of identity, fear, resentment or feelings of intimidation. You will be immersed in the fast pace of teaching situations and the overall demands of school as your workplace can leave little space for reflection, particularly with others.

Activity 1.4 provided you with an opportunity to record in detail a critical moment. Most people tend to record critical moments that are negative incidents. You can, however, choose a positive incident, and your narrative account should, in either case, highlight the dilemmas you faced and how you chose to act. Almost everything in the everyday life of school is a potential critical incident – even a basic routine like where you choose to position yourself in front of a class. If you can follow this writing with a dedicated professional conversation with an experienced teacher–mentor, you can be helped further to analyse your ideas of the particular *meaning* of the incident, rather than your experience of the incident itself. It is the critical analysis that makes the incident ‘critical’.

Through such conversations, you should find that your emotional experiences in the construction of your understanding of teaching and identity provide an opportunity to reveal things in your own biography that you might otherwise be unable to recall.

The Reflection Framework shown in Figure 1.4 can be used as well, to help you monitor how critically you reflect. It includes opportunity to include aspects of your work outside the classroom as well as actual teaching experiences (see Harrison and Lee, 2011). You can apply the Framework to your piece of writing about a critical incident and judge your level of reflection (routine, technical, dialogic) across each of the three dimensions: focus, inquiry, change.

The following account is typical of many recorded by the author from beginning teachers when relating their early, significant experiences of classroom teaching. Try applying the Framework (Figure 1.4) to the following account of one particular critical

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
	Routine	Technical	Dialogic	Transformative
	Oneself is kept separate from the situation/change.	Practical response given to specific situation; little or no change in personal perspective.	Cycle of situated questions and action; active consideration of perspectives of others; new insights gained.	Fundamental questions asked; change in practice/ approach occurs.
FOCUS	How does this affect me? How do I get control? Have I been successful? XXX was to blame!	Focus is on specific teaching tasks/ professional actions. Re-adjustment of practice takes place – I can transfer learning to similar situations.	Focus is on my students/others, and how well they have been learning.	I am personally involved with fundamental pedagogical/ethical/ moral/cultural/ other wider concerns, and how these may impact on my students/others.
INQUIRY	My critical questions and analysis are generalized and limited to a critique of others. I have not asked questions about necessary personal change.	My questions relate to specific situations. I stop asking questions after initial problem addressed: there are no wider questions about routines or context.	My questions are situated and lead to new questions. Questions are explored with others, with open consideration of new ideas. I actively seek the perspective of my peers, pupils, or others.	There is long-term/ on-going enquiry including dialogue with my mentor, critical friend, pupils, and a careful examination of critical incidents. I ask questions that challenge my assumptions.
CHANGE	The analysis of my practice is done for its own sake, as if there were a gap between myself and the situation.	I personally respond to deal with a situation, but the situation is not used to change my perspective.	I synthesize the results of my enquiry, so I gain new insights into teaching/learning/ personal attributes; it results in changed/ improved practice.	There is a reframing of my perspective leading to a more fundamental change in my practice.

Figure 1.4 A Reflection Framework (Harrison and Lee, 2011: 202–204)

incident during a period of teaching in school. To what extent do you think it illustrates a low (level 1), an emerging (level 2) or a high level (level 3) reflector? As you read it think about the sort of questions you might pose if you were to act as the mentor to this beginning teacher to help them open up their practice and their thinking about actions and consequences.

I had a negative incident this week. I was teaching XXX (name of topic). I realize that, generally, this can be a boring topic for Year 12 students (no reason given). In fact my class teacher tutor says he no longer teaches this topic. In an attempt to make it more interesting I had planned a series of experiential and more 'practical' lessons (i.e. 'student-centred' lessons). In the first lesson, students were asked to collect some questionnaire data and then to perform a statistical analysis in their own time. (I thought) this went quite well. The second lesson was 'teacher-led' (no elaboration on its content or purpose is given here). In the third lesson I asked them to go out of the classroom and use a further test with some other students in the school (was this reinforcement of some key ideas?). During this particular (third) lesson, one quite outspoken student called out quite rudely just how boring she was finding this topic. I spoke calmly to her in front of the class, explaining that it is often the one topic students find dull, but that I had (tried to) made it interactive (so the practical tasks could be used to illustrate the theory). Because of her (reaction) and other chatter and moaning in the room, I was about to abandon the practical task and ask them to continue working on their posters from a previous lesson. I also explained that she has an examination (to pass) in January so it's crucial she does this (topic).

This seemed to strike a chord with her. She then explained the topic was boring (for her) because she was also studying it in (another subject). Eventually I got the class to carry out a rather quick and rushed version of the planned practical activity by testing each other. (I thought) they all seemed to enjoy this. After the lesson I talked to the girl again to explain that we needed an agreement if I was to get through other parts of the topic that she finds boring. She didn't seem enthusiastic about this conversation (why?), but I hope it started to make sense to her!

Although I think I handled the situation satisfactorily in the end, (I felt) it was a negative incident. It was challenging to stand in front of a class after being told that what you are doing is boring! I could have handled it more assertively and told her how rude she had been ... I shouldn't let the fact that she (seems to) feel comfortable in my class allow her to say whatever she wants.

In response to her comment, my class teacher and I agreed to make the next lesson very practical. I had planned this anyway. I am moving it (i.e. the planning) forward to appease them (the class) slightly!

Analysis

The *focus* is very much on 'me' gaining control of the behaviour problem – this is *routine* reflection (level 1).

In relation to *inquiry*, little or no critical questioning is revealed in this writing concerning the wider routines or context (*routine* reflection, level 1). Indeed, until there was a *conversation with the observing teacher later*, in which the mentor was able, through a well-structured learning conversation to shift the reflection towards the specific situation for the whole class rather than the girl in question (this illustrates movement on the part of the learner towards *technical* reflection, level 2).

- What were your assumptions about Year 12 behaviour in your class as you planned your teaching?
- Did these assumptions impact on your judgements in the course of recording your critical incident?

- Define what you mean when you talk about ‘disruptive’ and ‘not on task’.
- What exactly was the ‘critical incident’ in the scenario that you have described?
- How did you feel when the students seemed to be ignoring you (and therefore not learning)?
- Did you consider at any stage being more assertive and addressing the whole class so they could consider why you needed silence so you could keep the lesson you had planned flowing towards the conclusion that you hoped for?

In relation to *change*, the extent of the focus on the students’ (rather than on the teacher’s) perspective seems limited in this account, and is revealed in the giveaway phrase ‘to appease them [the pupils] slightly’. There is little evidence of a changed personal perspective (*routine* reflection, level 1).

Further questions for a professional learning conversation could aim to consider the overall professional learning more:

- Describe in detail how you felt at the end of that lesson. What impression do you think the girl student/the whole class has about you as the teacher?
- How important is it to build relationships with each student? How will you take forward what you have learnt from this critical incident into your next year of teaching?

Further re-writing of the critical incident and what was learnt through conversation could also provide opportunity for meta-analysis. It can provide more focus on the incident itself, increasing the existing details to make it all the more clear. It can also enlarge the picture of the incident, so we see much more of the picture in less detail. Chasing for further facts about a situation can contribute to the wider picture in order to make sense of it. In this way the analysis might extend over a longer period.

You can read more about reflective practice and professional learning (see Ward and McCotter, 2004), and find other examples of critical incident analysis and the learning conversation in Harrison and Lee (2011).

Critical reading at Master’s level

You should now access and read the following scholarly article to prepare for this activity:

Kelchtermans, G. (2009) ‘Who I am in how I teach is the message: self-understanding, vulnerability and reflection’, *Teachers and Teaching, Theory and Practice*, 15(2): 257–272.

This individual activity is designed to further develop your critical reading skills. Your critical thinking and writing could also feed into a group seminar/discussion about

the on-going process of professional learning (development). By working through the following questions you can summarize your developing understanding of the types of approaches to 'teacher thinking' research that form the basis of this paper:

- 1 Kelchertermans uses the metaphor of a 'pair of glasses' (p. 261) to explain how teachers develop a personal interpretative framework in their thinking about themselves and their teaching. Do you consider this to be a powerful metaphor in relation to reflective practice? What are its possible strengths and limitations?
- 2 Kelchertermans prefers the idea of 'self-understanding' (p. 261) rather than 'identity' (p. 261). What are his particular arguments for this preference? Briefly summarize the five components of self-understanding that he presents.
- 3 What have you learnt from Kelchertermans' presentation of 'subjective educational theory' (p. 263)?
- 4 A teacher's judgement is presented as a central feature of teaching, and in turn of reflection and professional knowledge: 'The process of judging remains essential (and for example deciding that in this particular situation the most appropriate action is to make an exception of what is normally is the rule)' (p. 264). Draw on one or more of your own teaching experiences; for each, describe the process of judging which allowed you to link the 'what' (i.e. your perception of the task) with the 'how to' (the knowledge you used to achieve the particular goals and norms).
- 5 Summarize the three elements of teacher vulnerability that this author presents. Explain how these relate to his notion of 'broad reflection' (p. 267).
- 6 You can investigate the relationship between self-study and emotion in Kelchertermans and Hamilton (2004), and read further on understanding teaching and learning about teaching in Loughran (2006).

Conclusion: being a reflective practitioner

The notion of the reflective practitioner is an enticing one. It starts with messy, unpredictable practices, unpicks what is going on, generates **inductive hypotheses**, asks for analysis and attempts to reveal more about the nature of expertise within the professional setting and the judgements upon that. It provides an important counterbalance to current emphases in policy making on evidence-based practice, in which certainty and technical rationality are the ideals.

Reflective practice asks us all to weigh up the scientific evidence base against competing versions of events. Thus it can take account of the richness and creativity of

our practice and lead to new notions of professionalism based on diversity and flexibility. At its heart is the unsettling of hierarchies (for example, the gendered nature of teaching) and traditional working practices. Loughran refers to this phenomenon as *disturbing practice* and argues persuasively that 'it does not divorce feelings from the actions associated with confrontation or challenge; it creates powerful learning episodes ... Working with colleagues ... [provides the opportunity] of gaining advice and feedback on such episodes and of continuing to push to make the tacit explicit' (2006: 57).

Reflection implies that you can see one thing in another – the external world in your mind and, as such, it provides a powerful metaphor which also deserves a word of caution. It describes and is performative, since the act of reflection can give back some improvement in professional practice (Biggs, 1999) – it may be expected that it leads to action and change. This is a persuasive feature of reflective practice. In addition, professional portfolios can be used as vehicles for the assessment process in professional training and you can position yourself to present your material to make a convincing claim that you (as a professional) are competent. Reflection in this situation might become a self-measurement and provide for self-evaluation against standards or other appropriate performance measures.

In contrast to such highly instrumental practices in professional education there must be deeper forms of reflective practice as well as criticality in learning. These require freedom from the gaze, in the Foucauldian sense, of the institution in which we work (see Foucault, 1980: 155). Thus, research and autobiographical approaches in professional education do provide the freedom to think more about self in context, personally and socially, and in potentially radical ways. Truly reflective practice involves trust and relative autonomy; schools today are steeped in cultures of accountability and audits, involving measurements (for example, the number of students in school receiving free school meals) and managerialism (for example, through the publicity of league tables of performances). However, in today's rapidly moving society, the reflective practitioner cannot and should not be seen as being freed of the constraints of the reality in which he or she practises. As Wenger's (1998) approach shows, professional work is influenced by participation and by the fixed and solid environment we all work in.

Very broadly, in workplace learning, professional development becomes the formation of professional identity. It provides a process in which to translate the practices, values and attitudes of the *teacher* (the worker) with those currently part of *teaching* (the profession), and in some situations with the goals and mission of the *school or college* (the organization). However there are additional important words of warning. One of the current difficulties you will encounter with generic statements of **professional standards** in teaching is that they allow for multiple interpretations of meaning. Professional (expert) teachers are presented in such a system as subjects who understand how the learner learns and how to support you as beginning teachers in your learning. If we are not careful, reflection could become simply a self-measurement and

self-evaluation against these teaching standards. More than this, the rhetoric of technical expertise, competence and reflective practice is used to promote changes in professional practices and identities in particular ways, and can on occasions be used to identify certain practices and dispositions of the teachers as specifically *professional*.

Therefore in the remaining chapters of this book we anticipate that you will begin to recognize that workplace cultures can be very powerful and may be hidden from you in their operation (see Chapter 2 in Rogers, 2006, for an introduction to the nature of school cultures). The range of tasks we provide in each chapter should allow you to examine some of the assumptions implicit in all sorts of professional practices that you will encounter in your training year. By the end of your training period you should have a better understanding of what we might mean by a *teaching profession*, what we might mean by *professionalism* in teaching, and the range of *professional values*. In this way you can be helped to recognize the particular professional values and practices that are essential to developing competency in the classroom. Overall this book is designed to support what Yinger (1990) has described as ‘the ongoing conversation of practice’ in which you are beginning to participate.

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