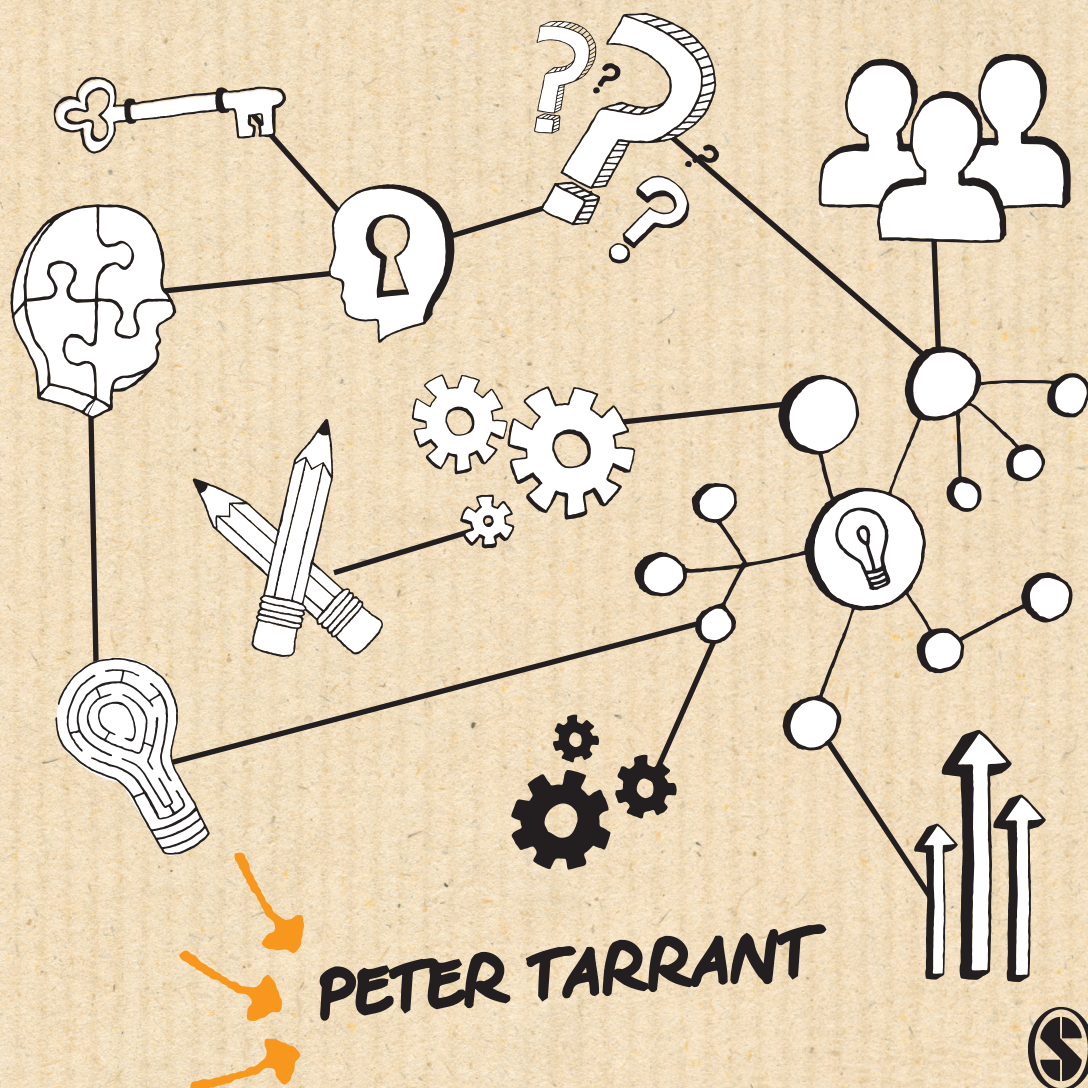


REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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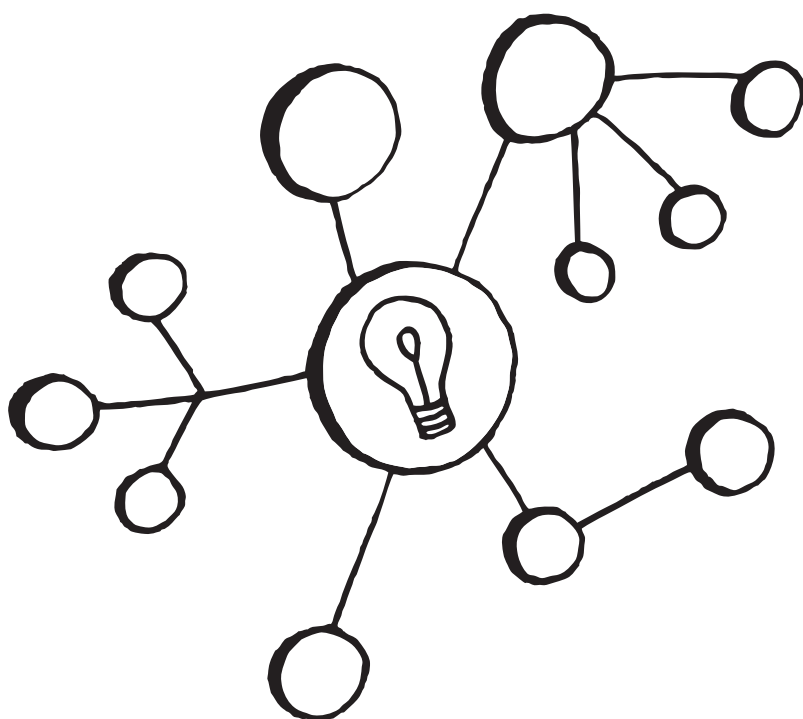
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He is responsible for the organization and running of a number of courses for Initial Teacher Education. He lectures in Practicum, Professional Studies, Learning Behaviour and Languages and Literacy. He is also responsible for developing Professional Reflection for students on the Bachelor of Education and the Post Graduate Diploma in Education courses.

He previously worked as a primary school head teacher for five years and as a deputy head teacher for 15 years.

The structure and intent of the book

This book aims to encourage the reader to reflect on their professional practice.

It takes a brief look (in Chapters 1, 2 and 3) at what is meant by professionalism and reflection. This is the section where the theoretical underpinning can be found with reference to other significant work in this field.

The next stage (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) is to suggest a different way of encouraging reflection. This is an approach where professionals are encouraged to have greater 'ownership' of their reflections and where they are supported in articulating what those reflections are. In these chapters, we argue that peer learning interactions can be beneficial in terms of professional reflection because they bring the following opportunities:

Benefits of an approach involving peer learning interactions

- Provides personal ownership
- Is non-judgemental
- Develops reflective skills
- Develops articulating skills
- Shows that facilitating is a learning experience in itself
- Describes the experience which makes the reflection more potent
- Gets away from controlling agendas
- Gets over the one-off snapshot approach

- Involves the idea that frequent and focused is better than a nerve-racking one-off observation and feedback
- Has a focus on the future not the past
- Is an enjoyable and collaborative approach to developing practice

In Chapter 6, we look at what students and teachers think of reflective practice and articulated learning interactions. There is evidence here from working with students and teachers over a three-year period.

In Chapter 7, there is information about modifying the approach from reflective practice for adults to 'meta learning' for children. There is a discussion about the potential of the approach and some information about how it has been received in local primary schools.

Chapter 8 looks at supporting reflective practice in practice.

Chapter 9 draws some conclusions about reflective practice and the suggestions contained in this book.

In the Appendices, you will find some useful resources and ideas.

Introduction: Peer Learning and Personal, Professional, Reflective Practice

Although this book attempts to establish the importance of professionalism in general, and reflective professionalism in particular, it is important to have a realistic understanding of the complexity of being a professional. In many professions, the stakes are high, time and money are in short supply, and any suggestion of adding to the burden of daily practice will not receive a positive response. Browsing this book on the bookshelves may lead you to ask the following question:

On top of everything else that constitutes my professional life, why would I undertake all this reflective practice stuff as well?

Indeed, it is a question that concerns me greatly. In this book, I try to argue the case for an interpretation of professionalism that benefits from, and is supported by, reflective practice. I try to argue that the 'best learning' (the most potent, memorable and lasting) is that which we learn for ourselves. Yet ultimately, it is the commitment and professionalism of the individual that will make it a success. Ideally, the individual will want to engage in reflective practice, they will want to look at their practice on a regular basis, and to use what they learn to continue to develop in their profession.

However, this kind of professional, who is motivated and self-aware enough to undertake this path, will be very rare. The best chance of success is for there to be an institutional focus or commitment to reflection. If the company, authority, service, school or institution commit to this approach, and if they encourage, organize and support staff then there is much more chance of success. Without this support and commitment, it is all too easy to put such matters aside, claiming that the job is already much too difficult, time too short and priorities elsewhere much more demanding.

As Wenger (2006) explains: 'A growing number of associations, professional and otherwise, are seeking ways to focus on learning through reflection on practice. Their members are restless and their allegiance is fragile.'

The ideas in this book, and the view of authentic, professional, reflective practice as something self-initiated and self-perpetuating are an ideal. This ideal, it must be acknowledged, needs the support of the institution in order to succeed.

I have seen this approach introduced in schools where staff were initially very keen and enthusiastic about the idea, but where early impetus floundered due to a lack of institutional support. Once introduced, little was said or done to support and encourage staff to be involved. In this situation, even the most committed professional will lose heart and devote their attention to more pressing matters.

Yet in other contexts, I have seen management, who were committed to the success of the approach, support and facilitate in a way that enabled time and space to be found; where the dialogue and topic of reflection were constantly kept high on the agenda. In these situations, the staff flourished, as did the school ethos and reflective conversation.

Staff may be self-motivated enough to volunteer and organize reflective sessions for themselves. They may get involved because they are persuaded and encouraged by others; they may be coerced by their management; but the best scenario will be where the institution takes professionalism seriously and makes a commitment to develop reflective practice as a priority. If there is full backing, with some kind of training for those involved and time devoted to setting up the scheme, there will be more chance of success. Thereafter, it will be important to check that sessions are happening on a regular basis until the ethos is well embedded into the institution.

As a researcher investigating the effectiveness of the approach, it would be easy to decide that it was a big success because, every time you visit the staff, they are all involved and speak highly of the benefits of the approach. However, it is what happens afterwards that is the acid test. Will staff still be involved when there isn't the prospective visit from the researcher looming?

Certainly in ITE we have made this approach an integral part of the placement programme. The peer learning constitutes both formative assessment and student support. It is something that students *must do* in order to progress. The hope and belief is that having spent some time engaged in the scheme, students will then go out into schools

and spread the word. One of the aims of this book is to make the whole background to reflective practice and the strategies used clear and accessible so that any institution can set up to involve their workforce. However, as stated above, it is not simply a case of 'here it is, now get on with it'.

If staff feel accountable, in the sense that someone will ask them if they have been involved, or they show an interest in the experience or outcome, there will be more success than if, once introduced, the assumption is that staff will continue unsupported and without encouragement from management.

There is an irony here, of course. Professional reflective articulations rely on the notion that the power imbalance is removed. It thrives on the notion that the professional wants to work things out for themselves, yet there still needs to be some lead, direction or organizational support from management in order to 'make it happen, and enable it to keep on happening'.

The difference lies perhaps in the fact that support, encouragement and interest shown by management are different from the traditional accountability agendas of the past. The involvement that is advocated is more to do with *leadership* and with a management team that has a commitment to an interpretation of staff development which is about 'helping people to help themselves'.

In terms of power relationships, this leadership is all about setting up and supporting an approach which empowers others to develop professionally. Instead of a top-down approach, staff can be part of a professional development dialogue, but they need management to show an interest and encourage them to take part and to continue to do so.

The aim of this book is to highlight the importance and significance of professional reflection, to explore the many ways of encouraging reflection, and to suggest a raft of measures to ensure that reflection becomes an instinctive aspect of any professional's practice. Whilst aimed primarily at students in ITE and teachers in the early stages of their career, it is hoped that other professionals might learn from the discussions regarding reflective practice and ways of achieving an ethos of reflection to support professional development in any institution.

Reference

Wenger, E. (2006) *Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction*. Available at: www.ewenger.com/theory/

1

What is reflective practice?

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will discuss professionalism and the reasons why we are encouraged to reflect. I will look at some of the more traditional models of supporting reflective practice and explore the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches and their impact on practice.

- Why this book?
- Why do we need to reflect?
- What is reflection?
- What is the impact on practice?
- Focus reflection questions



Why this Book?

For many years now, I have been working with teachers and student teachers in developing professionalism. One important element of this professionalism is reflection on practice. Over this time, I have investigated a number of approaches to reflection; and I have investigated the ways it is promoted, 'prescribed,' supported, documented and utilized in the context of teacher professionalism. I have looked at coaching models, structured models and traditional models. I have considered the benefits and drawbacks to reflection and the many challenges in having an approach that encourages personal

reflection which is relevant, meaningful, and, above all, useful to those doing the reflecting.

One significant conclusion I have come to is that it should be the person doing the reflecting who gets the most out of the experience. In order to manage this, they should have some ownership of the process, they should see and understand its purpose, and should not feel that it is something imposed upon them by others.

Why do we Need to Reflect?

One of the benefits of reflection is its impact on professionalism. Through reflecting on our practice, we become more aware, more in control, more able to see our strengths and development needs. Through reflection, we can begin to move from novice to expert. Berliner (2001: 5–13) states: ‘To the novice the expert appears to have uncanny abilities to notice things, an “instinct” to make the right moves, an ineffable ability to get things done and to perform in an almost effortless manner’ (in Banks and Mayes, 2001: 20).

He talks about the five stages: novice, advanced beginner, competent performer, proficient and then expert. He suggests that ‘the experts have ... an intuitive grasp of the situation and a non-analytic and non-deliberative sense of the appropriate response to be made’. Berliner goes on to say:

The wealth of knowledge and routines that they employ, in fact, is so automatic that they often do not realize why they performed a certain plan or action over another. However, when questioned, they are able to reconstruct the reasons for their decisions and behaviour. (In Banks and Mayes, 2001: 27)

It is this process, the questioning or self-questioning to reconstruct what happened – or to construct what might happen – that enables the teacher to move from novice to expert. Indeed, it helps the expert to continue to grow and develop. It may even enable the expert to pass on this expertise to other professionals as they share their reflections.

It is well documented that to develop as professionals we need to be able to reflect on our practice and to learn from this reflection. Donald Schön (1983) suggested that the capacity to reflect on action is to engage in the process of *continuous learning* and that this is one of the defining characteristics of professional practice.

What is Reflection?

There are many definitions of professionalism, and probably just as many definitions of reflection. It is important to establish what definitions I am using to underpin the ideas in this book.

There is much written about notions of professionalism. Authors such as Carr (2000), Sachs (2001) and Story and Hutchison (2001) view a professional as someone with training, expertise, autonomy and values consistent with the society of the time. For the purposes of this book, I will assume a shared acceptance of the 'training and expertise' aspects, but the values and autonomy perhaps require some discussion.

Professional values

It is important to acknowledge that being professional is about much more than 'what you do'. It is also about *how you do it* and the values that go along with it. It is about how you behave, it is about who you are and how you see yourself. Our actions and attitudes are influenced by our values and what we believe is 'right', 'just' and 'fair'. Often, we can become entrenched in our own view of the world and do not see some of the other 'possibilities'. Given the enormous influence we have on the lives of young people, it is important to be aware of how the values transmitted, either consciously or unconsciously, are appropriate. This book suggests that through talking about our profession, through articulating some of these deep-seated beliefs and values in terms of professional practice, we might begin to better understand them. Often, we do not realize that we hold some of these values until we have cause to stop and reflect upon what we did/said, why this might be and what effect this might have upon others in our care.

Teachers in particular can be very self-critical, and the demands of the profession are such that we often take even constructive criticism from others badly. We, nevertheless, blame ourselves for any seeming disaster that occurs in the course of our duties. Yet, on the other hand, we get little formal recognition for our victories and seldom stop to celebrate our expertise. It is often only when we stop and reflect that we realize how far we have come and how well we have done. This idea of reflection is not new. Many institutions have reflection embedded in the systems that operate in the professional environment. For many, it is this reflection and these values that help to define their professional identity.

Professional identity

Osgood (2006) suggests that ‘a professional identity is performatively constituted, “being professional” is a performance, which is about what practitioners do at particular times, rather than a universal indication of who they are’.

This is echoed by Sachs (2003) who states that ‘across society, professionalism increasingly refers to an individual’s attitude and behaviour, rather than a group’s formal status and collective identity’.

Without reflection, these elements may get locked away and development is hindered. Through reflecting on practice and on ‘what it is to be professional’ the door is opened to better understanding and potential development of the tools that will enable you to develop and grow professionally. These are tools that will support your practice in times of change, where attitudes and approaches must adapt and develop.

Reflective practice is specifically about reflecting on oneself and one’s inner world, behaviours and impact. Therefore, we need to consider much more than performance. Many ‘expert professionals’ can operate well in difficult situations and not tell you how they did so. Through reflection and articulation, it is possible to learn how to express these things and to understand what made the difference in a certain situation. It is possible to look at your own beliefs and values and consider them in the light of your profession. The whole autonomy element of professionalism can only really be addressed if you are able to stop for a moment and reflect on your practice.

Donald Schön (1983) has written extensively on this relationship between reflection and professionalism. He states:

A professional practitioner is a specialist who encounters certain types of situations again and again ... He develops a repertoire of expectations. He learns what to look for ... As long as his practice is stable, in the sense that it brings him the same types of cases he becomes less and less subject to surprise ... As practice becomes more repetitive and routine ... the practitioner may miss important opportunities to think about what he is doing. He may be drawn into patterns of error which he cannot correct ... When this happens the practitioner has *over learned* what he knows.

A practitioner’s reflection can serve as a corrective to *over learning*. Through reflection he *can* surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situation of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow

himself to experience ... Sometimes he arrives at a new theory of the phenomenon by articulating a feeling he has about it ... When someone reflects in action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He does not separate thinking from doing. (In Pollard, 2002: 6–7)

Professional expertise

Having trained and qualified to do your chosen profession, it is important to realize that this is not the end of the journey. Becoming a professional is not the end, merely a stop en route. The continuous development – constantly developing and updating knowledge and expertise – is what separates the professional from the technician.

Fullan (2007) suggests that every teacher has to learn, virtually every day. I would contest this and suggest that it is not ‘virtually’ every day, but indeed *every* single day! He goes on to state that ‘to improve we need to do two things: to measure ourselves and be open about what we are doing’. The reflective process is one approach to this challenge, and one I will discuss in more detail in the following chapters of this book.

Professional autonomy

There is, of course, a well-documented, ongoing debate about autonomy for professionals. There is always a fine balance between, on the one hand, the need for results and accountability, and on the other, the professional judgement and independent licence required to respond to day-to-day situations.

Quicke (1998) argues that teachers can be moral leaders only if they have sufficient autonomy to develop ‘strategies and approaches in ways which, in their view, will benefit society’ (cited in Banks and Mayes, 2001: 47). However, decades of government intervention have led to the erosion of professional autonomy. In particular, for teachers, ‘the application of rigor, and of robust standards and procedures by successive governments, has widely been viewed as an undermining of autonomy and creative potential in the classroom, with teachers as ciphers, simply technicians of the process’ (Storey and Hutchison, 2001: 47).

Brown (1989) argues that ‘teachers work spontaneously from their own situations and this does not tally well with a more systematic, define objectives – plan activities – evaluate achievement of objects, approach’.