

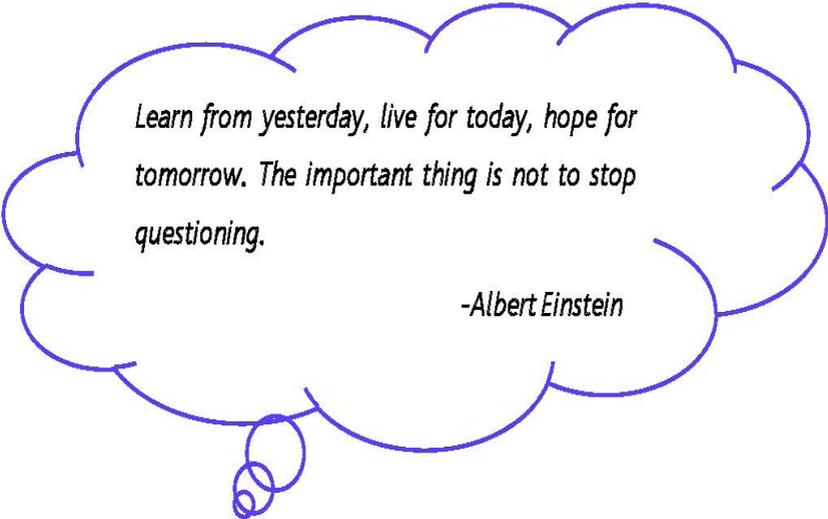


Reflective Practice

Teaching Development Unit, Wāhanga Whakapakari Ako

process identify
assumptions teaching
sequence teachers identity
invisible shifts purposeful
reflecting self-knowledge order Reflective way
chronological enable specific
learning teacher self-reflection Critically
influence whose improve
occurs lives moment thinking
tool pause systematically more
students practice think events
work learners scrutinize situations
experience situation many visible
about Reflection
ways self-awareness

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE



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

-Albert Einstein

This booklet and associated workshop has the following learning outcomes. Participants would be expected to be able to:

- explore their own current perceptions of reflective practice and its usefulness in teaching and learning
- explain the key components of reflective practice
- use a range of tools for reflective practice
- identify and apply strategies for reflective practice in the context of teaching

Task

For five minutes, reflect on what you think might be the benefits of becoming a reflective teacher who inquires into your own practice. These benefits might be theoretical, practical or both. Write them down. If you are at the Reflective Practice workshop, be prepared to share them with others in your group. You may want to capture any ideas about the disadvantages of this approach for later discussion.



List your ideas about the benefits of becoming a reflective practitioner.

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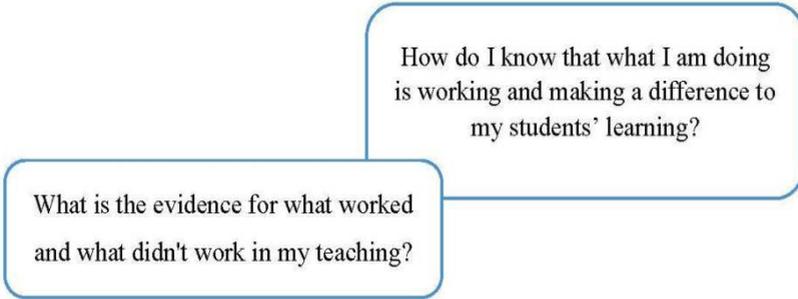
Following group discussion and feedback, list the benefits you have shared or heard below.

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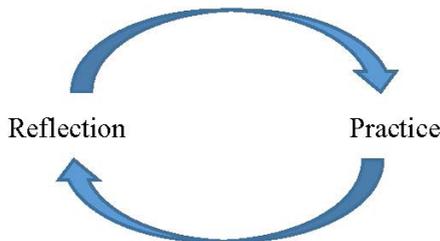
List any reservations or disadvantages you have shared or heard below.

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- *
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1.0 INTRODUCTION



Questions like these have occupied many teachers' minds at different stages of their practices and careers. Preoccupation with such questions often occurs when teachers are forced to confront the situation or the possibility that something was not working the way they assumed it would. Sometimes the best intentions by teachers lead to contrary or unexpected outcomes in learning environments. For instance, the refusal to give explicit directions for assignments in order to prompt self-directedness may be interpreted or understood by students as duplicitous (Brookfield, 1999), or on some occasions as evidence of the teacher's lack of knowledge. In contrast, certain behaviours we have tried to avoid in teaching are, in fact, valued by students as they have helped them to learn more effectively. It is evident that reflection and practice nurture each other in numerous ways in the context of teaching.



Critically reflective teaching occurs when teachers “identity and scrutinize the assumptions that undergird” their teaching and the way they work as teachers (Brookfield, 1999). The questions that arise here are: How to become aware of such assumptions? Are we aware of our own conceptions of teaching? Reflective practice assists teachers to confront inconsistencies between their thinking and their practice, and promote a conceptual change in teachers’ views about teaching. Teachers’ pedagogical thinking informs their decision-making and behaviours in teaching situations.

Ten reflective questions (Ghaye, 2010, p. 3) that may help you think about the assumptions you make when engaging in reflective practices:

1. Values: How should I act?
2. Expectations: What ought I to do?
3. Context: What is actually possible here?
4. Decisions: Is my action justifiable?
5. Options: Could I have done anything better or differently?
6. Judgement: How far was this successful?
7. Strength: What is worth amplifying (getting more of, not less of) next time?
8. Learning: Who has learnt what?
9. Voice: Whose voice has been heard and whose has not?
10. Knowledge: Whose knowledge is worth knowing and why?

Reflective practice for teaching is for those teachers who are disposed to think about their teaching practices, and are willing to put reflective practice into action. Reflective practice challenges teachers who have unquestioned assumptions about good teaching, and encourages them to examine themselves and their practices in the interest of continuous improvement.

2.0 WHAT IS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE?

John Dewey (1993) recognised for the first time that an individual can reflect on things – particularly when there is a real problem or a sense of difficulty – by merely 'thinking' about them. Dewey suggested three steps of reflection: (1) problem definition, (2) analysis, and (3) generalisation. He emphasised the distinction between taking action based on reflection, as opposed to impulsive thinking. The literature on reflective practice in teaching demonstrates several purposes for reflection. They include:

- teacher's self-reflection as a tool for self-knowledge
- reflection for professional development
- reflection to aid research on teaching
- reflection to enhance student learning experience
- reflection as a teaching and assessment tool (e.g. reflective journal)

The notion of reflective practice as a means of professional development was later highlighted by Donald Schön (1987), and promoted reflection as an important tool for beginning teachers to improve their practice. Thuynsma (2001) discussed reflection in teaching as when teachers encounter uncertain conditions or critical incidents.

Other definitions of reflective practice include the following:

“A means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development.” (Osteman & Kottkamp, 1993)

“Reflective practice is an active, dynamic action-based and ethical set of skills, placed in real time and dealing with real, complex and difficult situations.” (Moon, 1999)

Reflective practice is more than a self-awareness process in which we pause and think back after something has happened. The moment we start reflecting upon a situation, we naturally begin to raise questions on 'how that happened?', 'Why it happened that way?', 'Could it be different?' Reflective practice in teaching shifts from thinking about a sequence of chronological events to purposeful thinking in order to identify how to improve specific learning situations. It can enable teachers to think systematically about the learning experience of students whose lives they influence in many visible and invisible ways.

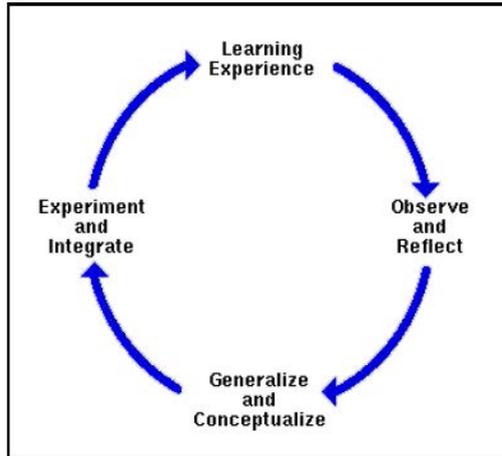
3.0 REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: HOW?

3.1 Using a Reflective Practice Framework

In learning environments and teaching contexts, teachers may encounter situations or episodes where they need to pause, think and make intelligent decisions. Stephen Brookfield (1999) introduces four lenses through which teachers can view these teaching and learning episodes and reflect on their implications. These lenses are: (1) autobiographies as teachers and learners, (2) students' eyes, (3) colleagues' experiences, and (4) the literature on teaching and learning.

The first lens involves putting our autobiographical self in the mirror to understand students' experiences through self-reflection. This can be done by drawing on our own experiences and understanding. This process can also alert us of the assumptions we may have made along the way. The second lens is to see ourselves as students see us, and draw on students' feedback to inform our reflections. This reflective process makes us aware of the invisible power relationships within learning environments that may affect students' learning experiences. The third lens enables us to observe our practice critically from a colleague's perspective. Finally, the fourth lens is research on teaching. It can provide us with insights into other people's practices, through reading literature, for instance. We find various related aspects of the things we have been doing in our own teaching in other people's situations. In other words, they may be named "in different ways [but they are] generic aspects of what we thought were idiosyncratic events and processes" (Brookfield, 1999, p. 30).

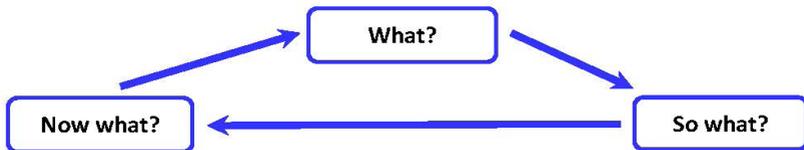
There are several modes and frameworks for reflective practice used for the enhancement of students' learning experience and also professional development. David Kolb (1984) has described the 'experiential learning cycle' where he offers four phases of learning process. In the first phase, the learner has a specific experience of learning. In the second phase, the learner observes and reflects on the experience of learning and also responds to it. In the third phase, observations are related to other concepts in the learner's past experience and knowledge. In the fourth phase, the learner figures out the implications for action that can be tested in and applied to different situations.



Source: David A. Kolb. *Experiential Learning*, New York: Prentice-Hall, 1984.

The second phase of Kolb's (1984) 'experiential learning cycle' has direct bearing on reflective practice. It is in the second phase that the learner observes and reflects on the experience of his/her learning – a concrete experience that has happened or been completed in the first phase. The reflection provides a basis for the learner to relate to or assimilate with past and present experience and knowledge (the third phase). As the result, the increased self-awareness, change of behaviour, and the acquisition of new skills are expected to engage the individual actively in the learning process.

Another reflection model offered by Driscoll (1994) has a simple 'what', 'so what' and 'now what' process, which enables us to look at the whole event.



The reflection model developed by Gibbs (1988) can be useful to reflect on something unexpected that happened in the classroom, when something went wrong (or perhaps extraordinarily well) in the classroom that we did not anticipate. Gibb's model is as follows:



3.2 Using Feedback for Reflection

One important concept that supports and nurtures reflective practice in teaching is feedback. Atkins (1994) recognises a key feature of lifelong learning as being able to "reflect on one's own practice and use feedback to assess and manage one's own performance" (cited in Hinett & Weeden, 2000, p. 246). Feedback can provide us with the impetus to embark upon reflective practice systematically and diligently, and also the evidence we need to make judgments about our performance as a teacher. Glendenning and Cartwright (2011) discuss the principles and processes of constructive feedback and the ways teachers can appreciate the information they receive, effectively respond to, take actions, and implement strategies as a result of the feedback and reflection process in their teaching. Glendenning and Cartwright (2011, p. 166) provide the following structure for reflecting on feedback about teaching. It is useful for encouraging teachers to reflect on the feedback they have received in the past. The process of reflection on feedback also assists us to shape thoughts and ideas around what types of feedback we would like to receive in the future to support our teaching.

Reflective task: What would you like and/or expect from feedback? This task would be even more valuable if conducted in pairs or small groups.

1. Jot down your individual thoughts on the following:
 - Why is it important to receive feedback on your teaching?
 - Who could provide feedback on your teaching?
 - What kind of feedback could you receive?
 - Is all feedback equally useful? Why/why not?
 - Can you give an example of feedback that you think has been really useful, and an example of some that has been less useful?
 - Do you think you need different feedback at different stages in your professional learning?
2. If possible, compare your own thoughts with those of peers or colleagues.
3. Reflect on the extent to which there is common ground. It is always useful for you to reflect on the extent to which your ideas are congruent with those of others, and if not, what the reasons for this might be.

Group reflection is beneficial; a critical friend can see things about your teaching that you cannot see.

3.3 Practical Strategies for Reflection

There are various methods to encourage reflection through writing or conversations, individually or in pair or group reflection, or a combination of these. The way that people capture their reflections is largely dependent on:

- their own learning style
- their discipline – whether they are in a predominantly written-oriented, performance-oriented or oral discipline; and
- what resources they happen to have at hand at the time

For practical reasons, most people capture their reflections in written forms such as diaries, post-it notes on lesson plans, journals, portfolio materials, poetry, sometimes short stories, novels or books. However, some capture reflections in dance, some in drama, some in song.

Scholars have reminded of the quality of journal writing for reflection on teaching, and how reflective they actually are. Research indicates that reflective journals mostly have the form of reports, or descriptive writing (Hume, 2009; Maloney & Campbell-Evans, 2002). Writing journals is the most popular form of reflection among teachers. Moon (1999) devotes one complete chapter to the use of journals for reflection. Writing journals should be sustained in the course of time and on-off type of writing does not ensure that learning has occurred from the reflective process. Moon suggests both unstructured and structured forms of journal writing. Unstructured forms include:

1. 'free writing and reflecting' (chronological but not involved everyday);
2. recording thoughts and reflection of an ongoing event or issue; and
3. 'double-entry journals' where one part of the journal is for recording of the event or what happened, and on the other side we write our reflection on "the written account of the experience" (Moon, 1999, p. 194).

Structured forms of journal writing varies such as 'autobiographical writing', portfolios or profiles, and so on (see Chapter 15 in Moon, 1999).

Reflective journal (and portfolios) should be able to demonstrate the ability to learn from reflective practice, and the ways practice have developed. A personal diary or journal, in fact, is a flexible way of reflecting and it does not need to be kept every day. The key point to remember is that it must both describe and examine learning and teaching situations or events. Generating reflection is an emotional journey which may make us feel uncomfortable at first, but the result is that our knowledge and practice will improve and continue to develop. FitzPatrick and Spiller (2010) discuss the ways in which compiling a (multi-purpose) teaching portfolio through a reflective process can generate complex emotions among teachers.

In the course of writing journals or any other forms of generating and recording reflection that our initial views of the situation or event change, and we gain a different perspective of something that happened. The questions below can assist us to be more focused in the reflection process:

- Have I (critically) questioned my actions, behaviours and speech? What justification do I have?
- Have I been honest and open with myself?
- Have I learned anything from the experience?
- Have I identified the new learning I need to put in practice?
- What is it exactly that I need to do now?

4.0 BUILDING REFLECTION INTO RESEARCH

Reflective practice is important as it deepens what we – as teachers – think teaching is, and stimulate awareness of our 'real' conception of teaching. Reflective practice challenges our emotionally settled impostorship that we may develop on different occasions. What we do is often driven by the exigencies of the moment and we do not always have the opportunity to act the way serve the learning situation best. Reflection enquires in the imperceptibly oppressive aspects of our teaching that neither students, nor us may be aware of. We recognise these aspects only when we deliberately think and question our own practices, behaviours, communicative styles, teaching methods, and beliefs that underlie our teaching. As a result of reflection teachers become more aware of what is the best to happen for students' learning. More recently, such recognition and awareness has led teachers to conduct research on their own teaching (There are, of course, other prompts for conducting research on teaching). You can refer to *Teacher's Reflective Practice Handbook: Becoming an Extended Professional through Capturing Evidence-Informed Practice* (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012) for learning the stages involved in conducting research on your teaching. This handbook is useful in discussing various aspects of research into your teaching, from the research methods involved, to the analysis as well as implementation of research findings.

If we do not take the time to write down or record ideas in some way as these occur to us, we are in danger of losing them. So, as we develop as a reflective practitioner cum teacher-as-researcher, we should find a way of capturing ideas that works for us.

A further benefit of capturing ideas and then formally reflecting on the effectiveness or otherwise of these, is that they are data for academic papers. The idea of the research teaching nexus directly takes us to action research and the ways reflection on teaching turns to an investigation whose outcomes can enhance students' learning experience. McNiff and Whitehead's (2006) definition of action research is possibly close to the idea of reflective practice in teaching:

Action research is a form of enquiry that enables practitioners everywhere to investigate and evaluate their work. They ask, 'What am I doing? What do I need to improve? How do I improve it?' Their accounts of practice show how they are trying to improve their own learning, and influence the learning of others.

For more detailed account of researching on teaching, see TDU's booklet on *Research and Teaching*.

5.0 TEACHER'S REFLECTION ON REFLECTION

Some thoughts from teachers include:

- “When I’ve been doing professional reading, I sometimes come across really great ideas that someone has tried out in their class, and written about. I’d like to try those out in my own work, but the pressures of work often mean that I don’t get around to it unless I actually write into my plan for a subsequent session that I’ll try one of them in that session.”
- “Sometimes, when I’m teaching a session, I’ll get to the end and think that something didn’t go quite right. At the time, I can remember why that happened. But if I don’t write it down, then the next time I come to teach that session I have a gnawing feeling that something didn’t go well, but I’m darned if I can remember what it was! It can make me feel quite anxious about how the session will proceed.”
- “When I’ve been out walking, I’ve often had flashes of insight into how to teach a class in a better way. If I don’t take the time to write down my insight when I get home, I often can’t remember it in the future.”
- “I’ve been observing someone else’s teaching, either in a formal sense when I’ve been asked to give peer feedback, or sometimes through something I’ve seen in a movie or on TV. I think there are some aspects of the way that person is teaching that person is teaching that I’d love to try out. But I don’t always remember how they set the situation up, or what they did, so I can find myself reluctant to try it.”

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