New Deal for the Education Workforce

Reflective practice

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Leading, learning, inspiring

Audience

Educational practitioners working with learners from ages 3 to 19, including teachers, support staff, leaders and further education lecturers.

Overview

This booklet defines and outlines the key features of reflective practice. It explores a variety of different approaches and describes how they can improve learner outcomes and contribute to whole-school improvement. The booklet provides examples and case studies of the practical implementation of a variety of reflective practice approaches in an education setting, and supports practitioners to assess their own abilities in and identify the next steps in developing their own reflective practice skills.

Action required

None – for information only.

Further information

Enquires about this document should be directed to:

Teaching and Learning Improvement Branch
Practitioner Standards and Professional Development Division
Department for Education and Skills
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Additional copies

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's Learning Wales website at gov.wales/learning

Related documents

Coaching and mentoring (Welsh Government, 2015)

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Contents

1. Introduction

This booklet forms part of a set of resources to support the Welsh Government's 'New Deal' for the education workforce, and its professional learning model (PLM) for educational practitioners in Wales. This key initiative emphasises the need for practitioners to learn and develop throughout their careers so that they can do the very best for their learners. It is linked to other education improvement developments including *Qualified for life* and schools development plans.

This resource focuses on the contribution of reflective practice to professional development and is a key component of the PLM, as indicated in Figure 1. It will provide you with information about reflective practice from a variety of sources, discusses its merits and limitations and offers practical guidance on how to develop as a reflective practitioner.

Figure 1: Diagram summarising the key components of the PLM

All studies, reports and other evidence mentioned in this booklet, are listed in Section 10 (page 24) so that you can read more about them if you wish. You can explore PLM topics further within the module on professional learning on the Learning Wales website.

2. What is reflective practice?

Much has been written about 'reflective practice': one search engine returns more than 900,000 results! It has a prominent position among educators in the world's leading educational systems, such as Singapore, Canada and Hong Kong. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlights skills for reflective practice and on-the-job research as key strengths of the most successful teacher education and professional development models around the world (Schleisser, 2012).

Essentially, reflective practice is a process of thinking through professional issues, problems or dilemmas, which do not have an obvious solution. We don't usually reflect on relatively straightforward matters such as collecting lunch money or taking the register. Moon (2004) suggests that a common-sense view sees reflection leading to some learning or a change of behaviour. We often reflect to consider things in more detail and usually for a purpose. However, there are times when we find ourselves being reflective and ideas seem to 'pop up' unexpectedly. Ideas around reflective practice are commonly advocated in teaching and other professions, such as law, social care and medicine. The following figure gives examples of definitions from different fields.

Figure 2: Definitions of reflective practice

Field	Definition	Source
Physiotherapy	Reflective practice is a process by which you: stop and think about your practice, consciously analyse your decision making and draw on theory and relate it to what you do in practice.	Chartered Society of Physiotherapy website www.csp.org.uk
Nursing	Reflection is the examination of personal thoughts and actions.	Somerville and Keeling (2004)
Dentistry	The reflective dentist is one who engages their team in a process of discussion regarding a variety of clinical situations, and who learns from both positive and negative clinical experience.	Simpson and Freeman (2004)
Education	A bottom-up self-directed process of learning which can be formal or informal in its approach and individual or collaborative in nature.	Melbourne Department of Education and Early Childhood Development www.education.vic.gov.au

The lack of a commonly shared definition of reflective practice has led some critics to claim:

> It has no meaning other than be worried about what you do, and talk about it or write it down.
>
> (Hayes et al., 2007, p.170).

However, reflective practice is designed to help you improve what you do and to respond positively to change (Figure 3). Typically, reflective practitioners regularly question both what they do and why, with a view to learning from their experience. They evaluate their practice, drawing out strengths and areas for development.

Figure 3: What reflective practice is and is not (Grigg et al., in press)

Often the terms 'reflection', 'reflective practice' and 'critical reflection' are used interchangeably and while they are related, they are not quite the same. Reflection involves recalling, describing and explaining what happened, as well as thinking about the consequences of what you do. Critical reflection takes this to a higher level. It involves evaluating practice and making the case for change based on solid evidence. This includes being self-critical, questioning the assumptions on which personal beliefs and values have developed, and critiquing the work of others. Critical reflection is a component of reflective practice, which focuses on challenges faced within a professional context. When new insight leads to change or improvement, reflection becomes reflective practice (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Opportunities for reflection to become reflective practice	
Opportunity for reflection	**Reflective practice**
Thinking about a challenging experience such as teaching a poor lesson.	Discussing the lesson with a colleague, drawing up an action plan and monitoring the impact of any change.
Completing an evaluation of a training event such as a course or conference.	Using the evaluation to reflect on how you might apply new knowledge or skills in specific contexts.
Answering questions during a staff appraisal or review.	Reviewing the previous year, establishing objectives and success criteria for the year ahead.
Submitting lesson plans for review.	Responding to feedback comments to improve planning.
Surveying the views of parents/carers.	Using parental responses to strengthen communication between home and school.
Observing a colleague teach.	Noting strategies that could be adapted in your own practice.

Source: Grigg (in press).

Most of the literature on reflective practice agrees that it is about moving practitioners out of 'autopilot'. This is achieved when practitioners focus on the consequences of their teaching, question what they routinely do, engage in professional dialogue with colleagues and consider how this and wider evidence can support improvement.

Points for reflection

- Is reflective practice simply another way of encouraging you 'to think about what you're doing'?
- How do you think reflective practice is similar or different to chatting with colleagues, friends and family?
- Reread Figure 4. Select something from your own experience that might become a focus for reflective practice.

3. Where does reflective practice originate?

The importance of reflection has been advocated for a very long time. Ancient philosophers such as Socrates more than 2,500 years ago questioned what people knew, their assumptions and why they did things. But the modern history of reflection begins with two American philosophers.

John Dewey (1859–1952) distinguished between the **routine** actions of teachers, when they based their decisions on custom, tradition and authority, and **reflective** action, where they questioned taken-for-granted knowledge. All practitioners and schools have their particular routines – demonstrated, for example, in the way children are expected to line up, respond to questions, their conduct during registration time or the manner by which classroom order is maintained. Dewey argued that reflective thinking is needed when teachers face doubts, problems or dilemmas. He defined reflection as 'a kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive considerations' (Dewey, 1933, p.3).

The thinking teacher looks carefully at what underpins a particular problem and then researches possible solutions, demonstrating the following three characteristics:

- open-mindedness – to new ideas and thoughts
- wholeheartedness – willing to seek out fresh approaches
- responsibility – an awareness of the consequences of the action taken.

For Dewey, reflective action mattered because it was the means by which these characteristics were developed. He valued reflection because it 'enables us to direct our actions with foresight … it enables us to know what we are about when we act' (Dewey, 1933, p.17).

Donald Schön (1930–1987) developed Dewey's ideas and first introduced the term 'reflective practitioner'. He claimed that teachers did not develop expertise by 'delivering' the curriculum, lesson plans, or following procedures – what he called 'technical rationality'. Rather, they became experts through 'professional artistry' acquired through reflecting upon experience.

As teachers interact with the class, they exhibit what Schön called 'knowing-in-action', much of which is tacit or unstated and difficult for others to imitate. Such knowing might include interpreting body language, reading emotions, knowing when to use humour and intuitive thinking – the 'gut feeling' or ability to understand what is going on around you. Knowing-in-action involves instantaneous and unconscious decisions. A feature of expert teaching is how well implicit knowledge is used to make these intuitive calls, which may not be the same in every situation. For example, two children may disrupt the class in the same way, but the teacher responds differently, perhaps taking into account individual backgrounds or temperaments.

If you observe an excellent teacher you should see such knowledge in action. It might involve how the teacher responds (sometimes very creatively) to unexpected events, such as the breakdown of technology or a sudden outburst from a child. These are often split-second 'thinking on your feet' decisions, based on prior knowledge and an immediate review of the situation – or what Schön called 'reflection-in-action'. This can involve 'reframing' how you see what is happening around you.

Schön also introduced the notion of 'reflection-on-action', which occurs after a lesson when teachers rerun in their minds what happened, what they have learned and what they might do differently next time. Schön's 'reflection-for-action' describes reflecting for the purpose of forward planning.

Case study 1

During a Year 2 lesson Fiona noticed that the level of class noise was rising. She asked the class to keep the noise down and referred to the rule about working quietly. For a few minutes this seemed to work but the noise escalated towards the end of the lesson. Fiona looked up from working with one group and gave one boy at the back of the class a firm stare. He ignored this. In frustration, Fiona shouted out generally at the class and told them that they would be kept in for five minutes as a punishment during break time to which several children complained this was unfair.

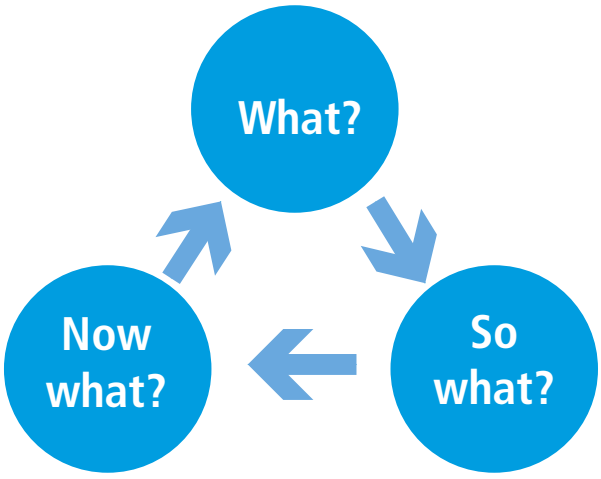
Points for reflection

- In case study 1, how might Fiona have responded differently during the lesson?
- How might she have 'reframed' the situation?
- If you were discussing the lesson with her afterwards, what would you want her to reflect upon to move forward?

4. What are the different models of reflective practice?

There are many models of reflection that have built on the early work of Dewey and Schön. Most are cyclical in nature to show that reflection is an ongoing process. For example, Kolb (1984) bases his cycle of experiential learning on responding to concrete experience through observing, reflecting and experimenting or trying out what has been learned. Borton (1970) introduced a simple model based on three questions. The first question prompts the individual to describe the experience. The second invites the development of a personal theory of understanding about the event, to see what can be learned from it. The final question focuses on what can be done to improve the experience (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Borton's model of reflective practice



In the context of nursing, Rolfe et al. (2001) developed this model by asking a series of sub-questions.

What?

… was I trying to achieve (aims/learning objectives of the lesson)?
… actions did I take?
… was the response of the learners?
… feelings did the lesson evoke (for me, for them)?
… was good/bad about the experience?

So what?

… does this tell me about my relationships in the class?
… was going through my mind as I acted?
… did I base my actions on?
… other knowledge can I bring to the situation?
… could/should I have done to make it better?
… is my new understanding of the situation?
… broader issues arise from the experience?

Now what?

… do I need to improve my teaching or relationships?
… broader issues need to be considered if this action is to be successful?
… might be the consequences of this action?

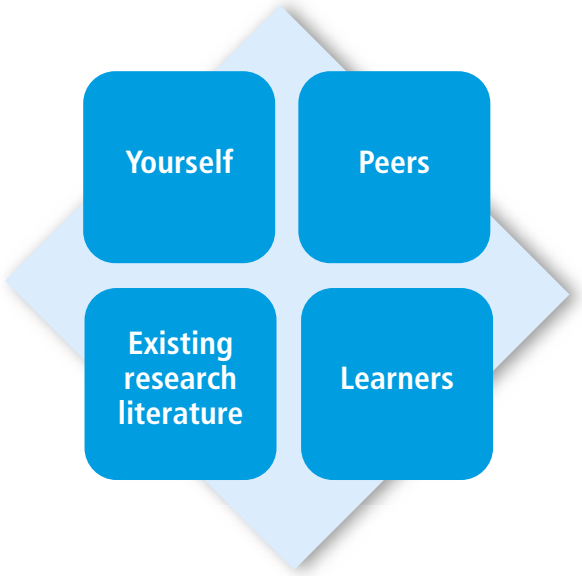
Gibbs (1988) suggested a more detailed six-stage model where the emphasis is upon learning from repetition.

1. Description – what happened?
2. Feelings – what did you feel and how did you react?
3. Evaluation – what worked/didn't work?
4. Analysis – what sense can you make of the lesson?
5. Conclusion – what have you learned?
6. Action plan – what would you do differently next time?

Critics claim that these models do not give enough attention to considering the viewpoints of others, such as learners or teaching assistants. Other models are helpful in this regard. Johns (1995) suggests two ways of 'looking': inwardly to consider personal thoughts and feelings, which should be written down, and outwardly at the actual experience, taking into account a range of factors including ethics (e.g. 'Did I act for the best?'). Reflective practice is then seen as a dialogic process combining inner talk and sharing thoughts and feelings with others. How you feel and what you believe are powerful influences on how you teach.

Similarly, Brookfield (1995, 2005) suggests that teachers improve their reflective skills when they see their practice through four critical, interconnected lenses: their own, the views of their students and colleagues and what can be learned from the wider educational literature. These lenses may reflect back different pictures of who you are as a practitioner and the impact of your work.

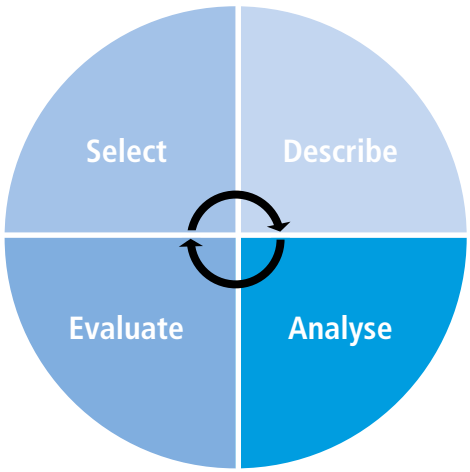
Figure 6: Brookfield's four lenses



Andrew Pollard and his colleagues have contributed to our understanding of the characteristics of reflective practice (Pollard and Tann, 1987; Pollard, 2014). These include having an active focus on the aim and impact of your practice, retaining an open mind, taking responsibility for one's professional development, engaging with colleagues and using evidence to reach informed judgements. Pollard's notion of reflective teaching is about moving beyond 'common sense' to gather evidence, research and critical feedback from others. At times, what might be considered common sense and routine practice is not, in fact, necessarily the best thing for learners or teachers.

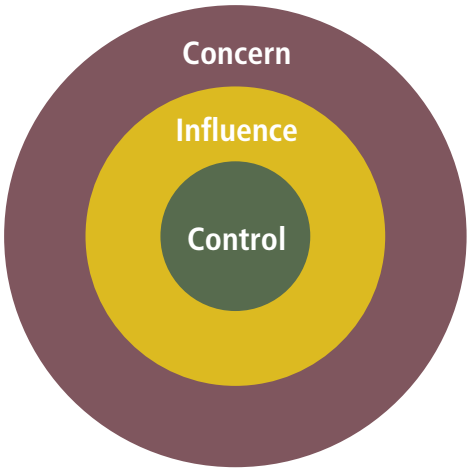
In bringing together these models, we can identify key steps within reflective practice (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Key actions within reflective practice



First, the reflective practitioner **selects** a key issue or event from the multitude of experiences they have each day. The key in selecting what to reflect upon is to focus on a priority and what you can do something about. Covey's (1992) spheres of concern, control and influence are helpful here. He studied the habits of effective people and suggested that the first habit was being proactive. Experts consider all of their concerns but narrow these down to focus on what was within their influence and then control. They don't waste energy and time worrying about things that are beyond their control. By strategically investing time and resources they are able to enlarge the circle of influence thereby reducing their concerns.

Figure 8: Covey's circles



Source: Covey, 1992.

Once a concern is selected, reflective practitioners **describe** it in some detail – they consider what happened, when, where and who was involved. This can involve describing feelings as well as thoughts at the time. Then reflective practitioners **analyse** more closely by asking why and how things developed and look for patterns in behaviour. Finally, they need to **evaluate** what really matters and what changes or improvements are necessary.

Points for reflection

- Think about a recent incident in your practice. How might this be seen differently through Brookfield's four lenses?
- What do you do if your recollection or response is very different to the views of colleagues and/or learners, or what reliable research tells you works well?

5. How are you doing in terms of reflective practice?

You might work in a nursery, primary or secondary school, a college of further education or university – wherever you work in education in Wales, however, reflective practice should matter because it ultimately aims to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Put another way, to reflect on what you do and how well you work is a professional responsibility. Figure 9 includes some prompts to review how often you engage in reflective practice. You might also want to consider Figure 14 (page 22) in terms of the quality of your reflections.

Figure 9: Prompts for reflective practice

Prompt	Scale
1. Lesson evaluations	
1a. How often do I evaluate my lessons?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
1b. In my evaluations how often do I think about 'why' and 'so what' as well as what happened?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
1c. How often do I modify my lessons as a result of reflection?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
2. Listening to the view of others	
2a. How often do I talk to a colleague about learning and teaching?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
2b. How often do I apply wise suggestions to improve my practice?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
2c. How often do I 'look outside' the school for inspiration?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
2d. How often do I listen and act upon the views of others (e.g. learners, teaching assistants) when reflecting on how to improve lessons?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
2e. How often do our team/staff meetings include discussions about how to improve the quality of learning and teaching?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always

Prompt	Scale
3. Engaging with research	
3a. How often do I read relevant research literature?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
3b. How often do I compare different sources of evidence when deciding what actions to take?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
3c. How often do I undertake action research as a result of reflecting upon learning and teaching?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
4. Professional development	
4a. How often do I evaluate my professional development activities, such as attending courses?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always
4b. How often do I incorporate ideas from professional development activities into my practice?	Never/rarely/sometimes/often/always

Source: Grigg (in press).

Points for reflection

- Using Figure 9, carry out a self-audit to see where you are in terms of reflective practice.
- Can you think of other key areas to reflect upon?

6. Why is reflective practice considered important?

Reflective practice is appealing for many reasons. It has the potential to improve the quality of your work to the benefit of learners and colleagues. Above all, it puts you in control of your learning. In this sense it is emancipatory. Larrivee (2000, p.293) argues: 'Unless teachers develop the practice of reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations'.

Teaching should be a learning profession. Reflective practice brings new knowledge and skills, promotes self-awareness and deep learning. Through reflection, practitioners can appreciate different ways of looking at their own actions. According to the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI, 2007, p.12) teacher competence is 'developed through reflection on practice and through dialogue with colleagues'. It argues that all teachers should make reflective practice part of their professional identity and mindset.

Reflection can support institutional change. Numerous writers argue that reflection is essential to bringing about whole-school improvements (Day, 1999; Griffiths, 2000). When schools complete self-evaluation reports, these should involve systematic reflection at team and school level. A literature review on behalf of the Scottish Government cites research that developing the capacity for staff to reflect is the most important factor in successful self-evaluation (Mentor et al., 2010). The challenge is to move from individual to collective reflective practice. In other words, your thoughts and feelings about school priorities need to be discussed with colleagues and, ideally, a consensus reached over whether these are the right ones and how these can be met most effectively.

In the spirit of reflection, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that reflective practice has its critics. For example, consider what Hayes et al. (2007, p.169) have to say in the context of further education: 'I don't accept that reflective practice is a good thing. It's a meaningless term that promotes a dangerous anxiety-making, navel gazing that undermines a lecturer's ability to be a good teacher.'

Along with any professional development, reflective practice has its strengths and limitations (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Arguments for and against reflective practice	
For	**Against**
☐ Can improve the quality of your work	☐ Limited evidence of impact
☐ Increases self-awareness	☐ Can become bland and mechanical
☐ Develops problem-solving skills	☐ Can be time-consuming
☐ Improves decision-making and professional judgement	☐ Can be emotionally draining
☐ Gives practitioners personal control and ownership of their learning	☐ Not everyone is inclined to reflect
☐ Complements action research	

Points for reflection

- Review the arguments for and against reflective practice in Figure 10.
- How do these compare to your view about reflective practice and those held by your colleagues?

Finlay (2008, p.15) has reviewed the arguments for and against reflective practice and cautions: 'Reflective practice should be applied selectively, taught sensitively and generally used with care.'

However, reflective practice is widely regarded as an effective means of professional development to complement others, including:

- deliberate, repeated practice
- action or practitioner-led research
- coaching and mentoring
- observation – we know that the most successful observations are primarily used as a development tool 'creating reflective and self-directed teacher learners as opposed to a high stakes evaluation or appraisal' (Coe et al., 2014, p.4).

7. How do I develop as a reflective practitioner?

To become a reflective practitioner requires motivation, open-mindedness and a genuine belief in its value. There are also practical considerations to take into account and how these can be overcome.

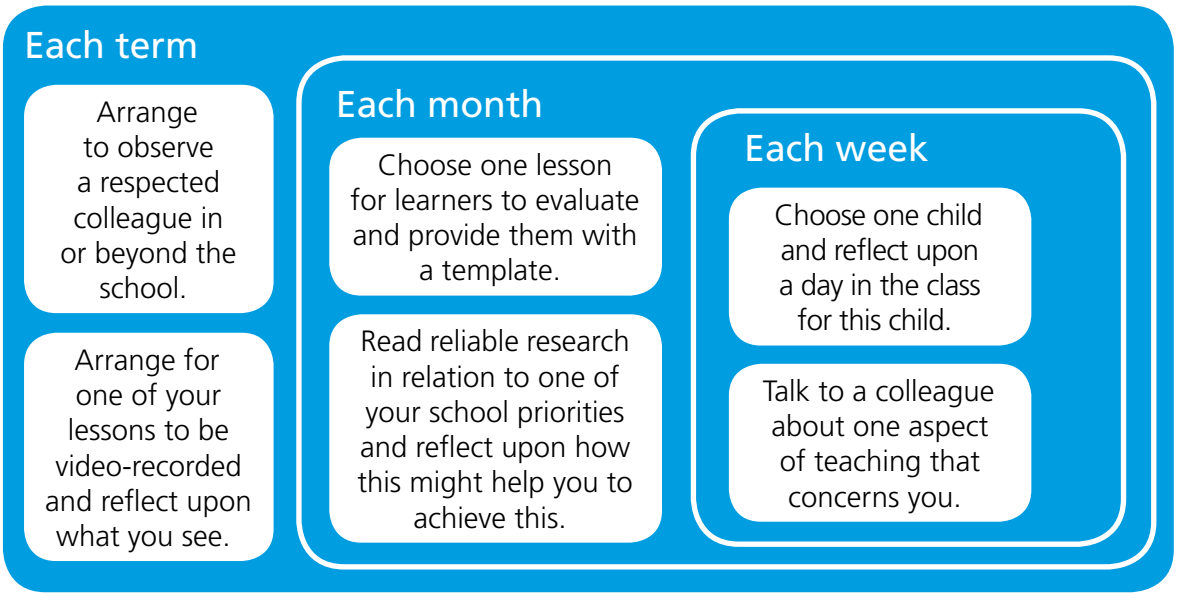
Where?

Reflection might go on inside the head but there are external, environmental factors to take into account if the quality of reflection is to improve. These include identifying where best to take 'time out': in the garden, staffroom, playground, library, at home, or on the way home from school. Wherever is chosen, creating an environment in which distractions are kept to a minimum is important. It may be the case that you do not set aside a specific area to reflect but rather are doing so 'on the move'. What matters most is having the dedicated time to do some serious reflection.

When?

Reflection can take place before, during and after lessons. It can last for less than a minute (reflection-in-action), half an hour or sometimes nag away and appear to be continually 'on your mind'. To set aside time for deliberate reflection-on-action, it may be possible to use planning, preparation and assessment time. Or in terms of reflection-in-action, within lessons you might think creatively by, for example, asking learners to complete a brief evaluation and use this to inform your reflections.

Figure 11: Possible time-related actions to embed reflective practice



Source: Grigg (in press).

Who with?

Is reflective practice best undertaken with others or on your own? Johns (2000) argues that reflection is more effective when learners work with an assigned mentor. Johns considered that through sharing reflections on learning experiences greater understanding of those experiences could be achieved than by reflection as a lone exercise. The support of a critical friend, a colleague who is trustworthy, knowledgeable and skilled, is much needed.

In many schools, teachers work closely with teaching assistants in planning, preparing and evaluating lessons. Case study 2 is a case study of an experienced teaching assistant working alongside her English teacher in a secondary school.

Case study 2

I support two particular children, mainly with their reading, language and social skills. One is autistic (Peter) and the other (Stefania) is quite new to the school. Usually I get the plan for the week to look at on the Friday before. We chat about how the week has gone, the things the children found difficult or things I've noticed, like particular achievements or how well the children are getting on with others. Yesterday I asked Peter "Would you like to get on with your work?" to which he replied "No", to the amusement of others and it caused a bit of a scene. But it was my fault. I discussed it with the teacher who suggested that being clearer with instructions and not implying anything might help in future. With Stefania, I usually focus on vocabulary building and the teacher and I review new words and phrases to be introduced each week. I tend to jot down major things on sticky notes to remind me for when we meet. We also discuss the jobs I need to do the following week.

Alex

Points for reflection

- Review case study 2. What are the strengths in the joint reflection between teacher and assistant?
- Why do you think Alex blames herself for the incident with Peter? How might she benefit from research into the kind of support provided for those learners with autistic spectrum disorders?

It is also possible to conduct reflective practice with learners themselves. In fact, promoting reflective learning is essential if learners are to develop awareness of how well they are doing, what they need to do to improve and how this can be achieved. So you might consider asking learners to evaluate lessons (indirectly your teaching) in a systematic but non-threatening manner; for instance, asking them to raise questions (anonymously if they prefer) about what they are uncertain about on slips of paper or sticky notes and popping these in a 'question and answer' box or on a 'learning wall'. Or for younger learners, inviting them to colour in appropriate faces or a number scale.

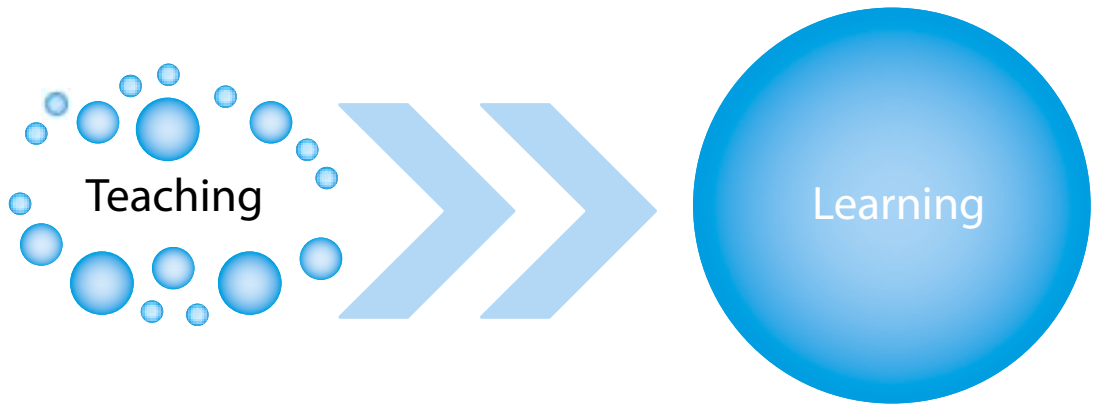
What?

Reflective practice needs focus. The content for reflection can be wide-ranging and include:

- your own values, capabilities and well-being
- subject and curriculum knowledge
- teaching skills
- deployment of resources
- monitoring and assessment arrangements
- the learning environment
- professional relationships within and beyond school
- leadership and management issues
- professional development.

It makes sense to focus on a particular issue or incident. However, sometimes reflecting on simple, daily habitual actions can prove more beneficial than hunting for the most critical or dramatic incidents. As Sharkey (2004) points out, 'we need to attend to the untold' and sometimes the events we 'forget' are the very ones that most need reflection.

Figure 12: What will you reflect upon?



How?

Reflection can be either a formal or informal process. It can use a range of tools including: reflective journals, academic assignments, lesson evaluations, notes from mentor meetings, brief post-lesson discussions or technologies such as video reflective dialogue, social media, e-mail, MP3 and hand-held devices. Figure 13 sets out examples of strategies to promote reflective practice.

Figure 13: Strategies to support reflective practice

Strategy	Notes
Reflective journals or diaries	Record incidents, ideas and reflections gained from different sources such as observations and training courses.
Session observation	Agree a focus, e.g. questioning skills to observe a colleague or for them to observe you.
Feedback	Part of professional dialogue and often following a lesson observation, feedback can take various forms (e.g. formal, informal general, specific, directive, open-ended).
Video-stimulated reflective dialogue	Video-record a lesson or part of one and focus on particular behaviours. Review with an experienced colleague.
e-learning tools	Technologies such as online forums, blogs, e-portfolios (webfolios) and virtual learning environments, can all support learning and reflection.
Graphic organisers	Visual tools such as mindmaps, diagrams and charts can aid recall and understanding.
Professional discussions	Conversations with a colleague or mentor about an aspect of practice or professional development goal.
Problem-based learning	Real-life scenarios used as a basis to develop critical thinking needed for effective reflective practice.
Learner voice	Set aside time for learners to complete evaluations or talk to them about their learning and use these to inform reflections.

Source: Grigg et al. (in press).

Point for reflection

- Review the strategies in Figure 13. Which appeals to you most and what are the potential strengths and pitfalls with this?

Reflective journals or diaries are widely used in teacher education and professional development, although reflective writing might seem to be a luxury for time-pressed practitioners. However, the process of committing something on paper can help slow down impulsivity and aid deep thinking about a subject. There may be a need to review key events, personal feelings and how others responded. Dye (2011) advises trainee teachers to use SOS as a reminder to focus when writing on **S**elf, **O**thers and the **S**ituation.

Feedback is an important source for reflection. We know that it is one of the key factors to improve the quality of learners' learning (Hattie and Yates, 2014). Teachers also need high-quality feedback for their professional development. Such feedback needs to be timely, tailored and constructive. Estyn (2014) suggest:

> Teachers find the feedback session most helpful when it takes place in a room where observer and teacher are not disturbed. It also tends to be more purposeful and beneficial when the feedback takes the form of a professional dialogue. In the most effective cases, observers ask teachers to provide their own reflection on the lesson before the observer provides feedback. Effective discussion focuses on what was successful in the lesson, especially in relation to its impact on pupils' learning.

Points for reflection

- Think back to the last feedback you received on your teaching. How did you feel then? Do you feel the same now?
- Can you recall the key learning points?
- Did you undertake any research to follow up suggestions?
- To what extent have/will you put these into practice?
- How will this follow-up be monitored?

8. How do I know I am becoming more reflective?

One of the criticisms of reflective practice is that it is hard to assess the quality of reflection because it is a personal matter. Hatton and Smith (1995) put forward a model based on the reflective writing of trainee teachers.

- **Descriptive writing** – writing that is not considered to show evidence of reflection: it is a description with no discussion beyond description.
- **Descriptive reflection** – there is description of events, and the possibility of alternative viewpoints is accepted but most reflection is from one perspective.
- **Dialogic reflection** – the work demonstrates a 'stepping back' from events and actions leading to a different level of discourse with self and exploring the discourse of events and action. There is a recognition that different qualities of judgement and alternative explanations may exist for the same event. The reflection is analytical or integrative, though may reveal inconsistency.
- **Critical reflection** – demonstrates an awareness that actions and events are not only located within and explicable by multiple perspectives, but are also located in and influenced by multiple historical and sociopolitical contexts.

To be regarded as a reflective practitioner, you need to go beyond the level of descriptive recall. Your reflections should demonstrate how you challenge your own assumptions and values, whether you consider the viewpoints of others and engage in wider educational research.

In recent years there have been calls to move **beyond** reflective practice. The notion of reflexivity describes the ability to reflect over not just what has happened and why but a deeper awareness of one's personal values and beliefs. The term reflexivity is derived from Latin and literally means 'to turn back on oneself'. Reflexive teachers know and understand why they think and act the way that they do. Reflexivity has also been seen in terms of how practitioners look at how they operate within the wider institutional context; for instance, your contribution towards school development priorities and how these align with your own values and beliefs.

McGregor and Cartwright (2011) suggest how you might progress towards deeper reflexive thinking (see Figure 14). Levels 1 and 2 are characteristic of routine responses: what happened and why. Level 3 demands recognition that there are alternatives but falls short of action. Level 4 calls for creativity in devising a plan to see what works well. Both Levels 4 and 5 depend on research culminating in trying things out, monitoring and evaluation.

Figure 14: Developing thinking to develop reflexivity	
Level	**Reflective level**
1st	Being able to identify and describe a critical incident or happening. The **what** of a situation.
2nd	Being able to explain **why** you did it the way that you did or why the critical happening arose.
3rd	Being able to recognise there were **different ways** to act in the critical happening or incident.
4th	Being able to devise a way of **finding out** whether one approach was better than another leading up to that kind of critical incident.
5th	Comparing evidence to decide **which** approach worked best, to avoid such an incident arising again, and **why**.

Source: McGregor and Cartwright (2011, p.236).

If you operate at the higher levels of reflection it is a short step to undertake action or practitioner research, which describes a systematic and focused enquiry into an aspect of practice. It is commonly used by those following a Masters degree and is effectively a form of reflection-in-practice. Its great value is bridging theory and practice. You can find out more about how to do action research in the *Effective collaboration* information booklet in this series.

9. Summary

- Reflective practice is popular in several professions and has been defined in many ways. In essence, it involves asking probing questions about one's practice with a view to improving it.
- John Dewey and Donald Schön were pioneers in the field of reflective practice. Many models have built on their contributions. Most are cyclical in nature and emphasise the integration of reflection within teaching.
- Reflective practice can be flexible. It can happen before, during and after lessons and can focus on different aspects of your development and learners' learning.
- There are different stages in becoming a reflective practitioner, from describing to comparing and then critically evaluating experience. Higher levels of reflective practice lead on to action research.
- Although there are criticisms of reflective practice, it is central to the most successful teacher professional development models around the world.

10. Where can I find out more?

The following publications and links will provide much more information about the topics discussed in this resource, and you will also find further details on the Learning Wales website.

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