BECOMING A REFLECTIVE TEACHER

No matter how well you teach, there is always room for improvement. One way to continually improve is to adopt a systematic approach to learning from your day-to-day teaching experiences. By looking at how you teach, thinking about why you do it that way, and evaluating how well it works, you can identify your strengths and target things to improve. This process is often referred to as critical reflection and it is a vital part of effective teacher planning, decision-making and teaching.

This chapter briefly describes several perspectives on why teachers should reflect and how they can examine their teaching philosophy, methodology and effectiveness. It identifies a range of techniques that you can use to help you reflect on the contexts within which you teach, the techniques and strategies you use and the effects you have on those you are trying to teach.

When you have mastered the ideas in this chapter you will be able to:

- explain the concept of reflective teaching
- increase your self-awareness about how you teach and how others perceive your teaching
- develop a personal checklist of questions to ask yourself when planning lessons and when reviewing your teaching, so that you can continually improve your teaching.
Defining reflective teaching

In our everyday lives, when we use terms such as ‘reflection’ or ‘reflective thinking’ we usually mean that we are looking back at something and thinking about what happened and why it happened. We are trying to learn from our experiences so that we can use this knowledge to guide what we do in the future. In this sense, the concept of reflection is certainly not a modern one. Throughout history, reflective thinkers have been highly regarded for their ability to analyse complex situations, to recognise subtleties in problems, to think divergently and to offer solutions to problems that others found perplexing. Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Galileo, Newton and Einstein are examples of such thinkers and the ways in which they reflected can be seen as very deliberate cognitive processes.

We can reflect about anything, but when you are learning to be a teacher it is particularly useful to reflect about yourself as a learner and as a teacher. Reflecting on learning and teaching is not a new thing – most teachers have probably always done it. However, it has been only relatively recently that the importance of reflection has been widely recognised in the study of learning and teaching. Most Western writing in this area seems to be based either directly or indirectly on the work of Dewey (1933), who made a distinction between ‘routine’ action (guided by tradition, habit, authority and institutional expectations) and ‘reflective’ action (guided by constant self-appraisal and development). These ideas have been refined by later writers such as Cruickshank (1987), Ghaye (2011), Korthagen and Kessels (1999), Schön (1987), Van Manen (1977, 1991) and Zeichner (1981–82, 1983, 1987). The writings on this theme, and the teacher education programs that have developed from these ideas, all have as their general aim ‘the development of teachers who have the skills and dispositions to continually inquire into their own teaching practice and into the contexts in which their teaching is embedded’ (Zeichner, 1987: 565). From this general perspective, reflective teachers are those who are aware of the teaching decisions they make and of the consequences of those decisions.

Various writers approach the topic of reflective teaching from quite different points of view. In fact, until relatively recently there was not strong agreement on what, beyond mere thinking about teaching, is the essence of reflective teaching. When trying to place the various views about reflection into a manageable conceptual framework, it is useful to consider the perspective provided by Gilbert (1994:512–13). She suggests that there are essentially two views of education. From one perspective, education is seen as ‘a servant of the economy’ and competent teachers are thought of as ‘technicians who have developed certain specifiable skills’ and who can produce ‘pre-determined learning outcomes in students’.
Gilbert refers to this as a ‘technicist’ view of education. From the alternative perspective, education is seen ‘fundamentally as an agent of social change’ and teachers are seen as ‘innovative professionals’ whose competence goes well beyond simply having ‘a set of specific, identifiable technical skills’ (Gilbert, 1994:514). Gilbert refers to this as a ‘liberatory’ view of education, a term based on the ideas of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. (Education that is liberatory encourages learners to challenge and change the world, not merely uncritically adapt themselves to it.)

Different views of teaching give rise to different views about reflection. Those who take a technicist view of teaching tend to favour reflection on the technical aspects of teaching. Those who take a liberatory view of teaching tend to favour reflection on the moral, ethical, political and social factors that influence teaching. These approaches to reflection are often considered as incompatible, but they can equally well be viewed as complementary. All approaches to reflection should encourage teachers to think critically about all their teaching practices and accept that what happens in their classrooms should be questioned and, if necessary, changed.

Van Manen (1977, 1991) identified three different levels of reflection: technical, practical and critical. They are defined as follows:

- **Technical reflection**: At this level, teachers are concerned with the technical application of educational knowledge in the classroom to maintain order and to achieve predetermined outcomes; reflective skills are developed and used to improve the application of research-based knowledge. This type of reflection is the central focus of the work of Cruickshank (1987).

- **Practical reflection**: At this level teachers become concerned with goals, the connections between principles and practice, the assumptions that underlie their practices and the value of their goals. This is the basis of Schön’s (1983) approach to reflection.

- **Critical reflection**: At this level teachers become concerned with issues beyond the classroom, so that moral and social issues such as equity and emancipation can inform their reflections on classroom practices. Brookfield (1995:8) goes a step further by suggesting that reflection should not be considered as critical unless it serves two distinctive purposes: the first being to understand the power relationships in teaching and the second being to question the assumptions and practices that ‘seem to make our lives easier but that actually end up working against our long-term interests’.

Zeichner and Liston (1987) addressed this issue slightly differently by focusing on criteria for reflection rather than levels of reflection. They noted that when teachers use technical criteria for their reflection, they concentrate on the
application of previously acquired knowledge for the achievement of given objectives. When they use educational criteria, teachers consider how situational and institutional contexts influence teaching and learning, and they consider the value of different educational goals. When they use ethical criteria, teachers reflect on the moral and ethical aspects of teaching and education. It should be noted that Zeichner (1990) opposes the notion that these criteria should be seen as hierarchical, since this conveys the impression that technical and practical reflection will ultimately be transcended by critical reflection. As Zeichner (1990:61) rightly claims, ‘this devalues technical skill and the reality of teaching and should therefore be rejected’.

Some of the most influential writing on reflection has been by Donald Schon (1983, 1987). He argues that technicist models of professional knowledge (based on knowledge gained from independent scientific research) are inadequate for explaining how professionals, such as teachers, develop their professional knowledge and improve their practice. Schon uses the concept of ‘frames’ to explain how teachers perceive the situations in which they work. Basically, a frame is a view or a set of expectations (based on knowledge, values and beliefs) that teachers use to interpret and organise their environment and to guide their behaviour in that environment. Teachers’ frames are determined by their past experiences and their previous efforts to make sense of those experiences. Some teachers are able to frame what happens in their classroom in multiple ways (that is, view it from different perspectives), whereas others are able to frame it in only one way and, therefore, can see only one set of possibilities for action in a given situation.

When teachers are able to deliberately change the way they are looking at a situation, they are said to ‘reframe’ it. This would happen if, for example, a teacher initially thought that students’ lack of effort was due to laziness but then deliberately started to look at how his/her approach to teaching might not be motivating the students. This idea that reframing a situation needs to be a deliberate ‘mindful’ act is taken up in considerable detail by Linder and Marshall (2003) and it forms the basis of the suggestions by Shay (2003) about ways in which teachers might resolve differences of opinion about the quality of students’ work. Barnes (1992:17) makes the important point that ‘to achieve change, teachers need to discover that their existing frame for understanding what happens in their classes is only one of several possible frames’. This point becomes increasingly important as our understanding of learning changes in the ways described by Sousa (2010) and Zull (2002).

Geddis (1996:251) suggests that the frames teachers use have two interacting components. ‘One component is a descriptive conceptual scheme that enables teachers to see classroom events in a particular way; the other component is a script which provides organized patterns of action arising from that way of seeing.’
Both the conceptual (what teachers think) and action (what teachers do) components of these frames must be the focus of reflection if teachers are to learn from their experiences.

Using the notion of frames, Schön (1983, 1987) argues that professionals develop their expert knowledge through two separate, but related, processes that he describes as reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Both approaches to reflection involve similar activities – framing and reframing problematic situations – but they occur at different times in relation to the situations being considered.

Reflection-on-action is the typical self-evaluative thinking that teachers engage in after most lessons. It is a deliberate attempt to understand past events in order to shape future action. Because it occurs when the teacher is able to concentrate on reflecting (free from other distractions), the teacher can carefully choose the focus of reflection and the frames that will be used to guide that reflection. Both the frames and the process of reflection can be explicit and deliberate – for example, a teacher might ask a colleague to observe a lesson and make notes about the level of student engagement so that the teacher could reflect on his/her teaching strategy.

Reflection-in-action occurs on the run – teachers simultaneously teach and analyse what they are doing, why they are doing it and how the students are reacting. You can picture this as being like the teacher presenting a lesson and simultaneously standing at the window watching what is happening and trying to explain why it is happening – a rather tricky skill to master. In order to reflect-in-action, a teacher must be able to frame problems almost subconsciously, generate hypotheses and immediately test them. Both the frames employed to make sense of classroom events and the process of utilising these frames will be tacit (not made explicit).

When reflection-in-action is continuous and automatic, it becomes the distinguishing characteristic of the ‘spontaneous intuitive performance of the competent professional functioning in complex environments’ (Geddis 1996:250). This point is echoed in the research of Faull (2009) on the dispositions of exceptional teachers. Butler (1996:273) points out that reflection-in-action is ‘possible only if there is mental processing capacity available to get outside the act of generation of the performance and to watch its effects and evaluate them’. That is why you may find it difficult to reflect-in-action in the early part of your teaching career – your mental capacity might be taken up just thinking about how to survive and perform. As you gain experience, you can pay less attention to surviving and many of your teaching activities will become routine – then you will be better able to reflect on what is happening as it is happening.

Whether teachers are reflecting on their teaching as it happens or after it has happened, two important factors can vary – the depth of their reflection (varying from non-reflective to highly reflective) and the nature of the things they reflect on (varying from technical to ethical issues). Valli (1993) suggested that teacher...
education programs that focus on the technical aspects of teaching in a non-reflective way are basically emphasising skill development (‘Do it this way, but don’t ask why’). This was a feature of many teacher education programs 50 years ago. Programs that encourage beginning teachers to reflect, but on only the technical aspects of their teaching (encouraging them to ask questions such as ‘Why does this technique help students to learn?’), are emphasising practical decision making. Programs that emphasise the moral, ethical and social aspects of teaching in a non-reflective manner (‘It is morally wrong to do that, but don’t ask why’) are labelled by Valli as ‘indoctrination’. Programs that encourage students to reflect on the moral, ethical and social aspects of teaching (asking questions such as ‘Why are we imposing these values on students?’) are said to be emphasising moral reflection.

Valli (1993:36) suggests that moral reflection ‘is the most justifiable and holds the greatest promise as a viable image of teaching’. This view is echoed by Zeichner and Gore (1995:16) when they describe a social reconstructionist approach to action research in teacher education that ‘brings the social and political context into focus and considers whether our work in teacher education is contributing towards the elimination of inequalities and injustices in schooling and society’. I prefer to think that teachers need to take a balanced approach to reflection and question both the technical and moral aspects of their practices – this view is implicit in the approach to quality teaching described in chapter 3.

Whatever approach is taken to reflection, the ultimate aim of helping teachers to reflect is to produce what Schön (1983, 1987) refers to as the ‘reflective practitioner’, one who can think about teaching while teaching and respond appropriately to the unique situations that arise. The approaches to achieving this aim may vary, but the basic ideas are similar – if teachers adopt a reflective approach to their teaching, they not only question their own practices but also render problematic many of the aspects of teaching that are generally taken for granted. (To render problematic simply means that these issues should be opened to question and investigation, rather than being accepted without thought.)

As Smyth (1984:32) suggests, ‘Put simply, to act reflectively about teaching is to pursue actively the possibility that existing practices may effectively be challenged.

**ACTIVITY**

**REFLECT ON YOUR TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM**

Using the framework suggested by Valli (1993), think about the different components of your teacher education program. What is being emphasised in this program and why do you think this is happening? What influence is this likely to have on the way you will teach?
and, in the light of evidence about their efficacy, replaced by alternatives’. This reflection must be open to the possibility that existing practices are not only inappropriate but that they are being driven by inappropriate sets of beliefs and values. Indeed, as Noffke and Brennan (1988) suggest, the real choice for teachers is not so much whether to be reflective but, rather, what to reflect on.

No approach to reflection is without its critics, and the most common criticism of any approach is that it denies the validity of other views. Such a criticism is sometimes made of even the critical–moral reflection approach that should be the most open (see Valli, 1993). Any approach to teaching or reflection that does not acknowledge that other approaches have some merit is dangerous.

In the remainder of this chapter, a broad view of reflective teaching is taken. This approach will emphasise that reflection is a form of inquiry through which teachers can question their actions, the contexts in which they teach and all the influences on those actions and contexts. It is based on the premise that when teachers become conscious of the beliefs and theories implicit in their practices and reflect critically on them, they can turn their experiences into triggers for fundamental changes to their classroom practices. This approach stresses that experience alone is insufficient for teachers’ professional growth; but reflection on experience can be a powerful tool for improving teaching. It also encourages teachers to focus on strengths as well as problems – an approach to reflection strongly supported by Ghaye (2011).

Characteristics of reflective teachers

From the brief overview of effective teaching given in chapter 2, you might have noticed that the concept of reflective teaching did not start to become prominent in the literature until the late 1970s, even though Dewey and others had been writing about it much earlier. It then took some time before people such as Pollard and Tann (1993) and Pollard (2008) made comprehensive attempts to identify characteristics that distinguished highly reflective teachers from their less reflective colleagues. We can now say with some certainty that reflective teachers tend to display the following characteristics:

* They accept that their actions are the prime determinant of their students’ learning.
* They have a high level of awareness of how they teach and how students and colleagues perceive their teaching.
* They are enthusiastic about improving their teaching practices in order to improve their students’ learning, but they are concerned with aims and consequences as well as means and technical efficiency.
They take time to think about their teaching so that they can engage in a continuous cycle of monitoring, evaluating and revising their teaching practices.

- They use a variety of strategies for gathering evidence from their classrooms to guide the development of their teaching competence.
- They are open-minded and willing to change their teaching practices.
- They willingly collaborate with colleagues.
- They view curriculum documents as guidelines rather than recipes.
- Their judgements and decisions are informed by self-reflection, evidence-based inquiry and insights from educational theory.
- They use deliberate strategies for reframing problem situations.

Benefits of reflection

The benefits of reflection are considerable and tangible. Korthagen and Wubbles (1991), for example, provide evidence that reflective teachers have better interpersonal relationships with students than do non-reflective teachers, and that they experience a higher level of job satisfaction. They also suggest that reflective teachers have strong feelings of security and self-efficacy, can talk and write readily about their experiences and are more likely than non-reflective teachers to allow their students to learn by investigating and structuring things for themselves. You will come to appreciate the importance of this approach to teaching as you explore the teaching strategies described in chapters 6 to 14 of this book.

The literature suggests several other reasons why teachers should be encouraged to be reflective. Some of these reasons have a sociological basis (Zeichner, 1992), while others clearly attempt to link reflection with teacher effectiveness in a technical or behaviourist way – that is, they suggest that through reflection teachers can improve their teaching and their students’ learning (Cruickshank, 1987; Killen, 1991, Troyer, 1988). Others relate teacher reflection to changes in measurable student factors such as thoughtfulness (Onosko, 1992).

Butler (1996) suggests that reflection is an important tool for helping teachers to move through a learning process that takes them from novice to expert. Similar ideas are expressed in the ‘life cycle of a teacher’ model described by Steffy et al. (2000).

Dobbins (1996:270) highlights several reasons why teachers should be reflective and why the practicum in teacher education programs should have a focus on reflection. First, she suggests that through reflection student teachers can ‘maximise their learning from the practicum and accept responsibility for their own professional development’, and that this can empower student teachers to ‘think and learn for themselves’. Quite clearly, a similar argument could be made for...
encouraging experienced teachers to be reflective. Dobbins’ second reason for encouraging reflection is that ‘teaching and the climate within which teaching takes place are different now from what they were’. Because of the changing demands and responsibilities placed on teachers, they must be reflective in order to respond appropriately to their changing circumstances. Finally, Dobbins emphasises that reflection is important because ‘teaching, as well as being a practical and intellectual activity, is also a moral endeavour’. Without the ability to reflect, teachers will find it difficult to make morally appropriate decisions about what they do and why they do it.

There is little doubt that the development of teaching skills can be hastened if beginning teachers have opportunities for guided critical reflection (Killen, 1990; Selinger, 1991). There is also evidence that experienced teachers can change their classroom practices quite readily if they are provided with structured feedback on which to reflect (Coulson, 2006; Killen, 1991; Nolan & Huber, 1989; Phillips & Glickman, 1991). While some would argue that technocratic approaches to changing teachers’ classroom practices are inappropriate (Gore, 1987), there are others who suggest that technical competence may be a precondition for reflection (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1989) as there is some evidence that reflective, critical, self-analytic thought is difficult for teachers with little experience (Berliner, 1988; Hammrich, Bonozo & Berliner, 1990; Marshall, 1990). Whether the technical and critical aspects of teaching should be reflected on concurrently, or whether the critical issues are better dealt with after teachers have achieved an acceptable level of technical competence, is likely to remain an issue of debate (Killen, 1989). Whatever view is taken on this point, it should be remembered that ‘it is worthwhile to pursue reflection in teaching only to the extent that it contributes to better teaching’ (Korthagen & Wubbles, 1991:1). This is a pragmatic point of view, but it does not exclude consideration of issues of equity, morality, power and social justice. This book emphasises that reflection on the technical aspects of teaching and reflection on broader educational issues are complementary, not mutually exclusive.

Whatever the prime motive for their reflection, it is likely that reflective teachers will devote more time and effort to critical review and analysis of their teaching and their students’ performance than will teachers who are not reflective (Walker et al., 1992). As a result, they are likely to have greater interest in self-improvement, have a greater interest in data on their teaching behaviour, have higher self-esteem, make greater efforts to encourage their students to be reflective and to think critically, and believe that they have more power to influence student learning significantly (Nolan & Huber, 1989). All of these outcomes are obviously worthwhile.

Arguably, the most important reason for being reflective was identified by Le Cornu and Peters (2005:51). They made the point that reflection is a constructivist
activity that enables teachers to learn more about teaching and learning, and argued that ‘students’ levels of participation in the learning process are inextricably linked to their teachers’ levels of participation in their own learning’. The reason for that is straightforward – the more teachers reflect, the easier it is for them to help students to reflect on their learning. If teachers follow the advice of Ghaye (2011) and reflect on their strengths as well as their challenges, this can result in other significant benefits such as heightened positive emotions and self-esteem.

As you progress through your teacher education program, you will be confronted with a bewildering array of theories of learning, teaching strategies, educational philosophies and advice from knowledgeable and experienced lecturers, teachers and supervisors. Balancing these theories and experience-based advice against the realities of the classroom and your immediate concerns for survival and preservation of self-esteem can be confusing and stressful. Reflection skills can help you to understand the situations you face when teaching and thus minimise your concerns. Finally, reflection can help you to appreciate that you, too, can be a producer of educational knowledge – through careful consideration of your learning and teaching experience you can develop insights that will help you, and others, to better understand teaching and learning.

### ACTIVITY

**TAKE A POSITIVE APPROACH**

Ghaye (2011) advocates a positive approach to reflection based on four steps:

- **Appreciate** what you are currently doing well.
- **Imagine** what could be done to make things even better.
- **Design** a way of achieving your new goal.
- **Act** to achieve your new goal.

Use this approach to reflect on and improve some aspect of your teaching. Document your learning journey and share it with a fellow student.

### Some strategies for reflection

The literature contains many suggestions for ways in which teachers, or teacher education students, can learn to reflect on their teaching, on themselves as learners and on education in general. The suggested techniques for reflection can be grouped into what Garman (1984, 1986) refers to as processes of ‘reflection-on-action’ and ‘reflection-through-recollection’. (Note here the extension of Schön’s idea of reflection-on-action.) In order for a teacher to reflect-on-action, segments of their teaching must be recorded as stable data so that they can be analysed and interpreted at a later time. This recording might be on audiotape or videotape, or it...
could be data recorded by an observer. For reflection-through-recollection, a teacher simply recalls significant events, possibly makes some record of them (such as in a journal), and then reflects on them.

Before considering what techniques you might employ to help you reflect on your teaching, it is worth considering the point made by Zeichner and Gore (1995:15) that teachers’ actions will not necessarily be better ‘just because they are more deliberate and intentional’ – there must be a valid basis for these deliberate actions. Kreber and Cranton (2000) argue that this valid basis should be an understanding of what constitutes quality teaching practice in your field so that you can compare your experiences and findings with this yardstick. They emphasise that the chief purpose of reflection is to make your teaching practices evidence-based.

A useful starting point for deciding on what reflection processes you will use is to ask yourself these questions:

- What specific issue, problem or situation do I want to focus on? (For example, you might be concerned about your ability to engage students in sustained discussions about important topics.)
- What data could possibly be gathered to shed light on this issue?
- How could these data be gathered, and by whom?
- How should these data be reviewed and evaluated so that some plan for action could be developed?

Some specific techniques that you can use to guide your reflection are summarised below; all are designed to help you gather and evaluate data on how well you are teaching and how well your students are learning.

Reflective journal writing

A reflective journal is a written account of your experiences and your thoughts and feelings about those experiences. It is a means of helping you to think critically about how you teach and why you teach that way. A journal can provide:

- a record of events and their consequences
- a description of your thoughts about those events
- a framework for viewing your experiences from different perspectives
- a record of your developing understanding of teaching and learning
- insight into your beliefs and values
- a framework for planning and taking informed action to improve your teaching.
Writing about your teaching (and learning) experiences will help you to develop the habit of being thoughtful, reflective and analytical. The format of your journal is up to you, but two common approaches that you can consider are:

- a free-flowing approach that documents your personal learning journey and developing understanding of teaching and learning
- a targeted approach that focuses on incidents, problems or issues that arise in your teaching.

Whichever approach you take, you will find your journal most helpful if:

- you make entries soon after the events that they are describing because they will be more accurate records and a better basis for reflection
- you make regular journal entries.

If you are keeping an issues-based journal, you could structure your entries around a series of questions such as:

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What effect did it have on student learning?
- How could the issue or problem have been avoided?
- Is there another way of looking at this issue?
- What did I learn about teaching from this experience?
- What did I learn about myself from this experience?
- Which of my assumptions were questioned by this experience?
- How will I alter my teaching as a result of this issue or experience?

You might find it useful to keep your reflective journal as a blog or as an electronic portfolio so that it is easy to share your reflections with colleagues. Barrett (2011) provides useful guidelines for this process.

**ACTIVITY LEARNING JOURNAL**

If you are in a teacher education program, keep a journal in which you describe and reflect on each of your learning experiences for a period of two weeks (these experiences might include attending lectures, participating in tutorials, visiting a school, researching on the Internet, etc.). Then answer the following questions:

- What types of learning experiences do you find most useful?
- Do you learn better when you are ‘teaching yourself’ (e.g., through library research) or when you are being ‘taught’ (e.g., in a lecture)?
- Do your lecturers or tutors use teaching strategies that make it easy for you to learn? How does this make you feel?
- How has reflecting on your learning helped you to understand how you might teach?
Feedback from students

It is very useful to try to view your teaching through the eyes of your students (Hattie, 2009). One way of doing this is to gather data about your teaching from your students and then compare this information with how you thought students would perceive your teaching. This enables you to check the extent to which your assumptions about your teaching compare with the reality seen by your students. Killen (1991) and Coulson (2006) found this technique provided teachers with a clear focus for reflection that resulted in significant changes to their teaching practices.

To gather the data you could construct a questionnaire that addressed specific aspects of your teaching, such as the clarity of your explanations or the pacing of your lesson. Alternatively, you could simply ask the students what you did to make it easy (or difficult) for them to understand the things you wanted them to learn. Pollard (2008) has numerous other suggestions. You should welcome all student ideas about how you can enhance the learning experiences you create for them. Rather than seeing student comments as critical, view the comments as constructive suggestions on how you can better serve the students’ needs. If you regularly gain feedback about specific teaching episodes (individual lessons, assignments, etc.) you will find that even quite young students can give you valuable information to reflect on. However, generalised feedback gained at the end of a long period (such as the end-of-semester student evaluations often used in universities) rarely provides a useful basis for reflection.

Recording lessons

Sometimes it is difficult to recall all the details of a lesson and often things that you are not aware of happen in a lesson. If you want to capture and reflect on the moment-to-moment processes of your teaching, you need to make an audio or video recording. An audio recording will usually be less intrusive and less distracting for students. The disadvantage of an audio recording is that it cannot capture any of the non-verbal information that might help you to reflect on the lesson.

Whichever approach you use, the aim is to capture as much information as possible to help you reflect on what was happening in the class and why it was happening. If you make regular recordings (perhaps once per month) you will have ample evidence from which to judge the results of your attempts to change your teaching practices. Of course, there is no point in capturing so much information that you do not have time to analyse it; a 30-minute recording in each lesson is usually sufficient. You should always follow school and departmental policies in relation to obtaining permission to make audio or video recordings of students.
Reflective partnerships

There is a limit to how much you can learn from self-analysis of your teaching. The benefits of reflection will be greatly enhanced if the process involves sharing ideas with a colleague. One structured way of doing this is described in Killen (1995) as a ‘reflective partnership’. The basic procedure is this:

1. Two teachers (or teacher education students on practicum) agree to assist each other to reflect on their teaching and learning by observing and being observed.

2. Prior to each observation, the two teachers meet to review the plan for the lesson so that the observer knows what is to be taught, who the students are, what general approach the teacher plans to take and what (if any) difficulties are anticipated.

3. During the lesson, the observer records information about the lesson in a format that has been agreed on. This might involve use of a data-gathering instrument or it could be free-form notes. The observer will also make notes about any particular issues that he or she wants to raise with the teacher.

4. As soon as possible after the lesson, the two teachers meet to review the lesson using the data gathered by the observer and the recollections of both the teacher and the observer. The purpose of this discussion is to help the teacher reframe the events of the lesson (look at them from different perspectives) and come to a better understanding of how her or his actions were influencing student learning.

5. The above steps are repeated several times, with the two participants alternating between teaching and observing.

One of the main advantages of a reflective partnership is that it helps you to avoid the pitfall that self-reflection can simply reinforce your beliefs and assumptions. Reflective discussions with another teacher are usually productive learning experiences for both participants. However, Bevis (2001) identified time and a poor choice of reflective partner as the two largest barriers to the likely success of this strategy.

Lesson study

An interesting variation to the reflective partnerships procedure has been developed in Japan and is known as ‘lesson study’ (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004). The lesson study process involves groups of teachers who are teaching the same subjects to similar groups of students; in Japan, it occurs most frequently in Elementary schools. The steps in the process are as follows:

1. Teachers who are teaching similar grade level students meet as a group and collaboratively plan the ‘study lesson’ – perhaps choosing a topic that is traditionally difficult for students.
2 One teacher presents the lesson to his/her class and the other members of the group observe.
3 The group then meets to discuss what happened in the lesson and to collaboratively modify the lesson plan.
4 A second member of the group teaches the revised lesson to his/her students and the other group members observe.
5 The group then meets to reflect on the revised version of the lesson.
6 If necessary and practical, the cycle of revision and teaching continues until the group is happy with the procedures they have developed for teaching the focus lesson.
7 The group then identifies a new study lesson and repeats the process.

This is obviously a very time-consuming process but it demonstrates the extent to which some teachers are prepared to go in order to learn from one another and come to a better understanding of teaching and learning. Cerbin and Kopp (2006) describe how they successfully adapted the lesson study approach to college teaching.

**ACTIVITY**

**WHAT TO DO NEXT**

Tice (2011) suggests that when you have gathered information about your teaching, the next steps should be: think, talk, read, ask.

Read the Tice article and develop a strategy for following her advice.

**Some barriers to reflection**

Meaningful reflection can be a difficult and complex task that requires considerable time and effort. It is not surprising that some research evidence suggests that inexperienced teachers may not analyse, evaluate and direct their teaching practices in the metacognitive manner that is the mark of an accomplished reflective practitioner. Some of the reasons for this are explored by Calderhead (1989), Graham and Phelps (2003), Killen (1990), McCabe et al., (2009) and Thompson and Thompson (2008). Table 5.1 summarises some of these reasons and indicates how you might deal with these issues. These points are not presented to discourage you; they are made explicit so that you will appreciate the challenges facing you as you strive to become a reflective teacher.

Real teaching situations are extremely complex and, as Korthagen and Kessels (1999) point out, teachers simply do not have time to reflect on all the numerous and complex relationships between the various factors embedded in every teaching
### TABLE 5.1 Minimising barriers to reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common barriers to reflection</th>
<th>Ways of meeting the challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have limited time.</td>
<td>Make reflection an integral part of your routine of planning, teaching and evaluation. Prioritise your commitments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning teachers may be so preoccupied with the subject matter, or with their delivery of the lesson, that they have little time to consider how well it is going.</td>
<td>Prepare thoroughly so that you are confident of your knowledge and clear about the structure of your lesson. Use a clear lesson plan to guide your teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning teachers may be reluctant to be self-critical at a time when they are lacking in self-confidence and when they are fearful of failure and their vulnerability.</td>
<td>Don’t expect to be perfect, but do acknowledge that you need to improve. Deliberately try to learn from your mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning teachers may lack the knowledge of diverse teaching strategies that might help them to perceive alternatives to their current practice.</td>
<td>Study chapters 6 to 14. Talk to other teachers about how they teach. Ask for advice. Observe other teachers. Look for ideas on the Internet. Be prepared to take a risk and step outside your comfort zone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inexperienced teachers may have a very limited number of frames within which to consider their teaching.</td>
<td>Practise deliberately looking at situations from more than one perspective. Try to look at your teaching through the eyes of your students. Take Edward de Bono’s advice and change ‘thinking hats’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some beginning teachers are unable to achieve the detachment from their own practice that would enable them to reflect on it objectively and critically.</td>
<td>Get feedback from your students. Ask colleagues to observe your teaching and give you feedback. Establish a reflective partnership.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beginning teachers may see each class and each student as unique and therefore see limited potential in reflection on practice.</td>
<td>Look beyond the uniqueness of each student and lesson and try to identify the common elements that help or hinder student learning in your classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beginning teachers may feel that they have no control over the social, moral and political issues that impinge on their classrooms.</td>
<td>All these issues are things that you need to reflect on. You may not be able to change them immediately but you can at least discuss them with other teachers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The busy routines of teaching may make it difficult to develop a challenging and questioning perspective.</td>
<td>Set aside time for reflection. Challenge yourself to question every major teaching decision you make.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many teacher education students want recipes to help them develop patterns of appropriate teacher behaviour (ways of dealing with everyday classroom events) so that they can react in fixed ways.</td>
<td>Don’t expect to always be able to deal with similar events in the same way. Be flexible. Deliberately try to develop your skills at reflecting-in-action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(Continued)
situation – they have to act. As a result, many teachers tend to respond to challenging situations in ways that reflect how they behaved in similar situations in the past. This may be appropriate and productive in some circumstances, but there is a danger that you will fall into inappropriate routines if you do not systematically reflect on your teaching.

So, where does this leave you? Well, it basically means that you will need to learn how to reflect and that this will probably be a difficult and lengthy process. So, the sooner you start to be reflective the sooner you can become proficient at it. Get started as soon as possible – start reflecting today on what you believe about teaching and learning. Start keeping a journal of your experiences and your reflections on those experiences. If possible, find someone with whom to share your reflections because you are much more likely to gain insights into teaching and into your own learning processes if you are able to reflect collaboratively.

### Conclusion

‘Good teachers are made, not born; and, the making of a teacher is a complex process. Reflection is a crucial part of that process and it cannot be expected to develop without training, modelling and structured experience’ (Selinger, 1991:1). Although expressed in many different ways, this view is common in the literature; it embodies the notion that reflection is a mode of thinking that can be identified, described and developed. It also suggests that, given the right set of conditions, a teacher who is not reflective can be transformed into one who is reflective. This transformation requires knowledge and practice. It also requires keen perception because perception is the filter through which individuals interpret their experiences. Unavoidably, our perceptions are influenced by our world view (our individual way of looking at the world) – and our beliefs and values determine
what information we use when reflecting on our experiences. As Hart et al. (1992:41) put it, ‘What we see depends on what we are looking at when we reflect’.

Unless teachers understand what they are doing and why they are doing it, there is little chance that their efforts will result in student learning or that their actions will be morally and ethically appropriate. Reflective teaching should involve ‘searching for patterns about one’s thinking about classroom practices and interrogating the reasons for labelling some lessons as successes or failures’ (Raines & Shadiow, 1995:30). By developing the disposition and the ability to be reflective, teachers can ensure that what they do is both effective and defensible. While it will always be true that deliberation and intention alone will not make teachers’ actions correct or defensible, reflection that is focused on understanding and improving teaching (from both technical and moral perspectives) should be a routine part of each teacher’s everyday activities.

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**Review and reflect on your learning**

Develop answers to each of these questions and discuss your answers with another learner or with an experienced teacher.

1. Why is it important for you to become a reflective practitioner?
2. How would you explain the difference between technical reflection and critical reflection to a teacher who had not previously heard of these concepts?
3. Why is it important for you to try to view your teaching through the eyes of your students?
4. Consider the following questions that a teacher might reflect on after a lesson. What types of reflection (technical, practical, critical) would be prompted by these questions?
   - Did the students achieve the outcomes I intended? Why?
   - Why does it matter whether students achieved these outcomes?
   - Was the strategy I used effective for all students? If it was not, what other strategies might have been more effective?
   - What learning theories might explain what happened in this lesson?
   - As a result of this lesson, what have I learned about teaching?
5. Why is it important to reflect on the things you do well, as well as reflecting on problems and difficulties?
6. In this chapter, some common barriers to reflection were identified. Which of these barriers have you encountered? What did you do about it? What will you do in future if you experience a similar barrier?
7 Develop a checklist of questions to ask yourself when planning lessons and when reviewing your teaching, so that you can continually improve.

8 What are the advantages and limitations of gaining feedback from students to help you reflect on your teaching?

9 What might be the advantages and disadvantages of using a blog as the structure for reflecting on your teaching?

Weblinks

- A useful web-based tool for helping teachers to reflect on their teaching practices is available at the Harvard University Active Learning Practices for Schools website at http://learnweb.harvard.edu/alps.

- To locate an extensive range of books on reflective teaching visit http://books.google.com.au/ and use ‘reflective teaching’ as the search term. For many of these books you can view substantial parts of the text.


- For detailed information about keeping a reflective journal, see the University of Technology Sydney website http://www.clt.uts.edu.au/Scholarship/Reflective.journal.htm.

Visit http://www.cengagebrain.com and search for this book to access the study tools that come with your textbook.