**DEFINITIONS OF REFLECTION**

The term ‘reflective practice’ derives from the work of Dewey and Schon. Dewey (1910) wrote that reflective practice refers to ‘the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it’.

This means that you will have a questioning approach; you will consider why things are as they are, and how they might be.

Dewey went on to say that being reflective ‘enables us to direct our actions with foresight … It enables us to know what we are about when we act’. This is extremely important in teaching. What you do in the classroom and how you behave should have been carefully planned, informed by theory and experience and be purposeful.

Schon (1983) presents a slightly different view. He regards reflection as having two aspects: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

Schoen (1983) describes **reflection-in-action** as private, very fast, and intuitive—so much so that we sometimes don’t even recognize it as reflection. It takes place in the situation, and works as a self-correcting tool when we realize something is not working as it should. In addition to well-planned lessons, this quick thinking and flexibility is an essential tool for a teacher, and should be emphasized accordingly in formal teacher training.

**Reflection-on-action** happens afterward, is often collegial, and preferably systematic. It focuses on intentional improvement; action research is an excellent example of how reflective practice can lead to progressive problem solving. Both of these reflective practices are essential for optimal growth in the educational profession.

**BENEFITS OF REFLECTION**

Reflection helps us to develop our own learning and teaching framework. Brookfield (1995) proposes that this framework:

• allows us to consciously develop our own **repertoire of strategies** and techniques to draw upon in our teaching, which are relevant to our particular context and discipline

• helps us take informed actions that can be **justified and explained** to others and that we can use to generate answers to teaching problems

• allows us to **adjust and respond** to issues and problems. For instance, rather than being devastated by a poor teaching evaluation, it allows us to investigate and understand what underlies these evaluations and to take appropriate action, which might be to adjust our teaching

• helps us to become **aware of our underlying beliefs** and assumptions about learning and teaching so we understand why we do what we do and what might need to change

• helps to promote a **positive learning environment**. Through reflection, our teaching becomes responsive to student feedback and needs, which can serve to build trust in students when they see their feedback is valued and taken seriously through changes to teaching

• helps us to **locate our teaching** in the broader institutional, social, and political context and to appreciate the many factors that influence student learning. In this way, reflection helps us to keep our perspectives and to avoid blaming ourselves for every problem that arises in our classrooms.

*It is a necessary component to becoming a scholarly teacher and a “reflective practitioner” (Schon 1983), engaged in continuous self-directed development and capable of making informed decisions about approaches to learning and teaching within particular disciplinary and academic contexts*.

**A FRAMEWORK FOR REFLECTION**

Is your teaching worthy? Stephen Brookfield (1995) suggests that the path to discovering the worth of your teaching is through a process of critical reflection. He emphasizes that reflection goes beyond just describing what we do, to thinking about why we do things and to whether they have gone as intended, why we think they may have worked well, and how we might do them differently next time.

In fact, critically reflective teachers, for Brookfield, are excellent teachers who continually hone their personalised "authentic voice", a "pedagogic rectitude" that reveals the "value and dignity" of the teacher's work "because now we know what its worth" (46-7). The goal of the critically reflective teacher, for Brookfield, is to garner an increased awareness of his or her teaching from as many different vantage points as possible. To do this effectively, we somehow need to assume the perspective of an external observer to ourselves, which can be quite a difficult thing to do. He suggests that an effective way to move beyond the limitations of our own experiences and to reframe our teaching is by viewing our practice through “lenses” that reflect back to us a differently highlighted picture of who we are and what we do.

Brookfield proposes the following four lenses:

**Self Lens** (our autobiographies as learners): Teachers may focus on their experiences as a teacher in order to reveal aspects of their pedagogy that may need adjustment or strengthening. Teaching philosophies and portfolios can be examples of this lens.

**Student Lens** (our students’ eyes): Engaging with student views of the learning environment can lead to more responsive teaching. Evaluations, assessments, journals, focus groups and/or interviews can each provide cues to improve teaching and learning.

**Peer Lens** (our colleagues’ experiences and perceptions): Peers can highlight hidden habits in teaching practice, and also provide innovative solutions to teaching problems. Further, colleagues can be inspirational and provide support and solidarity. Peer observation is an example for this lens?

**Literature Lens** (the theoretical literature): Teaching theory provides the vocabulary for teaching practice, and offers different ways to view and understand your teaching. Here you'll find ways to utilize scholarly literature in your teaching and critical reflection.