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# Reflection on the PGCE course

## What is ‘Reflective Practice’?

Reflective practice is ‘learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice’ (Finlay, 2008).

Teaching is a profession which requires constant self-evaluation, improvement and development. The colleagues and pupils you work with will challenge your thinking and reflecting on your practice, in terms of the pupils’ learning, will become second nature to you as a professional.

Reflection in its simplest form is ‘thought with action’ (Dewey, 1910, p.6). What did you think about what happened and what impact will that thought have on your future actions?

It will also support you in consciously thinking about and analysing your actions using your experiences, your knowledge and your own assumptions. Reflection is also the integral part of the professional development cycle of evaluation, feedback and target setting which is the key learning tool for teachers.

The Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework outlines the importance of reflective practice through the ‘Learn that’ statement:

*‘Reflective practice, supported by feedback from and observation of experienced colleagues, professional debate, and learning from educational research, is also likely to support improvement’* (CCF, 2020)

Our ITE curriculum is developed around the statements of the CCF and embedded alongside this are the principles of ‘knowing, doing and being’ (Craig, 2018).

* **Knowing** - The complex and interrelated body of knowledge for teaching and ways of thinking, such as creativity and criticality.
* **Doing** The multifaceted skills and practices involved in teaching.
* **Being** Self-awareness that establishes professional identity and responsibilities, and the reflexive relationships with others.

Throughout the PGCE course you will reflect on your progress with the developing understanding of what teachers know (subject and pedagogical knowledge), what they do (the skills involved) and how you will develop as an effective practitioner.

## How will it help me in my teaching?

As a teacher, your priority is the progress and learning of your pupils and so the actions you decide on should have a direct impact on this, either in the short or long term.

As you develop your understanding of pupil’s learning, build up your experiences and reflect on the reasons why some strategies were effective and why, perhaps, they were not, you will be able to apply this to a range of different contexts. This means that you are able to effectively teach across a range of different phases and subjects, learning from each one through reflecting on your experiences.

## How can I develop my understanding of reflective thinking?

There are many theoretical frameworks surrounding reflection, particularly with a focus on learning and teaching within education. Understanding these theories and recognising when you have used the principles will help you to see how your thinking fits into the professional development cycle and how this can structure your thought process for maximum effect and progress.

Keeping a reflective journal can also help you to process and make sense of your experiences. This can be a very personal thing and not one you would necessarily share but it is a good way of not only developing your reflective practice and thinking, but also your reflective writing. The key is to be able to recognise when you are simply *describing* an experience and when you are truly *reflecting* on it. Reflection forms the basis of critical thinking and means that you will actively and consciously make decisions and justify them using your own knowledge and understanding.

## Models of Reflection

### Brookfield’s 4 lenses (1995)

As noted above, there are many theoretical frameworks of reflection. However, we are advocating the use of Brookfield’s lenses. This model will be explored further in taught sessions and is used to guide your weekly reflections during school placements.

Stephen Brookfield suggests that critically reflective practice within teaching and learning has two clear purposes:

* To reach a better understanding of how power underpins and distorts educational processes
* To question assumptions and practices that appear to make our lives look easier on the surface but in the long-term detract from our best interests.

By looking at a situation from different vantage points, and applying rigorous, sceptical analysis to our thoughts and memories of it, we can bring an element of rationalism and objectivity to our efforts to make sense of what happens in the classroom. Brookfield therefore proposes teachers engage four different lenses during the process of critical reflection: 1) the autobiographical lens, 2) the students’ eyes, 3) peer review, 4) theoretical literature.



**Autobiographical lens;** helps teachers to think about their own experiences, knowledge and assumptions as a starting point for learning. This may be done by drawing on experiential learning models such as those devised by Kolb, Gibbs and Schon, which you may already be familiar with.

Action: Think about the situation in relation to your own previous experiences and your current reactions and feelings. Consider how your personal story and past may have shaped your view of what happened or may have resulted in unwanted physical and emotional reactions and responses.

**Student lens;** the teacher must then think about the learning through the eyes of their pupils, considering their experiences, knowledge and past responses.

Action: Try to put yourself in your students’ shoes and review the situation by looking at what happened through their eyes. Consider their reactions and how their stories may have led to the experiences. Also, think about how they have experienced the same situation. You may even be able to include students in your reflections by talking to them about what happened or by offering a system of written feedback.

**Colleague lens;** while it is possible to use this model effectively with just the previous two lenses, in order for it to be more useful, it is necessary to engage with expert colleagues and work collaboratively to reflect, discuss and evaluate.

Action: At this stage you are asked to include the views of your colleagues in your reflections. Their experiences and their observations of your work may offer you new insights into what happened and what you can do to improve your work.

**Theoretical lens;** teachers who engage with the most up to date research around pedagogy and subject knowledge will ensure that their teaching is based around theoretical frameworks and reflected on with a sound understanding of the supporting educational theory.

Action:In order to make sense of your experiences and in order to improve your practice you need to consult literature. Theories will help you gain new insights and better understanding. At this stage you need to relate your reading to the three other lenses in order to get a full view. This will then help you to think of new steps to take and of how you can apply theory to your practice.

## What makes good reflection?

Reflective practice is vital in teaching and indeed, in any profession. It means that every experience is a learning experience, whichever theoretical perspective you choose to adopt and whether it is in a short term or long term context.

The first ‘rule’ of reflection is to ensure that you are truly reflecting and not just describing what happened to you. To support you in your reflective thinking, the documentation you will use across your PGCE year will contain prompts for you to use a starting point. These will help you to structure your thoughts whether you are reflecting on an observation, an experience or a session you were involved with.

The important thing is that you are not just observing what happening but you are exploring the outcome, the impact, whether expected or not, and the reasons why this was the case. You can then apply this to future experiences. Try not to make assumptions about what you see. A pupil can look like they enjoy a lesson but this does not mean that they learnt anything. Through a combination of observation, discussion, assessment and reflection, you will gain a much more in depth understanding of the learning that is actually happening in the classroom and the impact your teaching will have on this.

## What makes good reflective writing?

Good reflective writing articulates clearly how applying critical reflection to your consideration of a key moment or critical incident in the classroom has supported a change in your thinking or understanding. It should always lead to a conclusion that outlines how this process will impact on your practice and how this will benefit your pupils by improving the learning experience. Write succinctly, keeping description of the incident itself to a minimum, so you can focus on the responses to it from the range of perspectives.

Consider the differences between these two examples, both relating to the same science lesson.

This is simply a description of what happened, very much focussed on what the teacher did and not on the impact it had on the children

It does not recognise the reasons why specific children might be focussed on and makes assumptions about how the children felt

During a science lesson about habitats, the teacher asked the children what they remembered about the previous lesson. All the children talked in their groups for a few minutes.

The teacher walked round the classroom while the children were talking and asked some of them what they thought. They all seemed to enjoy talking to each other about the topic. She then went round each group and asked the children what they remembered. They remembered quite a lot but did need a bit of prompting.

There is minimal description of what the teacher did and it immediately addresses the impact it had on the children (Students’ eyes).

During a science lesson about habitats, the teacher asked the children what they remembered about the previous lesson. I know I would have found this useful as a learner, as I often find it difficult to make links back and need prompts to support my recall. This engaged the children straight away as they were enthusiastic about the topic and wanted to let the teacher know what they remembered. She also gave them a few minutes to talk in their groups which meant that they encouraged each other and even the quieter ones contributed in a more confident way. The teacher also used this time to circulate and speak to those children she knew might need a bit of a prompt. I will use the strategy of giving the children time to talk before asking for their response so that they support each other and also feel more confident in giving their answer.

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It is more specific about why the teacher spoke to individual children and how this supported them. There is an element of self-reflection.

It goes on to say the impact that it has had on the observer; ‘thought with action’

Consider the differences between these two examples, both relating to the same incident.

There is a description of the behaviour system in place and of how the teacher handled a situation with a child but no mention of how, or why, the behaviour policy impacts on this

The school has a behaviour policy and in KS1 it is based on a sunshine, rainbow and cloud. The children all start at the same stage (the sunshine) every day and moved up to the rainbow for positive behaviour and down to the cloud for negative behaviour.

A child was repeatedly not listening and so she was moved down to the rain cloud after being given several warnings. The teacher took her to one side when the class were settled and spoke to her about her behaviour. She said that she could get herself back on the sunshine if she behaved herself for the rest of the day.

There is a more thorough explanation of how and why the behaviour policy works. It shows that it is important to consider the wider factors which might impact on a child and reflect on this when observing the children’s behaviour.

There is also clear reference to reading that has been undertaken (Theoretical Literature). This demonstrates a deeper understanding of the practice they have observed. It also shows how this reflection is looking at a scenario from different perspectives.

The school has a behaviour policy and in KS1 it is based on a sunshine, rainbow and cloud. The children all start at the same stage (the sunshine) every day and moved up to the rainbow for positive behaviour and down to the cloud for negative behaviour. This means that anything that happens on one day is forgotten and they start each day afresh. This worked well for all the children but there was one girl especially who displayed quite challenging behaviour and I think it was important to her to know that she could come in each day with a new start and the teacher would treat her that way. It meant that she tried her best every day rather than just assuming she had ‘failed’ if she went down to the cloud. I spoke to the teacher about this child and she explained that she had quite a turbulent home life and she often tested the boundaries at school as it made her feel more secure to know what she was getting, even if that was a negative consequence. This has helped me to further develop my understanding around the work of Carol Dweck and how the mindset of a child impacts on their behaviours. It is also important to think about the influence a teacher can have on the positive mindset of a child through an easy action of moving a child’s name on a behaviour chart.

## How will I develop my reflective practice during my PGCE?

Through responding to feedback from expert colleagues in university and school, you will develop your skills to be able to demonstrate useful reflective writing and discussions.

This structure around progression was shared with you on the first day of the PGCE and is worth reflecting on throughout the year:



You may find it useful to refer back to some of these sentence stems to support your spoken and written reflections:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A significant learning experience for me was…  ...had the greatest impact on my thinking because… I considered… I felt… I noticed… I found that… I began to question… I became interested in…I wasn’t happy with… I felt the impact of… This highlighted for me…  | This showed me that…I began to realise…I can see why… I have changed my opinion about… I did not realise… Now I understand how… Now I understand why my teachers did… Now I understand why it is important to….. I am going to make more time for…because I am going to find out more about…because I would really like to learn how to…because I hope to try to…  |

## Weekly Reviews

As part of your weekly review, you will be asked to complete a reflective account each week, following the Talk-through with your mentor. It is important to make sure that you are reflecting on your learning, based on your experiences and observations of the pupils’ learning and not just writing a diary entry of your week. It may help if you do this following the Talk-through so that you can look in depth at one aspect of your practice, rather than lots of individual events. Our aim is that you reflect on a specific aspect and learn from it.

## Talk-throughs

Our ITE curriculum uses ‘Talk-throughs’ during your placements. These will be opportunities during placements to plan for, and reflect on, a discussion around a key aspect of your learning and the children’s learning. You will conduct a ‘Talk-through’ with your mentor each week and your reflective notes will be recorded on your weekly review form (WRF) and should reflect the structure explained above.

## UA3

This assignment is designed to assess your ability to engage in critical reflection and analysis of educational policy and practices alongside considering the wider discourse about the teaching profession. It will support you in looking at your practice through a reflective lens and by becoming familiar with this way of working throughout the year, this in turn will support you in your writing of this assignment.

The assignment will be based around the following key questions (see the UA3 module guide for more information):

1. How do your relationships and expectations in a primary classroom support children’s learning?

2. How can concepts of inclusion and diversity support you in providing opportunities for all to make progress in their learning?

3. What contribution does your teaching of the broader curriculum make to children’s health, wellbeing and wider development?

4. How do Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies support your monitoring and evaluation of pupils’ learning?

5. How has your understanding of your ‘professional teacher identity’ developed?

Further reading:

Brookfield, Stephen D. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2017.*ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leicester/detail.action?docID=4790372.