Chapter 1: Reflective Practice

In preparation for reading this chapter, it is important to consider what you already know and what attitudes and belief systems you bring to the activity. To help you do this, the following questions are provided to focus your reflections.

- Q1. What is reflection?
- Q2. Who needs to reflect?
- Q3. Is it important for me?
- Q4. How does it help me?
- Q5. Do I think reflection is important for teachers? Why?

Introduction

Teaching is very demanding work. It requires a lot of energy, stamina and fortitude. Among all the physical activity however, it is important to remain focused on what may be identified as the more 'intellectual' aspects of the teaching profession. This is significant for several reasons. Arguably the most important of these is your obligation as a beginning teacher or an aspiring teacher to make increasingly well-informed decisions in the context of your everyday practice. This is because teaching is a profession in which demanding

situations arise on a daily basis. Frequently there are no right or wrong answers, no procedures to follow, no time or opportunity to consult with supervising staff or colleagues. In some cases you may have the possibility of discussing with and receiving advice about incidents or concerns from appropriate others. Often, however, as a certified teacher (or even as a student teacher), you may simply be advised or expected to use your professional judgement. This may be a reasonable expectation, as it allows you to develop your skills in relation to decision making and problem solving in your specific educational context. However, it does assume that you are well-informed or have some experience of the reflective process. It assumes that you have a framework within which to consider your options and determine any possible action. Robins et al. (2003) describe reflective practice as a tool that allows teachers, student teachers and teaching assistants to understand themselves, their personal philosophies and the dynamics of their classroom more deeply. While acknowledging the critics who argue that there is little evidence that reflection actually changes behaviour, they propose that the process of engaging in reflection not only provides a personal resource that can be accessed in other similar contexts, but is also a tool that empowers individuals who use it. This is because engagement with the process of focused thinking supports self knowledge and understanding (White, 2004; Wieringa, 2011).

The capacity to engage with your professional work in this manner is not always easy. One reason is that classrooms are busy, fast-moving work environments within which pupils of diverse characteristics are engaging in an extremely important undertaking: that of learning new knowledge, skills and strategies. Another is that any framework or other tool to support your professional development is only as beneficial as the user is proficient. In order to develop the skills and competencies of an expert teacher, you need to engage in reflection. Reflective practice, over time, allows you to become skilful in making informed judgements and professional decisions, and is empowering (Robins et al., 2003). Authentic engagement in reflection supports your efforts to become contemplative, to improve your professional competencies and to identify your personal strengths and relative limitations as a teacher. It is because of its potential to impact positively on individual practice that reflection is arguably the most important of the many professional attributes that characterise successful teachers at every stage of their careers (White, 2004).

What is Reflection?

Reflection is very broadly able to be defined as the deliberate, purposeful, metacognitive thinking and/or action in which educators engage in order to improve their professional practice. Different theories, models and levels of

reflection have most commonly focused on differentiating the major elements of this construct:

- the conditions, situations or circumstances that prompt engagement in the reflective process
- the process itself, different types of reflection, different concepts or opinions on how this is undertaken
- the content of the reflection, what exactly needs to be analysed, examined, discussed, challenged in the reflective process and with what perspectives or ideologies
- the product of the reflection, improved understanding of professional practice, action taken as a result of the reflective thinking.

The brief overview of understandings of reflection in educational practice that follows illustrates some of these differences as proposed by various writers in this field.

What Does the Literature Say about Reflection?

It is not possible to discuss all the writings about reflection, but a variety of ideas are presented here to provide some background for your own reading and research and to establish some common understanding of different ways of engaging with the reflective process.

No introduction to reflection in education, however brief, would be possible without discussing the early work of Dewey. His 1933 work *How We Think* is considered to be seminal in this area and was based on the ideas of a number of earlier philosophers and educators. Dewey's own definition of reflection as a cognitive *process* – 'the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends' (1933: 9) – indicates some of the basic characteristics that underpin almost all models and theories of reflection. However, he stresses the active, conscious, deliberate *thinking* in this particular type of problem solving. He also emphasises the rational, logical analysis of the problem, in which ideas are ordered and then linked together in a meaningful way. It was then intended that this 'chain' of thoughts was rigorously examined for any assumptions, underlying beliefs or knowledge that had been utilised in the formulating of a solution and any evidence that supported these ideas (Calderhead, 1989). This process relies heavily on the use of scientific theory to guide teaching practice and so the current and emerging scientific theories of that time are the predominant criteria in the evaluative processes of reflection. As a deliberate, reasoned, almost scientific activity, Dewey (1933) distinguished reflective thinking from

everyday, routine thinking and especially from impulsive thinking. Included in his notion of routine thinking was the thinking (and any subsequent actions) that resulted from an individual's automatic adherence to rules originating from authority or from tradition. He proposed instead that action taken as a result of reflective thinking was 'intelligent action' (Calderhead, 1989: 44), because the aspects of the issue had been considered rationally and the practitioner had undergone periods of doubt and uncertainty while working towards finding a solution. Dewey (1933) proposed that opportunities for reflective thinking were prompted mainly by *practical events* that created feelings of disquiet or confusion or by a sense of wonder and awe. These were to be resolved by the persistent, reasoned thinking that he identified as reflection, and this thinking was to be guided by the goal in mind. Dewey's understanding of the role of reflection is that it is undertaken to develop the knowledge and expertise of teaching.

Despite its importance and the heavy reliance of other theorists on his work, Dewey's notion on reflection has been challenged in several ways over the decades by other writers in this area. One of the most important critiques revolves around the notion that Dewey conceptualised reflection as the process of *thinking* about action and had not significantly linked it to action taken as the result of reflective thinking, despite introducing the term reflective action, which would complete what was identified as the 'reflective cycle' (Gore and Zeichner, 1991; Noffke and Brennan, 1988), which most theorists understand to be the *purpose* of engaging in reflection. Indeed, some writers (e.g. Calderhead, 1989) are openly dismissive of reflection that does not result in action. The very popular theory on reflection developed by Schon (1983, 1987, 1991) introduces some new ideas on the reflective process itself, most especially on the implication in Dewey's (1933) theory that reflection is necessarily a process embarked on after the event, is a long, ponderous undertaking and also on the content of reflection itself.

Schon (1983, 1987, 1991) suggests two levels of reflection: (i) reflection-in-action and (ii) reflection-on-action, partly based on Dewey's (1933) work. While Schon's (1983) theory differs in the criteria that constitute the content of reflection, in that he does not consider teaching to be the implementation of scientific theory in the sense that Dewey (1933) theorised, he, and others who are inspired by Dewey's work to support reflective teaching (e.g. Cruickshank, 1985), do not offer any suggestions regarding what precisely in their practice teachers do need to be reflective about. Reflection-on-action does have some of the same characteristics, specifically that the reflective process is undertaken after the event, problem or situation that initiated the process. However, Schon (1983) offers an interesting departure from the perception that problems for reflection are necessarily reflected upon after the event. He suggests that reflection-in-action is a concept that

celebrates the art of teaching, in that it allows for continual interpretation, investigation and reflective conversation with oneself about the problem while employing the information gained from past experiences to inform and guide new actions.

This process of experimentation, reflection and action combined, is cyclically conducted as the problem is continuously framed and reframed and as solutions to complex or ambiguous problems are systematically sought. This approach allows for contextually orientated experimentation in problem solving; it is a way of using past experiences, reflection and action to experimentally problem solve 'on the spot' where the circumstances are confused or unclear. Schon (1983) indicates that understanding new perspectives or views is not enough. He states that '[r]eflection-in-action necessarily involves experiment' (p. 141), indicating that reflection–in-action and the new ideas that evolve as a result must be trialled in a supportive professional arena – the classroom context. In this respect, Schon is acknowledging the experiences of the teacher as a source of knowledge that is valuable in the reflective practice. However, the notion of reflection-in-action requires that teachers have some appropriate, relevant experience upon which to draw and that they have reached a level of teacher competence from which they can reflect and act simultaneously (Hatton and Smith, 1995). This observation, in turn, suggests that teachers are more likely to be able to successfully engage with the cycle that constitutes reflection-in-action as a result of prior engagement in the reflection-in-action process. What remains to be established is what exactly was the circumstance in the relevant experiences that could be usefully drawn upon and what was the content of the reflection and from which perspective or viewpoint was it analysed?

Gore and Zeichner (1991) address these issues. While supporting both Cruickshank's (1985) and Schon's (1983, 1987, 1991) commitment to the development of reflective practitioners, they highlight the importance of both the quality and type of the reflection undertaken: the content of the reflection and the criteria that were considered. They note:

> Neither Cruickshank (1985) nor Schon (1983, 1987, 1988) have much to say about what it is that teachers ought to be reflecting about, the kinds of criteria that should come into play during the process of reflection (e.g. what distinguishes good from unacceptable educational practice) and the degree to which teachers' deliberations should incorporate a critique of the institutional contexts in which they work (V. Richardson, 1990). In some extreme cases, the impression is given that as long as teachers reflect about something, in some manner, whatever they decide to do is acceptable, since they have reflected about it. (Gore and Zeichner, 1991: 120)

Gore and Zeichner (1991) then discuss four 'varieties' of teacher reflective practice, which each have a different focus:

1. an academic version, which focuses on teachers' skills in disseminating the discipline content and presenting in such a way as to maximise its accessibility for their students;
2. a social efficacy version, which is based on research findings and focuses on evidence-based practice;
3. a developmental version, which primarily considers age and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies that focus on students' interests and thinking; and finally
4. the social reconstructionist version, in which reflection is focused on the political and social issues of schooling and on classroom interactions designed to promote greater student equity and justice. (Gore and Zeichner, 1991: 121)

There is considerable value in each of these versions of reflection; however, no one of these alone constitutes adequate, appropriate teacher reflection. While there may be a dominant focal point for reflection, the other foci also need to be considered for good teaching and reflective action to be authentic. Gore and Zeichner (1991) identify the social reconstructionist variety as 'critical reflection' although the term has a number of interpretations. Calderhead (1989) appears to use the term loosely as a general term for self criticism in reflection, while others (e.g. Gore, 1987) use the term consistently to indicate that the reflection is based on a particular set of ideological principles, and the beliefs and assumptions that are embedded in the precise philosophy that is being utilised as a frame of reference.
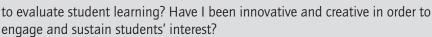
What Does This Mean for You?

Gore and Zeichner (1991) propose that each of these four types of reflection is important. They indicate four major aspects of your professional work. You need to ask and reflect on pertinent questions about each of these aspects in order to develop a deep understanding of your classroom interactions. These are some suggestions for questions you might think about in order to gain a holistic understanding of your professional work and your role in supporting successful learning by your students. You will be able to add others yourself.

1. *Academic reflection*: Do I know my content really well? Am I using appropriate pedagogical strategies for my students' needs? Am I well-organised and resourced in readiness to teach? Have I sequenced the content suitably for my students' needs and defining characteristics of my discipline? Have I completed the planning cycle with suitable, relevant assessment strategies

to evaluate student learning? Have I been innovative and creative in order to engage and sustain students' interest?

2. *Social efficacy reflection:* Am I implementing what I know from research about teaching this content? Have I considered specific strategies that have proven to increase student academic success? Have I considered any differences in the context and participants used in the research and my cohort and circumstances? Is this evidence-based practice meeting the needs of the students in my class?

3. *Developmental reflection:* Am I providing teaching and learning contexts, tasks and instruction that are suitable and appropriate for the age and stage of my students from a developmental perspective? Have I evaluated my students' skills and thinking to determine the stages at which each of them is able to engage in different learning contexts? Have I planned suitable instructional and task modifications to accommodate the differences in the students' thinking, emotional and physical capacities? Have I designed teaching and learning activities that are interesting for diverse groups of students? Have I taken into account and effectively utilised students' various interests to design lessons and curriculum?

4. *Social reconstructionist (critical) reflection:* What do I believe to be the purpose of education? Do I have specific philosophical beliefs or viewpoints about the values, purposes and functions of education? Have I critically evaluated the statements from my education authorities who articulate the purpose of schooling in my geographical location? Have I considered who determines the curriculum that is designed to meet the nominated purpose of education? Have I considered in what ways the curriculum supports or neglects the learning needs of students from different social, cultural and individual groups? Are there ways in which I can implement the mandatory curricula in my classroom to minimise any disadvantage to particular students or student groups? How can I mitigate any shortcomings in the system to provide more equitable education for all my students? Have I analysed compulsory tests or assessment items to identify bias or prejudice and taken appropriate measures to overcome or to diminish the impact of these where possible?

Different Levels of Reflection

This notion of different levels or types of reflective foci is not new. Van Manen (1977) had earlier developed three levels of reflection based on the work of Habermas as a hierarchical structure. The first level is *technical reflection*. At this level what is considered is the effectiveness and efficiency of achieving predetermined goals. These goals are not the focus of any

criticism, modification or change. All that is reflected upon are the competencies and processes that are required to achieve these goals. The second level is *practical reflection*. At this level, the processes or the means by which the goals can be achieved, their underlying rationale and outcomes along with the goals themselves are subject to analysis, examination and assessment. The third level is *critical reflection* which is concerned with informing the practical reflection by incorporating moral and ethical considerations related to the problem into the discussion with the purpose of supporting student equity, justice care and compassion without personal bias. Although both Van Manen's (1977) and Valli's (1997) frameworks (detailed below) have been criticised as hierarchies (Hatton & Smith, 1995), they are certainly useful in that they offer different aspects of reflection practice that are important for teacher consideration.

Valli's (1992) model of reflection incorporates many aspects of Schon's and Van Manen's frameworks. She describes five levels of reflection. The first is *technical reflection*, which is much as described by Van Manen (1977). This is where students match their own competencies to professional standards, graduate competencies, the external goals and competencies of teaching, and continue to work on improving their professional performance in relation to these predetermined benchmarks. The second level, labelled *reflection-in-and-on-action*, is taken directly from Schon (1983) and combines the ongoing engagement with reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, highlighting the need for ongoing reframing, reconsideration and self discussion of problems, both in the context of teaching itself and as reflection after the event. The third level, *deliberative reflection*, requires teachers to actively seek and consider various viewpoints in relation to pedagogical decision making. It demands that you have a strong research base from which to develop your pedagogical practice and from which to determine how to meet the diverse needs of your learners. The fourth level, *personalistic reflection*, is the development of an awareness of the impact of emotions, intuitions and self knowledge on your own cognition and, in turn, on your relationship with your learners and their personal growth. The final level is *critical reflection*, which follows the under-standing of Gore (1987) and others and includes a focus on social, moral, political and ethical issues. It incorporates the development of open-minded-ness, rational judgement and creativity. Although a considerable degree of overlap can easily be identified in the levels of reflection discussed, Valli's (1997) framework is the only one that explicitly acknowledges the impact of emotion, feelings and personal attributes on cognition, although others have identified it as a metacognitive activity (Calderhead, 1989; Cruickshank, 1985; Gore and Zeichner, 1991; Jay and Johnson, 2002).

Ultimately, however, while each of the models discussed (and many others that are not) has afforded valuable insights into the reflection for you, the reflective process itself is an intensely personal practice. Reflective practice that is overly dominated by prescription to any ideology, imposed values

or academic evaluation is at risk of being less than authentic. Individual, personal reflection has been considered unproductive in the past (Hatton and Smith, 1995), as it has been considered to be prone to be influenced by individual bias and to be unlikely to consider individually held underlying assumptions or to consider different perspectives. However, Vartuli (cited in Heydon and Hibbert, 2010: 796) comments that the research literature confirms that teachers' beliefs are at the heart of their practice. Kinsella (2001) writes that reflective practitioners reflect on themselves, including their assumptions, and use their insights to inform their practice. Mayer (1999) concludes that teacher identities are developed from the individual's personal feelings and how they identify with being a teacher. Although he separates these aspects from teacher function, it is clear that they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin, as one cannot help but impact on another. Habermas (1974), in developing a critical science concept of reflection, regards it as self determined action. Calderhead (1989: 44) comments on this perspective, noting:

> Reflection is viewed as a process of becoming aware of one's context, of the influence of societal and ideological constraints on previously taken-for-granted practices, and gaining control over the direction of these influences.

It appears that all theories acknowledge that teacher reflection is, of necessity, based in experience. Every individual experiences what occurs in their lives differently. It is essentially a very personal interpretation of events which is mediated by several other paradigms, including prior experiences and personal beliefs and values. Given the importance of the individual beliefs, feelings, knowledge of own assumptions, understandings of their individual professional contexts and the responsibility of each of you to be self determined, Valli's (1997) *personalistic reflection* may pave the way for a more authentic, personal, reflective model more closely related to an epistemological perspective. That is, a perspective that reflects what the individual believes about knowledge construction, and their personal definitions of truth and reality. You can see that:

- some levels of reflection are more complex than others
- as student teachers or beginning teachers, you will feel some aspects to be of more urgent consideration that others on occasion (Conway, 2001)
- different situations will often require that you engage in different aspects of reflection and these will become the major focus of your activity.

What is important about the notions of reflection discussed is that, irrespective of your starting point, you do need to engage in each of these aspects of reflection described and you do need to engage with these facets authentically as an individual who recognises and acknowledges the

origins and impact of your own belief systems, values and interpretations of what constitutes the role of the professional teacher. Because of your unique experiences, your perspectives in relation to a range of professional considerations will be very personal. One of the difficulties of reflective practices in the past is the perceived importance of being objective. However, the philosophical debate regarding a person's capacity to present a totally objective perspective becomes a moot point in face of the notion that all objectivity is first understood as subjective experience (Nisbett, 2005). As you critically scrutinise the origins, validity and limitations of your personal beliefs, values and principles that help you to understand your experiences, you are able to become more open to other perspectives and interpretations. From this starting point a more realistic approach to reflection practice and its potential to enhance your practice becomes possible; an approach that values the holistic nature of individuals can be developed.

Questions for Reflection

- Q1. Are there any ideas or information in these short overviews which are new for you?
- Q2. Which levels of reflective practice (if any) have you engaged with to date in your teacher preparation course?
- Q3. Are there any ideas here that you would like to discuss or challenge?
- Q4. Have you previously considered the notion of individual objectivity?
- Q5. What do you think the characteristics of an authentic reflection model may look like?
- Q6. Are you able to develop some sample questions that may be useful for supporting reflective practice in each aspect of, for example, Valli's model of reflection?

A Personal Model of Reflection

As reflection is understood to be learning based on experience, it is not surprising that Kolb's (1994) Experiential Learning Cycle provides a framework within which to organise the basic components of a Personal Reflection Model (see Figure 1.1). The first step is to acknowledge the conditions that prompt reflection by identifying an experience upon which to reflect and then describing it. This is the *What?*, which is followed by *So What?*, which requires individuals to analyse the content of the experience in terms of their own understanding of the situation and also in terms of what needs to be discussed, evaluated or challenged. The final phase is *Now What?*, which is

conventionally understood to mean what ought to be done or what needs to be done. The final phase of this model as it is currently presented requires action of some sort. This reintroduces the debate regarding the necessity for reflection to result in action being taken in order to be educative and useful to you. There are a number of problems for aspiring and beginning teachers when faced with this requirement for action. These include:

- Who decides what *ought* to be done and whose belief systems and values are being promoted, supported or actioned in this decision?
- There are a number of societal and ideological restraints associated with educational workplaces that mean that these contexts do not readily accommodate the desired action, irrespective of how it may facilitate improvement in the teaching and learning process.
- A third concern focuses on the skills and capacities of the individuals engaged in the reflective cycle to actually execute the action in the event that a consensually agreed action could be determined.

Despite these limitations, however, these basic three phases of reflection are a useful starting point for a personal model of reflection designed to stimulate focused thinking without necessarily having to take action. The model presented for reflection in this instance acknowledges reflective practice as a metacognitive activity. It is an activity where you are asked to think about your own thinking processes, beliefs, values and understandings. It does not separate cognition from personal emotional responses and promotes discussion of the underlying factors that shape individual views, values and beliefs. It utilises both aspects of Gardner's (1993) intrapersonal intelligence domain in order to fully incorporate your own self knowledge and your capacity to use this information to achieve your goals related to developing authentic reflective practice. It incorporates Kolb's (1994) three-part cycle as a means of simply organising the processes embedded in the reflective process itself.

The first consideration is always what exactly needs to be reflected upon. This may be an exceptionally positive, rewarding teaching experience or professional interaction or a matter that you find challenges you in some way and for which you need to think through a satisfactory answer or solution. If rules, guidelines and standards are not to be accepted blindly and acted upon superficially, then there are always experiences that need to be purposefully thought through. The selection of an experience for reflection depends heavily on your individual priorities and how you were prompted by specific aspects of the encounter. You are frequently the person who determines what is significant enough to merit purposeful consideration at a later stage or at the moment of the event. Even at this early, descriptive stage, it is useful for you to bear in mind that the actual recount of the experience, if the situation is reflection-on-action, is an essentially personal version of

Phase (Kolb, 1994)	Questions related to self (Gardner, 1993)
What?	Why have I selected this experience as a focus for reflection? What makes it important for me consciously and purposefully think about this experience at this time?
So What?	What is the focus here as I understand it? Is there more than one level of reflection that I think needs to be considered as a focus for discussion in this experience? In identifying my focus what level(s) am I prioritising in my reflection? Why would that be so? Do my priorities reflect my values and beliefs about the nature of teachers' professional work? Do my priorities reflect anything about how I am developing as a prospective teacher? Do I need to engage at a level of reflection that necessitates engaging with ethical and moral considerations? (critical reflection)
Now What?	Do I need to take action or just think about what action may be appropriate if the circumstances permitted? Do I have the skills, knowledge and strategies to make a well-informed decision about what action may be able to be taken? Can I realistically take action? What personal, social and ideological influences have impacted on the action I would take? How does my proposed action reflect my understanding and personal beliefs regarding what constitutes ethical, professional, effective teaching and the role of the teacher? Are my decisions and proposed actions congruent with my ethical and moral perspectives? Do I have the motivation, perseverance and capacities required to activate my plans successfully?

Figure 1.1   A Personal Model of Reflection

what occurred. While there is certainly no doubt that common understanding does exist between individuals and in society in general, any recount reflects the interpretation of the person compiling it. An experience that may concern or challenge one individual may not present itself as an event or occurrence worth thinking about to you or to others.

The second phase is the analytical stage. It is at this stage that the focus or foci of the experience need to be determined. This usually changes as you gain more experience and gain a greater understanding of contexts of education. For you as aspiring and beginning teachers, reflecting on your own teaching for the first time, the focus could frequently be on the more technical goals related to the profession. It may be a priority to check your own or individual pupils' performances against the levels of the standards or other benchmarks established by others as they are understood by the student teachers at that time. As can be seen in various models already

described, there is little discussion or challenge about the actual measures themselves as they are defined for the purpose of gauging professional competencies. The practical implications of these may differ to reflect your relative strengths and limitations when you engage in the next stage. This following stage engages you in the consideration of the ways and means that these goals may be achieved. However, your rather narrow focus, in time and with some experience, needs to expand beyond basic skills and competencies and it is at this stage that you are able to become most acutely aware of your assumptions, belief systems and personal values and the impact that these have on your professional understandings and ideals. It is important to look inward and examine why you hold certain attitudes and perspectives and to challenge personal views and to assess the quality of the veracity and trust-worthiness of their foundations. This activity, if engaged with authentically, allows you to examine your assumptions, prejudices, preferences and bias and assess their impact on your professional choices, decisions and practice. It can be argued that it is at this stage that the essence of professionalism comes into play because engaging at the level of critical reflection necessitates the inclusion of moral and ethical beliefs as a crucial part of the reflective process.

The final stage of reflection is the stage when action is planned, options considered and perhaps some intervention or scheme is implemented. However, any prospective action or plans in this stage are significantly determined by the analysis and the level of reflection that was the focus of the preceding stage. The decisions regarding any potential action are guided by available information, your instincts, your previously related experiences and the ethical and moral considerations that guided any critical reflection. In order to plan effectively for decision making, prepare proposed changes to practice or develop a new mindset it is important to be as well-informed as possible. Many professional experiences have the potential to be enhanced, even if reflected upon retrospectively, if sufficient knowledge and understanding are part of the reflective process. Self knowledge is also as important in the final stage as it was in the analytical stage before it, most especially if action actually is to be taken. The *Now What?* should be reflective of your personally held values, perspectives and competencies in relation to the focus of the reflection in order to be authentic. Ideally, the ideologies, social restraints, limitations of context and personal perspectives that are embedded in decision making and potential action should be:

- transparent
- reasoned and founded in fact, ethical considerations and professional values
- open to discussion and alternative perspectives.

However, in many practical situations, the planning for action and decision making components are not complete until they are activated. Because of this, you need to consider if you have the personal capacities to follow through with the planned actions. This is significant, not only to the required knowledge, skills and strategies but also to various personal attributes that will impact on your potential for success. These attributes include motivation, persistence and capacity to persevere when difficulties arise.

Questions for Reflection

- Q1. Are there any aspects of this model that might have helped you determine a course of action while on professional experience?
- Q2. Does this model incorporate the aspects that you nominated as contributing to an authentic model of reflection?
- Q3. Do you think that engaging with professional experiences using this process has the potential to support improved professional practice for you?

Practice in Reflection

Reflection is not always easy. Many professional experiences are challenging in so many ways that it can initially be difficult to conscientiously expend the time and energy required to systemically think through experiences that have proved less than optimal or even those that were serendipitously successful. The most successful approach may be to engage regularly in reflective practice with a small group of peers or with a suitable partner. Interaction of this nature, where individuals can respectfully challenge their own and others' assumptions, can both nurture the habit of engaging in the reflective process and facilitate a deeper understanding of the origins of diverse opinions and perspectives (Burrows, 1995). Additionally, this engagement with others can result in the participants broadening their knowledge base, developing increasingly skilful ways of identifying the focus of reflection and becoming more conscious of the importance of critical, professional reflection.

However, as it is unlikely that any two professional experiences are identical, it may be useful to provide some common focus for the discussions. McGovern (2012) describes the use of carefully chosen objects and literature to facilitate the conversation in the reflection component of his service learning classes; the purpose of which is to help students identify and articulate their own beliefs and values. While a similar purpose can be identified in the use of reflective conversations for student teachers, in this instance, scenarios

have been developed to illustrate some of the tensions and conflicts that characterise teaching as a profession. The scenario below and those that are presented for discussion in the following chapters are examples of experiences that can be part of any teacher's professional life. They are useful for reflective practice because there are no 'correct' answers. The diverse responses of individual teachers and students to these situations serve to illustrate both the complexity of teaching as a profession and the need to have a reflective framework from which to unpack, analyse and determine a response, albeit a theoretical response in this context.

The experiences described in the scenarios stem from issues that arise from foundational beliefs or theories about teachers' work, the role of teachers as professionals and current notions of 'best practice' that are commonly used in the development of standards. Frequently, although the standards or benchmarks themselves are not usually the subject of any challenge or change, these measures include assumptions about the commonality of beliefs and value systems and about your degree of understanding and interpretation. As a result, benchmarks and professional teaching standards are often presumed to be interpreted and understood in the same way by all members of the profession, despite their personal diversity. In practice, this is unlikely to be the case, as individuals invariably interpret each construct in terms of their own knowledge and experience. Consequently, many aspects of teaching standards and benchmarks provide fertile ground for discussion, analysis and reflective practice.

Scenario One

James had just completed his teaching degree and was very excited when he was offered his first appointment in a large, local primary school. He had visited for the first time before the summer break for his orientation and to ensure he would be as organised as possible for his first few weeks of 'real' teaching. All was going smoothly and he felt quite comfortable and confident until he entered the staffroom towards the end of the lunch break to wait for the principal, whom he was yet to meet. In the staffroom, several experienced members of staff were discussing the new principal's plans for the upcoming school year. It appeared that he had decided, with encouragement from the local secondary school, to experiment with new class structures for all but the youngest pupils. The other pupils were to be organised in 'performance' groups for literacy and numeracy each day. They were then to be assigned a particular teacher for their group for the year. This meant that the pupils might have as many as three teachers during

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the day instead of the usual arrangement of one teacher to one group of pupils identified as their class. If the literacy or numeracy teacher they were assigned happened to be their class teacher, then those pupils experienced less movement and less changes of teachers.

The teachers in the staffroom were debating the proposed changes, when another teacher came in and joined the conversation. She went on to explain that she knew of other information relating to the changes. It appeared that the principal had decided that the most experienced teachers should teach the most needy learners and that the less experienced teachers should teach those who had already demonstrated appropriate competencies in one or other area of learning. Additionally, the groups identified as 'needy' were to be small, with the group size increasing in proportion with the learners' proficiencies. She explained that the groups of needy learners were to be flexible in order to permit them to progress to the other groups as they developed increased competencies. All the restructuring was to be discussed in detail at the staff meeting day at the end of the term.

At this meeting, James was invited to join the other staff members who were reflecting on the implications of the changes. Initially, there were debates and suggestions regarding the supervised movement of pupils from one class to another, the timetable was reorganised to accommodate whole-school literacy and numeracy blocks and a plan for sharing resources was devised. After lunch the teachers were to determine, with the help of the principal, which teachers were to be assigned to the performance groups. Over lunch James listened attentively to the debate about the notion of placing the more experienced teachers with the smaller groups of learners who needed explicit support.

The staff members had obviously taken the time to think the ideas through. They appeared happy with the screening process that had been developed and the idea that flexibility was a key aspect of the programme, but there was some concern about three aspects of the plan. One concerned the provision of appropriate, challenging, teaching and learning tasks for the high achievers if they were in the classes allocated to the less experienced teachers. This was mentioned, they assured James, not because they felt less experienced teachers were not well-prepared but because these learners, when grouped together, needed to be provided for in a variety of ways that were not just extensions of the class activities and they considered that to be a considerable challenge for a beginning teacher. Another concern related to the organisation of the 'flexible' phases when pupils had opportunities to visit and contribute to each other's activities. They agreed that a planned schedule would help them organise that aspect of the restructuring. The third worry concerned the limited range

of experience that the newer members of staff would have in supporting the learning of pupils with difficulties in the key areas of numeracy and literacy.

As they left the staffroom on their way to the meeting in the library, James wondered how the principal would respond to the concerns that had been discussed. He was surprised to see as he walked into the library that there was a question written on the whiteboard in large letters. He read 'What is the purpose of education?' He was even more surprised to see the staff laughing and shaking their heads. It was, apparently, a familiar question for these teachers and they began to write their responses on the paper provided. James felt uneasy. It was not the type of 'big picture' question that had been a priority during his teacher preparation, although it had been discussed. He sat, wondering how to respond. What was he going to write on the otherwise blank page that had his name on it?

This scenario presents a predicament explicitly related to professional work. What is the purpose of it all? It illustrates the situation that often arises from the challenges implicit in proposed changes to traditionally held views of schooling. In general, as can be seen in the following chapter, professional standards for teachers generally include statements relating to the requirement for teachers to provide quality education for all learners and to develop the capacities to recognise aspects of diversity and to adapt their practice in order to ensure this goal for all learners is met. What might you consider in order to answer the following questions? Where could you begin your analysis? What important aspects of professional practice might you reflect upon first? In order to facilitate the process, the guiding questions in the Personal Reflection Model described in Figure 1.1 have been customised so they reflect the content of this scenario (see Figure 1.2). As it is often a temptation for students new to the reflective process to try to determine the *Now What?* before engaging in the analytical process that is embedded in the *So What?*, it may be useful to record your answers to each of the questions in the second phase. In this way, the congruence between your analysis and your proposed course of action can remain strong.

Questions for Reflection

- Q1. Are there multiple issues here for reflection? List them.
- Q2. What is the issue for critical reflection?
- Q3. In James' situation, what would you contribute to the discussion?

Phase Kolb, 1994)	Questions related to self (Gardner, 1993)
What?	Would I have selected this experience as a focus for reflection if I were James? What makes it important for me consciously and purposefully think about this experience at this time?
So What?	What are the many foci here as I understand them? What are the levels of reflection (technical, practical and critical or choose from one of the other models that incorporate various types/levels of reflection. Use whichever to help you work through your experience) that I think need to be considered as foci for discussion in this experience? In identifying my focus/foci what level/s am I prioritising in my reflection? Why would that be so? Do my priorities reflect/include consideration of my values and beliefs as a beginning teacher about the nature of teachers' professional work? Do my priorities reflect anything about how I am trying to develop as a beginning teacher? Do I need to engage at a level of reflection that necessitates engaging with my personal ethical and moral considerations (critical reflection) (i) about the purpose and process of education and (ii) my obligation to meet all students' learning needs?
Now What?	What response (action), based on my responses to phase two, would I need to take at the staff meeting when asked to join the discussion about the principal's proposed changes to the organisation and content of lessons in literacy and numeracy? Do I have the skills, knowledge and strategies to make a well-informed decision about the response I may make? If not, does this impact on my response? Can I realistically take action? Is it appropriate of me in this instance to make a response, given that I am the most recent recruit to the school's team of teachers? What personal, social and ideological influences have impacted on the response I would make? How does my proposed action reflect my understanding and personal beliefs regarding what constitutes ethical, professional, effective teaching and the purpose of education? Are my decisions and proposed actions congruent with my ethical and moral perspectives? Do I have the motivation, perseverance and capacities required to activate any ideas I may suggest in my response and to follow them through as successfully as possible?

Figure 1.2 The Personal Reflection Model for Scenario One

Conclusion

This chapter introduces the notion of reflective practice. It provides a brief overview of some of the models of reflection that have been developed over a number of years to support reflective practice in teaching and other professions. Additionally, it discusses some major differences in how the components of reflective practice have been defined and the impact that

these variations can have on how you understand and apply strategies in this aspect of your professional work. In addition to identifying some differences, the main phases of reflection, about which there appears to be some consensus, have been discussed. There is also agreement that professional teacher reflection is inextricably linked to professional experiences, whether *in action* or as recounted incidents known as *on action*. Despite a traditional tendency to applaud the attempts of reflective practitioners to be 'objective' in their deliberations, a Personal Reflection Model, based on Gardner's (1993) intrapersonal intelligence domain and utilising Kolb's (1994) three-phase framework, has been developed as a more authentic approach to facilitate improved professional performance in the current climate of increased teacher accountability, newly developed professional standards and changing societal and ideological expectations.

There is also an acknowledgement of the potential for individual interpretations and perspectives on the nature of your work as presented in various professional standards and the need for you, as a prospective teacher, to investigate and to reflect on the concepts and assumptions that underpin your standards, especially if they are presented as mandatory documents. This chapter is developed in such a way as to provide a paradigm for the chapters that follow. There will be discussions of literature, opportunities for you to think about personal knowledge, opinions and perspectives as an ongoing activity and scenarios on which to focus your thinking. This provision of scenarios for discussion provides content for a shared conversation, a means by which you can collegially work together to identify and explore your personally held values and beliefs in relation to your professional work. These conversations also provide opportunities for you to explore some implications of the theoretical and ideological underpinnings that are integral elements of many types of professional standards for teachers. The purpose of engaging authentically with the predicaments and complexities that are conveyed in the scenario recounted in this chapter and those in the chapters that follow, will also serve to provide contexts that allow you to become familiar with, and skilful in, the identification, analysis and planning process that constitute professional reflection for teachers.

How you organise your thinking, record your thoughts and reflections, is really up to you. There are a number of commonly utilised ways of recording which others have found very useful. These include pairing with a carefully selected 'critical friend' for discussion (Burrows, 1995), journalling your own ideas and perspectives in order to develop a deep understanding of yourself (Dinkelman, 2003; Francis, 1995), art making as an expression of self (Grushka, 2005), reflective writing (Hoover, 1994; Nyaumwe and Mtetwa, 2011), action research studies and field-based experiences (Kemmis, 2011; Liston and Zeichner, 1990; Zeichner, 1981), blogging (Killeavy and Moloney,

2010), video making and online discussions (Ozcinar and Deryakulu, 2011), working with the Zen Buddhist notion of 'mindfulness' (Tremmel, 1993), using frameworks and strategies as developed here and elsewhere (Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan, 1994), and developing digital portfolios (Wade and Yarbrough, 1996). The opportunities are endless. In the following chapters you will find discussions of some of the most critical, foundational issues that have the capacity to impact on your thinking, professional perspectives and class-room interactions. You will also find invitations to reflect on these as a means of developing your professional learning.

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