1993

Promoting Reflection During Practice Teaching in an Australian University: Clarifying the Rhetoric and the Reality

Ross Brooker
Queensland University of Technology

Thomas A. O'Donoghue
University of Western Australia

Recommended Citation
http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.1993v18n1.1

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol18/iss1/1
INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the promotion of reflectivity during practice teaching amongst student teachers at a university in Australia. By way of background, current criticisms of what is termed the "technocratic" approach to teacher education are outlined and the emphasis which is placed on the development of the "reflective teacher" as a counterforce to this approach is considered. It is then argued that the "technocratic" position and the "reflective teacher" position need not necessarily be viewed as being in conflict. Rather, the contention is that they are both satisfactorily accommodated within Van Manen's (1977) "theory of reflectivity".

For the study reported in the remainder of the paper, Van Manen's levels of reflectivity provided a helpful framework for the concepts, language and practices of reflection. The study details an investigation of the reality and rhetoric of promoting reflectivity amongst student teachers engaged in one practice teaching period of their Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) pre-service programme at an Australian university. Firstly, the paper reports on the extent to which the process of reflection was mentioned and clarified in the university's official practice teaching literature, and on the stated priority for its development as a practicum aim. The paper then goes on to outline the findings of the second phase of the research which explored the extent to which reflectivity was promoted in the practice of university lecturers supervising students on practice teaching.

THE BACKGROUND

(i) Current criticisms the "technocratic" view of teacher education.

Teacher education throughout much of the developed English-speaking world has come under intensive scrutiny in the last ten years. Recent attacks have relied heavily on stereotypes. Increasingly, references are being made to the remoteness of schools from the "real world" and to the vacuousness and subserviveness of educational theory. In the USA these attacks have been fuelled by such works as Closing of the American Mind (Bloom, 1987) and Cultural Literacy (Hirsch, 1987). A fear mentality that schools and universities are the cause of the deepening social and economic crisis has been created. The call is for a dramatic upgrading of the quality of teacher education, largely through higher standards of "liberal-arts" education for potential teachers, extension of programmes and considerable changes in practicum-clinical experiences (Price, 1989: 14). A related development affecting practising teachers in some of the states in the USA has been the introduction of "intrusive surveillance schemes allegedly aimed at checking efficiency and effectiveness" but constituting a bureaucratic means by which "those deemed to know" are able to exercise surveillance and invoke sanctions over teachers "deemed to be deficient" (Smyth and Garman, 1989: 344).

In England and Wales attacks on initial teacher education have come from, amongst others, O'Keeffe and The Hillgate Group (1989) of the Right. They dismiss initial teacher education programmes as lacking in intellectual rigour as being dominated by pseudo disciplines irrelevant to "the practical world" of the classroom and as being subservively committed to preaching a spurious "gospel" of equality. This is part of a wider move which argues that schools can be magically restored to their rightful role as servants of the economy if a variety of actions are taken, including a return to the teaching of basic skills, tighter classroom discipline, longer school days, more sophisticated performance indicators and national testing (Walker and Barton, 1987). The attacks have coincided with, and taken advantage of, an alarm about teacher
shortages which make less “restrictive” routes into teaching seem especially attractive.

A major proposal of the critics in England and Wales is that initial teacher education should take place under the control of schools. Some developments have been initiated along these lines with the introduction, on a limited scale, of an articulated teacher scheme. There are also suggestions for a national curriculum for training in special “training schools”. Overall, the approach is an apprenticeship model which exaggerates what can be learned through imitation, reduces the knowledge which new teachers require to a set of subjective beliefs about teaching and its contexts. In particular, there is a need to develop teachers’ capacities for reflective action (Dewey, 1933) and to move them away from a perception of the everyday reality as given, clearly defined and in need of no further verification, beyond its simple presence (Zeichner, 1981: 5). In contrast to “routine action”, namely, action which is prompted by tradition, authority, official pronouncements and circumstances, “reflective action” incorporates 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 consequences to which it leads (Dewey, 1933: 9). In addition, reflective thinking involves a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and an act of searching, testing, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity (Dewey, 1933: 12). This position, as the following section demonstrates, underpins much of the thinking in the contemporary “reflective teacher” literature.

(ii) The “reflective teacher” literature.

Over recent years a body of literature on the crucial importance of developing “reflective” teachers has emerged as a counterpoint to the more technical approach to teacher education. Works such as Schön’s The Reflective Practitioner, which appeared in the USA in 1983, have had a significant influence on those promulgating the importance of the “reflective teacher” perspective. Within a year many teacher education programmes in that country were being described in Schönian terms, as promoting “the wisdom of practice”, “reflection-in-action” and “reflection-on-action”. By the late 1980s the term had begun to pervade teacher education establishments in Australia. The trend was given a boost with the publication of Schön’s second work, Educating the Reflective Practitioner, in 1987.

As with the advocates of a technocratic approach to teacher education, those who argue for the development of a more reflective practitioner do not accept that all is well with teacher education as it exists at present. Gordon (1985) characterises much of teacher education in the USA as utopian, learner-centered, and unconcerned with efficiency, scientific, deterministic model of teaching and learning which has fostered acritical, apolitical, highly managerial and prescriptive paradigms. Similar concerns with regard to the situation in England and Wales have been expressed by the “testers” (1984), Fullan (1985), Hopkins and Reid (1985) and Boydell (1986). Henry (1983) and Price (1987) cast Australian teacher education in the same mould; as being “technocratic”, “routine” and “recipe-oriented” producing teachers with utilitarian perspectives.

One of the main concerns is that existing approaches to teacher education do not produce teachers who are able to improve themselves and their schools. The argument is that what is needed are approaches which would make problematic the knowledge and skills disseminated in teacher education programmes, fostering an open attitude of inquiry into teaching and learning and a reflective orientation towards practice which allows for continuous professional development at induction and in-service levels. This vision presents a view of teaching which assumes that teachers develop over time, cognitively, technically and socially (Zimpher, 1988: 58). It is considered crucial that the associated processes be developed in student teachers not just while on campus but also engaged in practice teaching and field experience.

At the same time, a cursory look at the literature of “reflection” reveals that it is a term which has a great range of meanings and has been appropriated to serve any number of prevailing ideologies. In the hands of some theorists, the act of reflection is rife with political implications. For others, its usefulness as a strategy derives from the very fact of its value as a process. What is disturbing, as Bullough (1989: 15) points out, is that because of its charm and power to inspire action, agreement on the meaning of reflectivity and implications for the development of programmes for its promotion amongst student teachers is assumed, not won, with unfortunate results. As he puts it, reflectivity becomes a slogan prone to meaninglessness which it may serve comfortably as an aim for any and all types of programmes. In the same vein, others have endeavoured to develop students’ powers of reflectivity by getting them to focus on their classroom teaching experiences is equally meaningless since the absence of a clear concept of reflectivity makes it extremely difficult to delineate the processes involved.

Accordingly, it was considered appropriate to give an exposition on the position favoured by the present authors, namely, that of Van Manen (1977). Particular attention is given to the practical implications of this position with regard to strategies which could be used for the promotion of the reflective process amongst student teachers during pre-practice teaching and post-lesson conference sessions. It is, however, accepted that these and other strategies can also be used for the development of the process while students are engaged in other aspects of practice-teaching and field experience.

(iii) Van Manen’s theory and the development of the reflective teacher.

Van Manen’s (1977) notion of “levels of reflectivity” accommodates a diversity of viewpoints with respect to reflection. It also provides a useful framework of language, concepts and practices for examining reflection in a university’s practice teaching literature and in supervisory practices of lecturers with student teachers during the practicum.

Van Manen identifies three levels of reflection, each of which describes different criteria for choosing among alternative courses of action. Level One is concerned with “technical rationality”. The primary emphasis at this level is on the efficient and effective application of educational knowledge for the purpose of attaining given ends. To reflect at this level is to question the appropriateness of various courses of action in the classroom but not to enquire about purpose. Level Two is that of “practical reflection” which involves the clarification of the assumptions that are the basis of practical action. The interest is with the moral, ethical and value considerations in the context in which the action is to be undertaken. Reflection at this level is concerned with deciding the worth of competing educational goals and experiences, not just harnessing energies for their attainment. Level Three is on the level of “critical reflection”. Here, the focus of reflection is on the ways in which educational goals and practices become systematically and ideologically distorted by structural forces and constraints at work in various aspects of society including educational settings.

Within a teacher education programme, reflection at Van Manen’s three levels can be promoted in a variety of contexts. One context is that of the pre-practice teaching and post-lesson conference sessions. Amongst the major means which can be used to promote reflection within these contexts are questioning, pausing and suggesting.

With respect to reflection at Level One, the major alternative is merely to remove the students away from any notion that there is one “correct” way of teaching and encouraging them to
Cruickshank (1985) has argued for the development of reflectivity at a level which classroom discipline and management, be a vehicle for consideration of these issues, seminars through the questioning of strategies. This is not to ignore the dialogue, the veracity of their own means. Cruickshank (1985) has argued for the development of reflectivity at a level which classroom discipline and management, be a vehicle for consideration of these issues, seminars through the questioning of strategies. This is not to ignore the dialogue, the veracity of their own means. Cruickshank (1985) has argued for the development of reflectivity at a level which classroom discipline and management, be a vehicle for consideration of these issues, seminars through the questioning of strategies. This is not to ignore the dialogue, the veracity of their own means.

While reflection at Van Manen's second level may be in danger or where there is a tendency to violate school rules. Within such parameters, however, the supervisor can facilitate student-teachers' analysis of their teaching plans and practice-teaching, thus encouraging them to be autonomous in their decision making about their planning, choice of content and teaching strategies, and in accepting responsibility for their decisions. Attention can also be given to classroom discipline and management, student motivation and evaluation.

Cruickshank (1985) has argued for the development of reflectivity at a level which corresponds with Van Manen's first level. He has been criticized on the grounds that he appears to give legitimacy to a focus on the pedagogical and behavioural skills of teachers to the exclusion of social and moral purposes to which teaching should be directed (Gore, 1987). However, as Killen (1989) points out, while Cruickshank certainly did not intend reflective teaching to be a vehicle for consideration of these issues, being primarily concerned with the development of the skills of planning, teaching and assessment, there is ample room for their consideration in other parts of the teacher education programme. Furthermore, as Cruickshank (1989) points out, while supervisory practices which concentrate on technical aspects of teaching are also noteworthy, namely, that they are morally sustainable as long as they are open to the possibility of being “turned back” upon themselves so as to establish through dialogue, the veracity of their own means.

While reflection at Van Manen's second level may be in danger or where there is a tendency to violate school rules. Within such parameters, however, the supervisor can facilitate student-teachers' analysis of their teaching plans and practice-teaching, thus encouraging them to be autonomous in their decision making about their planning, choice of content and teaching strategies, and in accepting responsibility for their decisions. Attention can also be given to classroom discipline and management, student motivation and evaluation.

Cruickshank (1985) has argued for the development of reflectivity at a level which corresponds with Van Manen's first level. He has been criticized on the grounds that he appears to give legitimacy to a focus on the pedagogical and behavioural skills of teachers to the exclusion of social and moral purposes to which teaching should be directed (Gore, 1987). However, as Killen (1989) points out, while Cruickshank certainly did not intend reflective teaching to be a vehicle for consideration of these issues, being primarily concerned with the development of the skills of planning, teaching and assessment, there is ample room for their consideration in other parts of the teacher education programme. Furthermore, as Cruickshank (1989) points out, while supervisory practices which concentrate on technical aspects of teaching are also noteworthy, namely, that they are morally sustainable as long as they are open to the possibility of being “turned back” upon themselves so as to establish through dialogue, the veracity of their own means.

While reflection at Van Manen's second level may be in danger or where there is a tendency to violate school rules. Within such parameters, however, the supervisor can facilitate student-teachers' analysis of their teaching plans and practice-teaching, thus encouraging them to be autonomous in their decision making about their planning, choice of content and teaching strategies, and in accepting responsibility for their decisions. Attention can also be given to classroom discipline and management, student motivation and evaluation.

Cruickshank (1985) has argued for the development of reflectivity at a level which corresponds with Van Manen's first level. He has been criticized on the grounds that he appears to give legitimacy to a focus on the pedagogical and behavioural skills of teachers to the exclusion of social and moral purposes to which teaching should be directed (Gore, 1987). However, as Killen (1989) points out, while Cruickshank certainly did not intend reflective teaching to be a vehicle for consideration of these issues, being primarily concerned with the development of the skills of planning, teaching and assessment, there is ample room for their consideration in other parts of the teacher education programme. Furthermore, as Cruickshank (1989) points out, while supervisory practices which concentrate on technical aspects of teaching are also noteworthy, namely, that they are morally sustainable as long as they are open to the possibility of being “turned back” upon themselves so as to establish through dialogue, the veracity of their own means.

While reflection at Van Manen's second level may be in danger or where there is a tendency to violate school rules. Within such parameters, however, the supervisor can facilitate student-teachers' analysis of their teaching plans and practice-teaching, thus encouraging them to be autonomous in their decision making about their planning, choice of content and teaching strategies, and in accepting responsibility for their decisions. Attention can also be given to classroom discipline and management, student motivation and evaluation.

Cruickshank (1985) has argued for the development of reflectivity at a level which corresponds with Van Manen's first level. He has been criticized on the grounds that he appears to give legitimacy to a focus on the pedagogical and behavioural skills of teachers to the exclusion of social and moral purposes to which teaching should be directed (Gore, 1987). However, as Killen (1989) points out, while Cruickshank certainly did not intend reflective teaching to be a vehicle for consideration of these issues, being primarily concerned with the development of the skills of planning, teaching and assessment, there is ample room for their consideration in other parts of the teacher education programme. Furthermore, as Cruickshank (1989) points out, while supervisory practices which concentrate on technical aspects of teaching are also noteworthy, namely, that they are morally sustainable as long as they are open to the possibility of being “turned back” upon themselves so as to establish through dialogue, the veracity of their own means.

While reflection at Van Manen's second level may be in danger or where there is a tendency to violate school rules. Within such parameters, however, the supervisor can facilitate student-teachers' analysis of their teaching plans and practice-teaching, thus encouraging them to be autonomous in their decision making about their planning, choice of content and teaching strategies, and in accepting responsibility for their decisions. Attention can also be given to classroom discipline and management, student motivation and evaluation.

Cruickshank (1985) has argued for the development of reflectivity at a level which corresponds with Van Manen's first level. He has been criticized on the grounds that he appears to give legitimacy to a focus on the pedagogical and behavioural skills of teachers to the exclusion of social and moral purposes to which teaching should be directed (Gore, 1987). However, as Killen (1989) points out, while Cruickshank certainly did not intend reflective teaching to be a vehicle for consideration of these issues, being primarily concerned with the development of the skills of planning, teaching and assessment, there is ample room for their consideration in other parts of the teacher education programme. Furthermore, as Cruickshank (1989) points out, while supervisory practices which concentrate on technical aspects of teaching are also noteworthy, namely, that they are morally sustainable as long as they are open to the possibility of being “turned back” upon themselves so as to establish through dialogue, the veracity of their own means.

While reflection at Van Manen's second level may be in danger or where there is a tendency to violate school rules. Within such parameters, however, the supervisor can facilitate student-teachers' analysis of their teaching plans and practice-teaching, thus encouraging them to be autonomous in their decision making about their planning, choice of content and teaching strategies, and in accepting responsibility for their decisions. Attention can also be given to classroom discipline and management, student motivation and evaluation.

Cruickshank (1985) has argued for the development of reflectivity at a level which corresponds with Van Manen's first level. He has been criticized on the grounds that he appears to give legitimacy to a focus on the pedagogical and behavioural skills of teachers to the exclusion of social and moral purposes to which teaching should be directed (Gore, 1987). However, as Killen (1989) points out, while Cruickshank certainly did not intend reflective teaching to be a vehicle for consideration of these issues, being primarily concerned with the development of the skills of planning, teaching and assessment, there is ample room for their consideration in other parts of the teacher education programme. Furthermore, as Cruickshank (1989) points out, while supervisory practices which concentrate on technical aspects of teaching are also noteworthy, namely, that they are morally sustainable as long as they are open to the possibility of being “turned back” upon themselves so as to establish through dialogue, the veracity of their own means.
student teachers was openly explored with them in the post-practice teaching interviews.

Data were also collected from pre-practice teaching (at the university) and post-lesson conferences (immediately following a student teaching episode) at the school between supervisors and student teachers. In addition, the researchers kept field notes on the school-based activities of supervisors to provide a supportive descriptive account of supervisory practices. All interviews and conferences were tape recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Categories and themes were generated from the data by using the constant comparative approach to analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Findings and Discussion

With respect to the role of supervision, there was consistency between the views expressed by each supervisor in pre-practice teaching interviews and those expressed in post-practice teaching interviews. At various stages they spoke about themselves as having moved in the last number of years from being primarily concerned with assessing students to being mediators, counsellors, co-ordinators and support persons providing a link between the university and the schools. Also, all saw themselves as being moderators of grades. They noted that while the supervisors in the school have the main responsibility for awarding grades, they are drawn into adopting their moderating role in cases where there are major discrepancies in grading between different schools.

The supervisors also highlighted the fact that they are unaware of any standard model of supervision recommended by the university. Accordingly, each supervisor approached supervision differently. In each case they conducted a pre-practice teaching meeting at the university and post-lesson meetings with their students at the school.

In the case of some supervisors, pre-practice teaching meetings were held with individual students while other supervisors met with groups of students. With regard to post-lesson meetings, all supervisors met with students individually. In some instances, supervisors subsequently met with groups of students. Only two of the supervisors provided written feedback to the student teachers for their consideration. One of the two in question argued that this feedback is necessary in order to provide the basis for discussion.

With the exception of one supervisor who specifically mentioned and continually revisited with students, the notion that “there is no one way to plan and to teach”, there was a clear tendency by supervisors at pre-practice teaching and post-lesson meetings to focus the student teachers’ attention on the development and refinement of the technical skills of teaching. In particular, they stressed the importance of planning skills such as “preparation”, “writing clear objectives”, “preparing specific content to teach”, “preparing what you are going to say”, “evaluating good questions beforehand”, teaching skills such as “using good questioning techniques and eliciting answers”, “using a variety of teaching strategies”, “looking for the inclusion of the whole class”, “effective use of motivation and communication skills”, “good chalkboard writing”; and classroom management skills such as “effective use of voice” and “sound discipline and class control”. Some supervisors adopted an instructive approach in impressing upon students the importance of mastering the basics of these teaching skills while others addressed this issue in a more interactive manner through questioning. All expressed concern that the university-based courses do not provide students with adequate opportunities for the acquisition of what are seen as basic teaching skills.

None of the supervisors indicated that they possessed a clearly formulated and comprehensive position on the nature of reflectivity, on the nature of any constituent parts which it might have and of the relationship of the parts to each other and to the whole. Furthermore, the term itself was rarely used by the supervisors in interviews with the researchers or in dialogue with the students, suggesting that it is a concept whose meaning and importance do not feature at the centre of their professional lives. This is somewhat surprising given the importance attached to “reflection” both in the teaching and teacher education literature and in the university’s practice teaching documents.

The fact that the supervisors had not given serious consideration to the meaning of the concept of reflectivity and to how it can be developed in student teachers during practice teaching was because it was not clear when they were questioned directly on such matters in the post-practice teaching interviews. The language of one of the supervisors gave indications of a struggle to determine the place of the development of reflection in students during practice teaching in each of the three years of their course. This was expressed by her as follows:

Year One - teach well
Year Two   - reflect on lessons
Year Three - reflect on curriculum.

Furthermore, the fact that this issue is unresolved in her thinking was evident in her willingness to consider the possibility that the development of reflection should not be a priority for pre-service teacher education but “may only be for practising teachers”. However, this lecturer, as well as all of those interviewed, did not articulate any possible meanings of the concept of reflection.

At the same time, there was some articulation of ideas that showed glimpses of correspondence with Van Manen’s position. Ideas encompassed within his notion of reflection at the “first level” were expressed as follows:

It is important to make sure that the student teachers are aware of alternatives so that they can think of new things they can try.

Third your students should be a bit insightful with respect to lessons by asking why did it go well and what needs to be done next time.

Your teaching is an ongoing action research model. You should be constantly adjusting methods. We need to develop the notion of teachers as learners.

Furthermore, the potential existed for promoting reflection at this level in a more comprehensive and systematic manner. In particular, the importance which all of the supervisors placed on student teachers’ self evaluation shows much promise.

A common expression of the supervisors was that “students evaluating themselves is very important”. There was some variation in the approaches adopted by supervisors for the encouragement of this capacity. Two supervisors emphasized with their students the need, as one of them put it, for teachers to “think about what went well with the lesson and what didn’t go well, and why”. It is arguable that while the intent is worthwhile, the means are not very helpful as they fail to allow for the fact that novice teachers need to have their thinking focused on specific aspects of their teaching practice (Turney et al., 1982: 83).

One of the lecturers insisted with her students that they write out their self evaluations after teaching lessons:

I check to see if they have done a self-evaluation to see if they are over-praising or under-praising of themselves, and how the lesson can be improved. This ability must be developed in them. I am not happy just with “this lesson went well”.

This approach is helpful because of its potential to engage the student teachers’ metacognitive processes. Unfortunately, as with the previous approach outlined, there was no accompanying focus of students’ thinking on specific aspects of their teaching practice.

A third approach, favoured by the remaining three lecturer, employed questioning to facilitate a process of self-evaluation. Students were confronted with such questions as “how do you multi-aged teaching” and “this is an interesting management style (adopted by the teacher). What do you think?” With respect to this approach, one lecturer explained his style as follows:

I use questioning to encourage them to engage in self-evaluation. I look at each student differently and get them to self-assess their practice, identify what are strengths and weaknesses and think how to improve it. I give them my perspective to think about rather than saying “this is what to do”. They still come with a “you tell me what to do” mentality. It is hard to break them out of it.

Another emphasised that when the practice teaching period is over she sits down with the school practice teaching co-ordinator and the student. She then attempts, through questioning, to promote dialogue between all parties as they look at the student’s report, focusing on “highs and lows, with regard to teaching itself and involvement in the school,”

This latter approach goes further towards promoting reflection at Van Manen’s first level, namely, the level of technical rationality, where the concern is with the examination of the appropriateness of various courses of classroom action, yet doing so divorced from purpose. Such reflection could be enhanced further by the students responding in written form to the questioning and dialogue. At the same time, in drawing attention to this matter sight should not be lost of the fact that the supervisors are not
Van Manen’s second level, that of “practical reflection”, is concerned with the anticipation and clarification of the assumptions that are the basis of practical action. In the lecturer-student interactions observed, situations arose which held the potential for initiating the student-teachers into this process of deciding the worth of competing goals and experiences rather than just harnessing energies for their attainment. However, there were no indications at any stage that the potential was being fulfilled to any extent whatsoever. There was no attempt to encourage the student teachers to question the fact that most of the schools followed a rigid timetable with the weekly allocation of time to each subject being prescribed at the beginning of the school year. The curriculum itself was also viewed as being non-problematic even though it is the subject of much continuing debate throughout Australia.

Furthermore, the students gave no indications of any desire to engage in discussion on such matters. Rather, as one supervisor put it, “their main concern is with getting a high grade and they bring strong pressure on us to give it to them”. This, of course, is understandable given that the Department of Education requires that the university grades the student teachers’ practice teaching performance and that the level of the final grade is then a major factor in the student teachers’ ability to secure employment. The Department of Education requires that the university, in question has conducted no formal preparation programmes for lecturers to facilitate the development of student teachers’ reflective abilities while on practice teaching. The general thrust of lecturer preparation has been towards an organisational task dealing with such matters as the importance of establishing good relationships with the host schools, making sure all of the necessary form filling is done and ensuring that the student is complying with the schools’ regulations with respect to dress and decorum. Furthermore, and no of this has been communicated in written form and no major forum has existed wherein supervisors could discuss any of their reservations and questions. Accordingly, it is not surprising that in their pre-practice teaching and post-lesson conferences, supervisors concentrate almost totally on focusing the student teachers’ attention on developing and refining the technical skills of teaching.

CONCLUSION

In recent years a substantial body of literature stressing the crucial importance of developing “reflective” teachers has emerged. Associated with this has been a trend towards incorporating the term “reflection” into the objectives of teacher education programmes. This paper reported the findings of a study, in one Australian university, aimed at evaluating the extent to which the notion of reflectivity is mentioned in practice teaching documents, and is subsequently developed and promoted by lecturers in one practice teaching period for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) pre-service programme. It has demonstrated that while the universities’ practice teaching literature for the degree in question stresses the importance of student teachers developing their reflective abilities, the meaning of the term “reflection” is not clearly articulated. Furthermore, the supervising lecturers did not possess a developed notion of the concept and their supervisory practices indicated that their priorities with respect to the purpose of practice teaching, at best lay at the most basic level of reflective activity.

Consequently, it is mandatory that this situation be addressed in teacher education programmes as the understanding of reflection, by lecturers and students, would seem to be an essential starting point for student teachers. To ignore this mandate denies reflectivity to be no more than a meaningless slogan. Furthermore, the notion of reflection is in danger of being brought into disrepute if the rhetoric in teacher education course documents is not matched by the reality of practices aimed at its promotion amongst student teachers.

This case, contextualised in one university, is offered to other teacher educators so that they might consider their perceptions and practices. The notion of reflectivity is a powerful one which holds great possibilities for transforming teaching practice. However, unless the rhetoric is clarified and the notion of reflection is clearly articulated and related to practical outcomes, the notion will go the way of all other well meaning but ill defined notions which have entered the teacher education debate over the years. This process needs to be supported by meaningful attempts to prepare lecturers for the effective promotion of reflection in their supervisory practices. This study provides a framework for developing enlightenment and guiding activity on these matters since it can “speak” to others in similar and related contexts who share some of the same concerns.

REFERENCES


In this paper I want to raise four issues:

1. Why the interest in reflective approaches, now?
2. What is to be gained from this approach?
3. What are some of the advantages?
4. What are the drawbacks?

The basic argument of the paper is that the notion of "reflective practice" has generally had a positive history and connotation in schools, and that it is worth persisting with, but unless we develop some touchstone principles to guide us as to what it means to act reflectively, there is a distinct danger that a constructive and useful approach will be "at risk" as good ideas are appropriated by governments for other ends - ones that are not necessarily in the interests of students or teachers.

I want to conclude by canvassing some of the principles that might underlie a re-assertion of what it is that is fundamentally important about reflective approaches.

**WHY THE INTEREST?**

There are a number of major changes occurring across a range of professions and professional groups that are having a profound impact on the shape and nature of professional knowledge. Perhaps the major factor has been the breakdown of traditional forms of production (the so-called Fordist notions) and their replacement with much more flexible forms of specialisation, and ways of responding to customers and clients. With the dramatically increased speed of communication and the new micro-technology, it is now much easier for capital to move around so as to take advantage of global comparative advantage.

The effect of this has been that rigid, centralised forms of production are no longer the most appropriate. We have a dramatically changed set of conditions. Donald Schon (1991) captured the essence of these changes for education when he indicated that "disciplinary-based forms of knowledge, which in the past had been used to try and construct grand theories of the way the world works, are no longer relevant. What we have in their place, are much more locally-based theories that recognise the idiosyncrasies of site-specific circumstances, and that acknowledge the integrity and worth of knowledge won by people at the workplace. This represents a major shift in the centre of gravity of knowledge. The view that there are particular elite groups in our society whose responsibility it is to develop knowledge for and on behalf of others, has endured for a long time (and even now is only dying slowly in some quarters). What characterises these new locally-based approaches is the much more negotiated (even devolved) ways, in which the people who do the work are given a much more significant stake in it. As Schon (1991) put it in his most recent work, what we have is a "reflective turn", in which practitioners are allowed to give voice to the reasons that lie behind what they do. What this means, essentially, is that those of us in universities and other educational agencies have to grapple with a changed role for ourselves - namely, how to work with practitioners in assisting them to observe and describe what it is they do, and with what effect. Schon (1991) put it in terms of "exploring the understandings revealed by the patterns of spontaneous activity that make up practice" (p.5). Our role, therefore, becomes one of helping insiders to make sense of experience, often in quite strange and puzzlingly new sets of circumstances - rather than telling them what these experiences ought to look like.

This is quite a different emphasis to the past where "practice" was regarded mainly as a field of application, where ideas were developed by someone else (who usually wore the label of theorist or policy maker), then exported back to the field of practice to be implemented. The emphasis in the reflective approach is upon practitioners being assisted to theorise their own accounts of practice, and how they might use that as a springboard for action. What this change does is turn the world dramatically on its head. The issue is not "what is best for practitioners to do", but rather "what do practitioners need to know, and what do they already know or understand that might help them gain those insights?". Herein lies the really interesting (and daunting) aspect to the reflective turn - there is no uniform approach!