CHAPTER 1

What can reflective practice mean for you . . . and why should you engage in it?

Debra McGregor

Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning.

Albert Einstein

There can be few better ways of elevating your life than by thinking about, and reflecting upon, how your development as a teacher will improve the education of the children and young people whose lives you will touch. Reflectively pondering and questioning what you do can improve your achievements in life. This chapter focuses on describing why you should reflect as a developing teacher and how you can reflectively consider and question different aspects of your teaching to develop into a confident and competent educator.

Reflection often begins when you pause to ‘think back’ after something unexpected or out of the ordinary has happened. You re-play the happenings, incident or event in your head, and, in thinking about it more, it begins to change from a sequence of chronological events into a series of questioning thoughts such as ‘What happened?’, ‘When?’ and ‘How?’ These initial thoughts can be purposeless and just idle musings. They become more purposeful and constructive when thinking is directed to consider questions such as: ‘Why did it happen that way?’ and ‘How could I have behaved or done things differently?’ Questions such as: ‘Would action x have been better than action y at the beginning of the lesson?’ or ‘How could I have responded differently to the disruptive boy at the end of the lesson?’ lead to thoughts about how to improve specific situations. Reflecting determinedly to improve something requires effort and sustained, focused thinking centred on a particular issue or concern you might have about your development as a teacher.
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Providing clear instructions or explaining ideas to others may be a talent you already possess. It may also come naturally to you to be gently supportive and encouraging of your learners. You may already have a talent for steering a learner to achieve new understanding or develop a previously unmastered skill. However, if you are to become a consistently effective teacher, developing engaging lessons on a daily basis and commanding the attention of all around you, you will need to develop a clear understanding about what you do that works well. You also need to appreciate that some things you might consider doing are unlikely to be successful, or deter you from making good professional progress. Thoughtful reflection can help you to recognize more swiftly what is effective practice and what are the key characteristics of a successful teacher.

When starting out on a teaching experience or practice, you may feel that there are some skills you already have, but recognize that others need development. You may, for example, need to think about how to address a group, or how far to go in your explanation of fractions, or even what to say to learners to help them see how they are progressing. Your academic and professional learning around issues such as these will be aided by your previous experiences, a rapid review of learners’ progress during the lesson and focused contemplation after episodes of teaching. The following quotation indicates how a beginning teacher realizes, like many others:

“It will be . . . difficult in the classroom to take control and deal with behavioural problems but hopefully I will learn from any mistakes I may make in the first instances and also learn from other qualified teachers as to how best to control bad behaviour.

(Patricia, one-year PGCE student, at beginning of course)"

Behaviour management is almost always a concern for the beginning teacher. Others include:

- knowing how to talk at an appropriate level in class;
- ensuring that lessons are both successful and enjoyable;
- adhering to government and accreditation expectations;
- being liked by learners!

To succeed in all these aspects as well as many others (for example, formative assessment, marking books, creating succinct plenaries) requires careful reflection about the process, delivery and development of your teaching. To teach successfully, with learners who appear to be increasingly challenging, requires the nurturing, adaptation and refinement of a range of academic understandings and a plethora of more practical professional skills.
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This extract from Martyn’s reflections early in his teaching practice indicates how there are many things to reflect upon when learning how to teach:

“One worry I had was that they wouldn’t know the answers to my questions and I would be stood at the front in a silent room! However, they were very responsive and it made the experience much more enjoyable . . . after the lesson . . . my mentor pointed out that I was not to lower my voice when speaking to an individual as it prevents the rest of the class from hearing the answer. I also sometimes felt myself stumbling when talking to the whole class . . . . so I need to be clearer in my explanations. The second starter [beginning lesson activity] was with the same group later on in the day and I felt much more confident about delivering it after their earlier response. The pupils once again responded well, enjoyed it and they even applauded me once I had finished! I was so engrossed in ensuring my presentation was correctly set up that I forgot to stand at the front of the classroom. I feel I would have gained more authority if I had done this from the start of the lesson. The pupils became quite excitable and started shouting out the answers during the activity and although I asked them to put up their hands, some continued to shout their suggestions. From this experience, I know that I need to use management strategies to control the class, for example, not responding positively to those who were shouting out.

(Martyn, one-year maths PGCE, early in the course)"

Martyn’s reflections indicate that he has a lot to think about, all at once! It is of course not possible to master all teaching skills at the same time, and knowing exactly what to focus on can be tricky. This chapter introduces different views of reflection that are important for beginning teachers and helps you to consider what the focus of reflection might be, and how reflection at different points can be useful. At its simplest, reflection is consciously ‘looking back’ at your actions and being able to make some kind of evaluation of whether your teaching was successful or not. More complex, analytical and critical reflection is that which not only recognizes what you have done, but also how a particular course of action (or series of actions) shaped outcomes for your learners. Most beginning teachers, like Martyn above, are able to describe what has happened in their classroom. What they find much more challenging is a level of critical reflection that enables them to identify and explain:

- what contributed to effective learning;
- what was detrimental to effective learning;
- what they could do to improve learning.
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Many trainees find thinking about how to improve their practice quite a trial, because, in their early observations it is not easy to recognize what effective teachers do to control their class and make learning an engaging and enjoyable experience. It is a little like watching someone drive when you are first learning; should you observe the gear change, the clutch control or the brake pedal movement? It all looks easy, but when you try to do it there is so much to think about all at once. So it is with teaching; teasing out what is essential is not always obvious.

The nature of the reflective teacher

Most views of reflection emanate from the work of American philosopher, John Dewey (1910), who is often credited with being the originator of reflective practice. Being reflective requires active consideration about actions and their consequences. As a beginning teacher you might think that you must punish children who talk when you are giving out instructions. However, if you do not contemplate the implications of keeping the whole class in over a break because the interruption involved only one loud student, you will not learn from your experience quickly. Dewey (1910) recognized that the ‘thinking teacher’ requires three important attributes to be reflective; ‘open-mindedness’ to new ideas and thoughts; ‘wholeheartedness’ to seek out fresh approaches and fully engage with them; and ‘responsibility’ to be aware of the consequences of one’s own actions. So, in his view, reflections to help develop these characteristics are essential to becoming a successful teacher. Patrick demonstrates the first of these characteristics:

“By keeping an open mind on a given situation, I allow myself to view a problem from more than one angle . . . . I am prepared to try out new ideas if I believe them to be valid and am more than willing to accept feedback on the impact my approach has on an audience whether it be good or bad.

(Patrick, one-year PGCE student, at beginning of course)"

Beginning teachers often show a desire to be ‘open minded’ and are full of enthusiasm to try out new ideas. However early in their training they need to be open to suggestions about how to master the basics of teaching. From there they can move on to develop successful new approaches. This requires researching new materials or resources, discussing ideas with more experienced professionals and watching other expert teachers in action, observing what they do that is successful.
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The ‘thinking teacher’ requires three important attributes to be reflective: ‘open-mindedness’ to new ideas and thoughts, ‘whole heartedness’ and ‘responsibility’.

How can you ensure that activities are exciting, or that your freshly adapted resources are a triumph? This requires thinking beforehand about how best to organize their use and, afterwards, about how well they worked from both your learners’ and your own point of view. This is Dewey’s ‘whole-heartedness’. To be a thinking teacher requires wholehearted immersion in the business of education. You will be constantly seeking out techniques and materials that will appeal to your learners, and thinking about tasks that will engage and motivate them. This exemplifies an attentive and conscientious approach to preparing to educate. The third of Dewey’s characteristics, responsibility, demands reflection on experience. Clara, below, is taking responsibility for what happened in her classroom:

“In the third week of my placement I felt confident enough to lead the whole class in a starter activity I had designed and constructed. I gave out instructions to the class and they started the activity. I was feeling very nervous about the opinion of my mentor. Whilst I was not being formally observed, I felt it important to set a good impression as he was the head of department. After about two minutes I realized that both halves of the class had been given the same set of equipment, and they should have been comparing each others’ findings! How naive of me not to check the equipment before giving it to the pupils! Luckily, the activity still worked well and even more luckily, the head of department had not realized there was ever a problem. I will now be triple checking everything before it goes into the pupils’ hands!

(Clara, one-year science PGCE student, three weeks into first teaching placement)

Why reflect?

Extending Dewey’s view of the thoughtful teacher is about considering the consequences of one’s actions. Reflection is an important tool in helping you to do this, as it enables you to take a critical look back at what you did. Dewey identified two categories of teacher behaviour:

• routine action
• reflective action

To the untrained eye, schools can look as if they run like clockwork. This is not chance, but based on the accumulative effect of routine actions, for example, the way learners respond to the teacher during registration when their names are
called out, the way they are expected to line up outside a classroom door, or to respond to question/answer sessions in class. As a beginning teacher you need to ‘fit in’ with existing routines and develop some of your own, such as the fixed stare indicating ‘watch what you are doing!’ or standing at the front of the class with arms folded conveying ‘I am waiting for silence’ or exaggerating starting a timer indicates ‘I am now timing to see how long it takes you to be quiet and will waste that much of your time at the end of the lesson’. You may well pick these up from observing experienced teachers and reflecting on the triumphant consequences of their actions and consciously plan to adopt their routines. Like driving a car, once these routines are established, they require little conscious thought. Dewey (1910) contrasts these kinds of ‘routine action’ (doing what is guided by factors such as tradition, habit, authority and institutional expectations) with ‘reflective action’ (doing made up of changed actions informed by self-appraisal). As a beginning teacher you cannot take routine action for granted.

Professional artistry is the application of ‘intelligent action’, experimenting in the way you respond to situations through ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’.

Even apparently simple tasks can go wrong unless you think through what they mean and why they exist. For you, ‘routine action’ will develop only from ‘reflective action’ as you seek constantly to improve ways of working.

Developing Dewey’s ideas further, Schön (1983, 1987) highlights how professionals often face situations that are unique, but apply their knowledge and previous experiences to inform how they act. He defines this active, somewhat experimental process as professional artistry. He suggests that practitioners who respond or act in such a professional, competent way in uncertain situations are ‘knowing-in-action’ (1987: 25) and can reveal different sorts of knowledge that emerge through their ‘intelligent action’ (1987: 25). In your teaching practice, for example, you might have given the learners a writing task, but while you are setting up the technology to use a video clip to stimulate discussion, you notice the increase in quiet whispering. You know that if the noise reaches a certain level the discussion will not go well. To maintain quiet control of the group you could do with extending the task or re-engaging the quick learners in a subsequent activity. Anticipating this need, being prepared for it and responding to it is great teaching artistry.

Another time, towards the end of the lesson, the tasks have been completed and there are still 10 minutes before the bell. Professional artistry would facilitate the engagement of the learners to reflect on the lesson, summarize what they have learned; you as the teacher pull it all together, connect the outcomes to the learning objectives and success criteria, and still have them thinking about what they have learned as they leave the room. So where does this ‘professional artistry’ come from?
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Dewey suggested that professionals might experiment in the way they respond to situations by using both ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’. The former involves thinking about action while actually doing it, and may result in change during the teaching process. Schön (1983) argues that this could be a form of action research (discussed further in Chapter 14), changing or adapting your practice to deal with a particular demand or situation. He indicates that this kind of practice is freed from established theory and able to inform the personal theory that you might construct from your experience. As a beginning teacher you will think about what you are doing during the lesson, and think back to what happened after the lesson. However you will also benefit from contemplating what could happen in lessons and how you will prepare for learning before delivering a lesson. This we could call reflection-before-action. Pollard (2008) sees reflection that informs the development of teaching as a cyclical process that should be scaffolded by various frameworks (discussed in Chapter 9) and mediated through collaboration and discussion with colleagues. He extends these ideas by emphasizing the rigorous nature of reflective teaching, moving beyond ‘common sense’ to gather evidence, research literature and obtain critiques from colleagues. The monitoring, evaluating and revising of one’s own practice should therefore arise through evidence-based enquiry, a premise that informs the structure of many trainee development programmes. Seven key characteristics of reflective practice (adapted from Pollard 2008: 14) include:

1. having an active focus on the aims and consequences of your teaching;
2. taking a cyclical approach to regularly monitoring, evaluating and revisiting your practice;
3. using evidence to make judgments about success and how to progress;
4. retaining open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness;
5. basing developing pedagogy on insights from research as well as judgments from evaluating own practice;
6. engaging with colleagues through collaboration and dialogue to improve professional learning and personal fulfillment;
7. redeveloping practice by creatively integrating external frameworks and models of practice.

The aim of reflective practice is thus to support a shift from routine actions rooted in commonsense thinking to reflective action emerging from professional thinking (Pollard 2008: 26) drawing from external evidence-based sources. All seven key points are addressed throughout the chapters in this book.
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Reflective task 1.1

A number of different views have been briefly outlined above. Think about any recent experience you have had teaching or instructing someone to do something new (helping them to learn a new sporting skill or using a different technique on a computer):

1. Did you think through how to help before doing anything, or pause mid-action, or mull over later how you were explaining, demonstrating or encouraging the learner?
2. Could you align this contemplation to reflection-before-action; reflection-in-action; reflection-on-action?
3. If you were to do this again would you do it the same or differently next time? How? Why?

What should you be reflective about?

There are many different things to consider and think about when you are developing as a teacher. Figure 1.1 suggests how many different facets of a teacher’s work can shape and influence their development. This model (developed from Shulman’s 1987 and 1998 work and Higgins and Leat 2001) indicates the various dimensions that beginning teachers should pay attention to. It could be very useful to consider each of these features as part of the toolkit that arms you with helpful tactics, strategies, frameworks and general guidance about what to pay attention to on your reflective journey to becoming an effective teacher. You could view them as key components of the legend on the road map to becoming a qualified teacher.

Reflecting on subject knowledge

This is a key prerequisite for teaching. You need to know and understand the subject content that you are going to teach. If you do not ‘know your stuff’ you will not have a clear idea about what your students should learn. Before teaching any lesson, it is important that you understand the substantive or important subject knowledge in your area of curriculum. You need to know the content as well as how it is constructed. For example, in science there are three main subject areas: biology, chemistry and physics, but there is also an underpinning view that ‘how science works’ (the nature and historical development in science) should be nurtured through the three different disciplines. In MFL you need to be able to
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Understand, and communicate accurately in, the target language, but you must also understand how the language works (what the grammatical patterns are) in order to prepare your pupils to become independent learners.

Thus subject knowledge is about knowing the key facts and appreciating and understanding how they are connected together; this could be summarized as ‘knowing what’. As a developing educator you should also recognize how the subject matter should be organized, for example if you are a PE teacher you will recognize that you cannot teach children how to play rugby or netball if they have not yet learned the basic skills of passing the ball. There is a need to pay attention to, and develop competency in, one area before progressing to the next. This is an example of syntactic subject knowledge, understanding the way that subject matter can be organized and developed. This could be referred to as ‘knowing how’. Before you begin teaching it is important that you reflect on the extent to which your understanding of ‘knowing what’ and ‘knowing how’ is appropriate. Most teacher preparation courses provide a knowledge and skills audit, so that would-be trainees can reflect on ‘what do I know currently?’ and ‘what do I need to know before I start?’
Curriculum knowledge

As well as acquiring subject knowledge, learners also develop other skills and understanding related to the subject. It is important for you to see how, for example, literacy, numeracy, thinking skills, collaborative skills, creativity, criticality and problem-solving approaches fit into subject teaching. Skills and knowledge are integral to any subject area. In history, for example, students might be required to analyse key factors influencing the development of World War Two; or they might need to synthesize arguments about the contrasting nature of Buddhism and Judaism in religious education (RE). In art they may need to generate alternative presentations of a slogan, or abstract interpretations of an object. Such skills are not confined to older learners; in mathematics even young children learn to develop different ways of solving a problem, or in English they might need to report the same event from two contrasting viewpoints. It is important to recognize how skills may be key to the learning of substantive or syntactic subject knowledge. This could be thought of as ‘knowing-what-else’. Curriculum knowledge is also about knowing how and where the subject fits into the whole curriculum and how it is assessed and accredited at different stages of education.

Pedagogic knowledge

Pedagogic knowledge, or knowing how to teach, is multi-faceted:

- **Practical teaching knowledge** is used to ensure effective learning through the application of practical strategies that include classroom and behaviour management, organization, questioning techniques and formative assessment techniques.
- **Beliefs about teaching** (intuitive and experiential understandings of what works) may also influence your thinking and practice. Perhaps you think that mixed ability is good when a lesson is focused on skill development, such as team building in PE, and setting is appropriate to have all students learning together in a high ability MFL class.
- **Understanding of learners** and their unique capabilities (appreciating influences of child development, emotions, skill needs, diagnosed difficulties, talents or gifts) may influence how you design the learning tasks or organize the classroom.

This could be viewed as ‘knowing what works’.

Acknowledgement of educational values

- **Influence of learning settings** can shape the way you teach. The school culture that includes the routines, practices and performances that have become an
automatic and accepted way of working might constrain or develop your practice. Sixty-minute lessons, or regular field trips, or fixed commentary boxes on reports, or the ICT network support can shape how you perform as a professional.

- **Acknowledgement of an individual’s values** (individual standards, morals, religious practices, home cultures) can influence how and what things happen. A headteacher’s view of handwriting or wall displays, or the fact that you are working in a religious school, can influence what you say and how you conduct your lessons.

  These could be described as ‘knowing what else matters’.

### Personal constructs and identity

It is important for you to understand that how you view yourself as a teacher (and a person) will have a bearing on the way you perform in the classroom. How you communicate with others (authoritatively or submissively, enthusiastically or very matter-of-fact) can convey your beliefs and how you think you should or could act in any professional situation. Equally you need to be aware of how you wish to be portrayed to your learners, colleagues and peers. This is discussed much further in Chapters 3 and 5 in particular.

### Pedagogic enactment

This is about how you teach. The level of confidence that you have when you first enact your role as a teacher will be greatly influenced by:

- how well you are mentally prepared;
- how carefully you have thought about what you will have the students do and what you will say;
- how you will question your learners.

Your performance or enactment as a teacher will express your understandings (about your subject, its nature and sequence) and beliefs (about how your students learn) and the influences of the institution (daily routines, weekly practices and integral values). All these factors (and more) will impact on you as a teacher and how you present yourself. As you develop professionally and you recognize something is not working too well, you may find it useful to take each of the aspects described above and reflect on them in turn, identifying where you need to focus further to facilitate your development.

With the different facets of becoming a teacher in mind (Shulman’s model, Figure 1.1) read Case Studies 1.1 to 1.3 and consider the questions that follow.
Case Study 1.1  Clive the mathematician

Clive is a quietly competent mathematician teaching a group of Year 9 students. In attempting to teach about angles and how to measure them, he had produced some brilliant animations (on an interactive whiteboard) of swirling right-angled objects, and engaging activities where the students measured the angles of objects around the classroom. His demeanour, however, was somewhat timid and he allowed the students to choose where they sat and who they (loudly) conversed with. He asked probing questions and his presentation of ideas about how angles could be measured and calculated was crystal clear. This trainee illustrated strengths in his understanding of mathematics as a subject and could communicate to willing listeners how to describe and measure different kinds of angles. The tasks he designed for his learners were engaging, differentiated and challenging to the more able. Yet the behaviour of his classes could erode his confidence and perhaps even deter him from pursuing teaching. His reflection needed to be carefully directed so that he could identify where his strengths lay and where he needed to focus the next steps in development.

Reflective task 1.2

1 What do you think are Clive’s strengths and weaknesses?
2 What aspect of his development would you encourage him to reflect upon next?

Case Study 1.2  Mimi the scientist

Mimi is a highly qualified scientist who has previously worked in industry. She was teaching secondary students about diet. She was knowledgeable about the key aspects of a healthy diet and the essential contribution of vitamins and minerals to food we eat. She had devised an interesting practical activity involving testing foods for the nutrients they contained. She organized ‘testing’ stations around the laboratory so that the different groups would work at various, well spaced, points around the perimeter of the classroom. The apparatus was neatly laid out for collection by a representative from each group to avoid collisions in the haste to grab equipment and do some science. She provided a carefully explained set of instructions, demonstrated techniques and requested ‘hands up’ to check all understood the method to be used. Some students did not appear to understand exactly what to do so she also directed reflective questions at those who appeared not to be paying careful attention with a request to ‘repeat what you have to do in the experiment’. She had a pre-prepared worksheet upon which the students could quickly record their results and draw their conclusions. Despite all these props for the practical, the lesson was not successful.
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Reflective task 1.3

1. What aspects of Mimi’s teaching or preparation may have led to an unsuccessful lesson?
2. What would you suggest she reflectively focus upon?

Case Study 1.3   Nigel the physical education trainee

Nigel was an athletic, energetic and enthusiastic trainee. He was teaching Year 8 how to throw the shot. Before the lesson he laid out markers for the students to use as launching points and he impaled javelins at either end of the throwing area, and knotted a tape from one to the other, to denote the height the shot should reach. His learning objectives were shared with the class through a bulleted list on a portable whiteboard. At the start of the lesson he asked the students about the success criteria for throwing the shot, ensuring safety and helping a peer improve their performance. He had the students working in pairs, alternately operating as athlete and coach. They took it in turns to practise a throw and make peer observations to suggest to each other how their performance was good and also how it could be enhanced. Their initial throws were carried out on their knees to ensure they understood the importance of ‘clean palm’, ‘dirty neck’, ‘high elbow’ and ‘none putting arm as guide for direction of throw’ before they could progress to a full standing throw. At the end of the hour lesson each student had improved in their techniques in putting the shot.

Reflective task 1.4

1. What strengths did this trainee clearly show?
2. What should Nigel focus on to improve his lesson?

Deepening your reflection so that it becomes more meaningful

Reflection-on-action

This is probably the most straightforward kind of reflection. It involves considering an experience and thinking about how to improve it next time. On a long car journey, for example, you may have opted for the most direct route, but it takes twice as long as the more circuitous motorway. Reflection-on-action will inform
the route you take next time. If you wish for a shorter time in the car the motorway is better. However, if the cost of fuel is paramount the direct route may be more desirable. Similarly with teaching, after reflecting on an experience with a class you may make decisions about how to change things next time. This is Fiona’s reflection after teaching her third lesson:

“At the end of the lesson I felt like I could write an entire essay just on what I had learnt from that hour! These are some of the most salient points:

1 Never, ever give out equipment until you want them to do something with it! Especially true for a lower ability set, the cups I gave out for the activity were too much of a distraction!

2 Always double check who in your class will struggle with which tasks. I gave out role play cards and was very embarrassed to learn I had given a complicated role to a pupil who could not read! I was also upset to realize I had asked the newest member of the class to hand out the books; this pupil was also Polish and did not speak much English. These were particularly disappointing things to do as I had spent lots of time researching the needs of my classes in extensive detail, but I now know that class so much better.

3 I need to work on the tone and pitch of my voice. While the teacher fed back that I varied my voice well, it did become high and squeaky sometimes and my nerves probably came across to the pupils.

4 Always wait for silence. I insisted on it several times and tried my best to wait for silence but I am aware I did not always wait for absolute silence before progressing. In hindsight, this was probably because I was aware of the timing of the lesson and that it had taken longer than I anticipated getting the initial part of the lesson started. I appreciate that it is an important part of my classroom management to follow through with what I say so I will definitely be practising that from my first lesson back after half term.

5 Praise. I was pleased with my questioning technique and felt as though the pupils were confident in answering my questions; however I did not thank them for their answers nor praise them when they were correct. Again, I am sure this was because of my awareness of timing and I will ensure from now on that I include the word PRAISE on my lesson plan so that I am reminded when I look at it to use some more ‘well done’s’.

(Fiona, one-year PGCE trainee, three lessons after start of teaching)
Reflective task 1.5

Having read Fiona’s reflections on her lesson, can you identify where she needs to focus next?

The following is a key reflection from Greta, again three weeks into her teaching practice on a one-year PGCE course:

“I recently read that pupils only spend 12% of their time in lessons (Capel et al. 2009) which surprised me and made me realize how important it is to make use of every moment in a lesson to maximize learning. Teacher assessment of learning is crucial and pupils are always being reminded of their target grades, how to improve and are pushed to achieve their highest potential. I have observed lots of lessons where teachers use formative assessment to monitor the progress of their class. One strategy I liked was the use of mini-whiteboards on which pupils write down their answers and hold them up – which I intend to use in some of my lessons.

(Greta, four weeks into her PGCE teaching experience)

Reflective task 1.6

1 What else are you likely to learn by watching other teachers?
2 How is the reflection of their actions different to reflection on your own actions?

These are Mark’s reflections after watching two different teachers, one in English and the other in science:

“A teacher in English has shown me how to structure an instruction, repeat it and then explain it in another way. This is so he can use a whole ‘catch all’ approach to get his class going on what to do next. Another member of staff always uses pupil language to describe tasks to be done like ‘add a splash of iodine to the food mixture’ or ‘this is a mortar and pestle – also known as a grinder’.

(Mark, one-year PGCE science, second week in classroom)
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Reflective task 1.7

1. What do you think are the benefits of watching other more experienced teachers teach at the beginning of your practice?
2. Can you identify which features of teaching Mark is most focused on early in his development?
3. How do you anticipate these might change as he becomes more experienced?

Reflection-in-action

This type of reflection is a little more sophisticated and will require more on-the-spot responsive thinking. On a car journey the road ahead is blocked because of an accident, but you have to reach your destination in five minutes’ time. You must make an in-the-moment decision about whether to wait or try an alternative road. You need experience of the local road network to make an informed judgment. Similarly, in the classroom, some experience is needed to flexibly review an in-the-moment happening to decide if a different course of action is appropriate.

This is Saheed’s view of reflection-in-action:

“
As someone who was expecting to find reflection difficult, I am pleasantly surprised by how much I am learning from it. I am now gaining in confidence about reflecting-in-action; something I had to do when my starter activity was going wrong and I needed to re-issue instructions to the class. Reflection-on-action, of which I have done a great deal, has helped me analyse the lessons as I taught them. This made me think about them all the way through. I am now beginning to understand why becoming a reflective practitioner will be so useful as a teacher, I will constantly be evolving in my teaching style and learning from every single lesson I teach.

(Saheed, one-year PGCE, third week in placement)
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Reflective task 1.8

1. To what extent is reflection serving to help you currently?
2. How do you see it supporting your professional development in the future?
3. Can all the features in Shulman’s model be addressed through reflection-in-action?
Reflecting-before-action

Using reflection to inform planning is a useful strategy for considering the alternative ways you could prepare and teach a lesson, just as preparing for a long car journey, preparatory information can be provided by looking at a map, exploring alternative routes via the internet, asking other drivers which way they would go, or speaking to advisors from an automobile association. However, the planning and decision making about when to fill up with fuel, when and where to stop for a break and how much food and drink you should carry is ultimately your decision as the driver of the car. Just like the planning for a lesson, you can invest more or less time in the preparation of a car journey. Taking time to consider possible outcomes based on certain actions can be time well spent. A long car journey that is undertaken during severe weather conditions will require more in-depth thought to thoroughly prepare for anticipated eventualities. Similarly dealing with a challenging class can feel like entering a storm, and needs careful thinking through. Preparation requires looking back on experiences to project forward and plan as carefully as possible. Consider this comment from Pritpal:

“Since I began observing in an active school many things have changed in my understanding, chiefly among which is that I now have an understanding of what goes on in a school on a day-to-day basis. Previously, aside from the teaching and monitoring, the life and work of a teacher was a mystery to me. I had no idea what they did between classes and how much prep they did before a lesson, thinking that many would just make it up on the fly. Some do, but that’s because they have been teaching a while. You sing the songs for long enough you can forget the song sheet. It would also seem that the professional role seems to step beyond that of instructor. A teacher seems to be simultaneously an instructor, guide, carer, confidante and informer all in one.

(Pritpal, PGCE trainee, three weeks into his first placement)"

Reflective task 1.9

1. How does Pritpal apply reflection-on-action?
2. Which features of Shulman’s model of development do you think are more likely to be developed by reflection-on-action?
3. How does Pritpal’s view connect with other theorists about reflection?
DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

This is Paul’s reflective view of teaching after a few weeks in school:

“I have come to realize during my brief time teaching that shouting and aggressive language is something that is definitely required but should be used sparingly. Punishments and disciplining are not required to be at high decibels and with a frown. For some pupils the drama, commotion and attention are exactly the response that they hoped to provoke. For others such a response may be so upsetting that they are unable to concentrate on their work through embarrassment, anger or disappointment.”

He later adds:

“The fact remains that there is no need to have a negative emotional response to a child’s behaviour. Although it is difficult not to feel aggravated by insolent behaviour, keeping calm is the exact same self-control you as a teacher expect from your pupils when asking for silence and they want to chat. It is for this reason that disciplining children through a fair and consistent behaviour policy, in a calm and pleasant manner, without causing a scene or drawing whole-class attention to the pupil concerned, is the most effective method to establish mutual respect from all involved.

(Paul, one-year PGCE, after two weeks in placement)

Reflective task 1.10

1. What kinds of reflection is Paul bringing to bear here?
2. How far can you judge which features of the Shulman model he is addressing?

Summary

This chapter has introduced some key ideas about reflection that are taken further in many subsequent chapters. The central thread of discussion here is about how reflection can inform the development of practice. Well-known theorists and their associated ideas have been introduced. Dewey’s (1910) view of routine actions and reflective actions has been considered and contrasted with Schön’s view (1983) of reflection as a continuous process supporting development of professional practice. His view of reflection-in-action (while doing something) and reflection-on-action (after doing something) are applied to beginning teachers’ situations. Shulman’s (1987) distinct multi-faceted perspective on the nature of
WHAT CAN REFLECTIVE PRACTICE MEAN FOR YOU ... AND WHY SHOULD YOU ENGAGE IN IT?

Teacher development is utilized to help learning teachers to focus their attention in different directions and consider where progression might be best steered. Pollard (2002) builds on the views of these eminent scholars and considers further the more dynamic nature of reflection-in-action, to explore how the dilemmas and challenges beginning teachers face influence effectiveness in the classroom. Readers have been invited to reflect on the differing nature of the key theorists and their views’ of reflection.

Conclusion

As you progress through other chapters in this book, or dip into them, you will find frequent references to ‘pedagogic’, ‘subject’ and ‘curriculum’ knowledge and to ‘personal constructs’ or ‘teacher identity’. This chapter serves as an introduction to these concepts so that as they recur in your reflections you will feel increasingly comfortable with them.

Key learning points

- There is a range of views about reflection.
- Reflection can clearly inform and support development of practice.
- Reflection-on-practice can include consideration of established routines and practices and how these might be improved or changed as needs demand.
- Reflection-in-practice can be conceived as action research.
- Reflection can arise before practice.
- Different perspectives of reflection can be woven together to suggest how the pedagogic craft of praxis (the application of theory to inform practice) of beginning teachers can be supported so that their actions are informed through reflective reasoning.
- It is vital to understand that reflection is a strategy for learning about teaching.
- It is important to appreciate how reflection can focus on different aspects of teacher development.
- Beginning teachers need to consider how prominent views of reflection (Dewey, Schön, Shulman and Pollard) can illuminate different aspects of their developing practice.