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Reflective Teaching and Learning in Further Education

Keith and Nancy Appleyard
Series Editor Susan Wallace
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Meet the series editor and authors

Susan Wallace, series editor

I am Emeritus Professor of Education at Nottingham Trent University where, for many years, part of my role was to support learning on the initial training courses for teachers in the further education (FE) sector. I taught in the sector myself for ten years, including on BTEC programmes and basic skills provision. My particular interest is in the motivation and behaviour of students in FE, and in mentoring and the ways in which a successful mentoring relationship can support personal and professional development. I have written a range of books, mainly aimed at teachers and student teachers in the sector, and I enjoy hearing readers’ own stories of FE, whether it is by email or at speaking engagements and conferences.

Keith Appleyard, author

I have worked in further education (FE) since 1978 as a teacher, college senior manager and teacher trainer. I have been a tutor and course leader for PGCE/Cert Ed programmes at Lincoln College, and a tutor and franchise co-ordinator on these programmes at Nottingham Trent University. Most recently I have worked as an initial teacher training reviewer for Standards Verification UK and as a consultant for LSIS. I live in Lincolnshire and, with my wife Nancy, am the co-author of three other books on FE issues.

Nancy Appleyard, author

My early working life was in the insurance industry, initially with a large general insurance company and then as a partner in a commercial insurance brokerage. A career change brought me to Lincoln College where I taught insurance, business skills and communication studies. My particular interest is supporting learners in developing their professional and personal relationships through effective communication.
Our grateful thanks to:

Vicki Locke and all her colleagues in the Teaching and Learning Hub at Boston College for showing us how the ‘Journey to Outstanding’ (J2O) project operates and welcoming our participation;

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Susan Wallace and Julia Morris for their advice and continuing support.
1 Introduction

The old grey donkey, Eeyore stood by himself in a thistly corner of the Forest, his front feet well apart, his head on one side, and thought about things. Sometimes he thought ... to himself, ‘Why?’ and sometimes he thought, ‘Wherefore?’ and sometimes he thought, ‘Inasmuch as which?’

A A Milne, Winnie the Pooh

Everybody reflects, even fictitious donkeys! And this particular donkey has enlisted the help of some rather useful reflective words: ‘Why?’, ‘Wherefore?’ and ‘Inasmuch as which?’ If Eeyore were really to push the reflective boat out perhaps he could come up with some more handy words; words such as ‘What?’, ‘If?’, ‘How?’, ‘What else?’ and ‘Supposing?’ to name just a few.

Of course, for Eeyore in his thistly corner of the forest, the concept of reflective practice is no more real than Eeyore himself, so he probably does not need to bother. But the same cannot be said for anyone teaching in further education (FE). Indeed, in FE it is difficult to avoid hearing about, reading about or participating in discussion on reflective practice. Scholarly articles on the subject abound; educational libraries have dozens of books on the topic and teacher training courses invariably have reflective practice as a key element of their course design. This is no coincidence, nor is it overkill.

Why reflective practice is so important

There are three main reasons why reflective practice has become so significant: firstly the influence of educational theorists, secondly the concept of the teacher as an autonomous professional and finally the introduction of government regulation designed to ensure high standards of teaching in the FE sector.

The influence of educational theorists

During the second half of the last century, educational theory witnessed a change in emphasis away from concentrating on didactic skills where the teacher’s job was to impart knowledge
and skills to a passive audience. Rather the teacher was increasingly seen as a facilitator of learning, and the focus was centred on the learners rather than the teacher.

One of the most influential writers in this regard was David Kolb. His 1983 book *Experiential Learning* proposed a model involving reflective practice as a key teaching skill whereby the teacher reflects on and analyses a teaching problem prior to identifying ways of solving it and trying out possible alternative strategies. Around the same time, Donald Schön proposed that reflective practice was an indispensable characteristic of effective teaching, and that teachers gradually build up the ability to reflect in an increasingly sophisticated manner throughout their careers. Other writers have developed these theories – Graham Gibbs, Gary Rolph and Chris Johns, for example – and in consequence, developing the skills of critical reflection has now become an indispensible element of the training and professional development of FE teachers.

**The teacher as an autonomous professional**

This trend to incorporate reflective practice in the skill set of FE teachers has been partly driven by the perception of FE teachers as autonomous professionals: well-trained teachers delivering a high quality product and with considerable discretion on how they carried out their work in the classroom. Consequently, the vast majority of initial teacher training (ITT) courses in the late twentieth century included a strong focus on reflective practice with novice FE teachers being required to reflect on the lessons they taught, to keep a learning journal and to discuss their successes, problems and feelings with colleagues, mentors and tutors.

In this context, reflective practice was seen as an emancipatory and individualised experience that was encouraged and supported on a voluntary basis by most college managements. For FE teachers the emphasis was on intrinsic rewards; enthusiasm for reflective practice was a good attitude to develop because it would improve your teaching and increase your personal satisfaction in doing a rewarding professional job.

**Government regulation**

Increasing government regulation is the third reason why reflective practice has become so ubiquitous within the FE sector. At the time that writers like Kolb and Schön were encouraging teachers to become reflective practitioners, successive governments started to adopt policies that were designed to make the teaching profession more efficient and accountable.

Before 2001, there was no mandatory requirement for teachers in FE to hold a recognised teaching qualification. The tradition in the sector was that the key requirement for vocational teachers was experience and qualifications in their subject specialism. If you wanted somebody to teach welding, your prime need would be to find an expert welder; their teaching skills could be acquired on-the-job or by undertaking a part-time teaching course. A significant number of teachers did undertake part-time qualifications such as City and Guilds 7407, PGCE or Cert Ed and were supported by their employers in doing this. However, as gaining an ITT qualification was not mandatory, there were many teachers in the sector with no teaching qualification and little involvement with the ideas of reflective practice.
This rather ad hoc and haphazard system came under the political spotlight, particularly following the 1997 election and Tony Blair’s mantra of his priorities as ‘Education, education, education!’. In 1998 it became government policy that all teachers in FE should not only be teacher trained but also that this training should meet agreed national standards. The aim of this policy was to raise the status of the teaching profession to equate with that of other professional occupational areas such as medicine or law. Service users and other stakeholders needed a guarantee that learners in FE would be taught by well-trained teachers working to high professional standards.

The result of this policy has been the design of a succession of written standards that are intended to guarantee a professional service delivered by well-trained and motivated teachers. The first set of standards, known as the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) standards, was published in 2001. These were superseded in 2007 by the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) standards. There was an additional mandatory requirement that FE teachers would need a qualification that met these standards in order to gain a licence to practice. Since the publication of the Lingfield report in 2011, this policy has been modified to encompass a less centralised approach. At the time of writing, the FE sector is working with the 2014 Education and Training Foundation (ETF) set of professional standards, which, like its predecessors, has a strong focus on reflective practice.

In summary, reflective practice is here to stay, a key professional skill for FE teachers, supported by current educational theory and encouraged by government regulation. This is why it is so important and worth investigation.

**About this book**

This book is an examination of reflective practice, primarily intended for all teachers working in FE, no matter which part of the sector you are working in and what stage of your career you have reached. A basic premise is that reflective practice is a skill not only for the professional role of the FE teacher, but it is also a life skill providing a philosophical basis for a wise and fulfilling life.

**Content**

The content of the book is designed to help you become a more effective reflective practitioner. It moves from an introduction to reflective practice to a consideration of a series of key themes relevant to the work of an FE teacher within which effective reflective practice is illustrated. The final part of the book aims to encourage a deeper understanding of reflective practice by offering a critique of the concept in the light of the issues introduced earlier. There is consequently a progression from the earlier chapters, where the emphasis is on practical situations, to the final chapters, where there is a greater focus on the philosophical basis of reflective practice.

Here it is worth commenting on the use of educational theory. Your understanding of reflective practice will be formed from a variety of sources: your personal teaching experience, discussions with colleagues, reading, formal training courses, casual chats with friends and so on. The content of this book reflects this variety, using case studies and the authors’
personal experiences to illustrate the main learning points alongside material drawn from a range of writers and theorists whose insights have contributed to the understanding of reflective practice. Hence, educational theory has an important contribution to the narrative of this book, increasingly so as ideas are developed in greater depth in the later chapters. However, the emphasis is always on the practical experience of teachers as the starting point for understanding reflective practice, while theory is seen as supporting and enriching this experience.

Chapter content

Chapter 2 introduces the concept of reflective practice through the eyes of professional practitioners. It covers its processes and key features, emphasising the need to match these to your own individual requirements.

Chapters 3–6 look at reflective practice in action, starting with the theme of planning and the practicalities of teaching. Chapter 3 focuses on developing and maintaining these skills and, as in all other sections of the book, uses case studies and appropriate theory to illustrate how the chapter theme can be integrated within your reflective practice. The theme of Chapter 4 is the relationship between reflective practice and self-awareness, considering issues relating to personality, personal strengths, beliefs and values. Chapter 5 is concerned with communicating and managing behaviour, and uses examples from a range of teaching and learning situations to demonstrate the importance and value of critical reflection in developing effective communication techniques and behaviour management skills. Chapter 6 highlights reflective practice as a cornerstone of continuing professional development (CPD). Through a series of case studies you will be encouraged to engage in reflective practice in order to identify, plan, undertake and evaluate your own developmental activities.

The final three substantive chapters develop the themes introduced earlier. Chapter 7 is a more in-depth study of reflective practice. It traces its development and its increasing popularity since the work of Dewey in the 1930s and reviews recent theory in the context of contemporary FE teaching. It describes how reflective practice has been used in a variety of professions as a tool for professional development and is now an important element of government encouragement for FE teachers to attain and develop high standards of professionalism.

Chapter 8 evaluates the potential limitations of reflective practice and balances these against its benefits. This chapter emphasises the need to be realistic about what it can achieve but suggests that, even in an unsympathetic environment, there are many ways in which reflective practice enriches professional life.

Chapter 9 introduces action research as a key method of developing reflective practice further, leading to a deeper understanding of its power and range. It highlights the philosophy of action research, looks at its key features and uses an in-depth case study to illustrate the role of reflection in action research. The aim is to inspire you to engage in your own action research as a means of developing your skills as a reflective practitioner. This point is reinforced in the conclusion (Chapter 10).
Structure and use

Each chapter, apart from this introduction and the conclusion, follows the same structure that includes:

- a statement of aims that outlines the purpose and rationale for the chapter, plus a visual map that depicts the chapter content;
- an introduction that briefly outlines the chapter content;
- case studies that give practical examples of the learning points under consideration, together with questions for discussion and further research;
- critical thinking activities designed to draw out the relevance of the chapter content to your own reflective practice;
- a conclusion and chapter reflections that summarise the content and learning points of the chapter;
- suggestions for further reading headed ‘Taking it further’;
- references.

There are many terms in common use to describe teachers and learners: lecturer, trainer, tutor, instructor, student and client come to mind. Normally this depends on where you are working, but for the purposes of this book the generic terms teacher and learner are used throughout the narrative.

The case studies that you will find throughout the book are based on real-life situations. In these studies you are asked to consider certain points, and hopefully to relate the situation to your own experience. They are designed to stimulate thought and discussion.

The critical thinking activities are designed to help you consolidate and develop what you have learned. They encourage you to think about a particular aspect of the chapter and relate it to your own practice and to the theoretical concepts discussed in the chapter. They also give you the opportunity to explore these concepts in relation to your own situation.

These features should help you to develop as a reflective practitioner no matter what your professional role is and how much you already know about reflective practice. You will want and need different things from your reading dependent on your professional situation and experience. If the whole concept is new to you, the book may well serve as a practical introduction that can be related to meeting the everyday challenges facing you in your work. Alternatively, if you are interested in the philosophical aspects of reflective practice you may find the later sections covering theory and research most useful. The main premise is that anyone working in the FE sector – novice teachers, teacher training tutors, experienced teachers – will be able to enhance their skills as reflective practitioners.
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