

Reflective practice

One of the key principles that underpin existing models of teacher training is the approach known as reflective practice. This approach is reflected in the standards expected of those for teaching in schools, in higher education and in the LSS sector. For example, standard 1.7, as part of the professional values for those training to teach in schools, states:

They are able to improve their own teaching, by evaluating it, learn from the effective practice of others and from evidence. They are motivated and able to take increasing responsibility for their own professional development.

Reflective practice is the essence of good teaching and is a process you will, it is hoped, engage in for the rest of your professional life. Reflective practice is based around a cycle of professional development, which involves:

- *Professional knowledge*: gaining experiences and ideas from a wide range of sources about what is effective in the classroom.
- *Professional values*: developing certain attitudes and dispositions which are valued by the profession.
- *Professional practice*: trying things out for yourself in the classroom.
- *Evaluation of practice*: reflecting on what was effective and why, and adding this to your professional knowledge.

In the LSS, reflecting on performance and meeting professional needs are key areas of the standards.

Implicit in the term 'reflective practice' is the idea that the role being undertaken requires constant consideration and analysis. Reflective practice as a learning tool underpins the training of many professionals today: nurses, engineers, lawyers and others all support the principles of lifelong learning. What reflective practice tells us as professionals is that we have many skills to learn, that we never stop learning and that we should always be prepared to adapt and adopt different skills to meet changing needs. In addition, reflective practice is seen a learning process. By reflecting on our own strengths and weaknesses we become more aware of our training needs and can with confidence adapt our teaching styles to try different approaches to meet different student needs.

Reflective action is the opposite of routine action and implies constant self-appraisal and development as well as flexibility, rigorous analysis and social awareness. Reflection is a fundamental part of training to teach and, once applied, should inform the professional practice of every teacher:

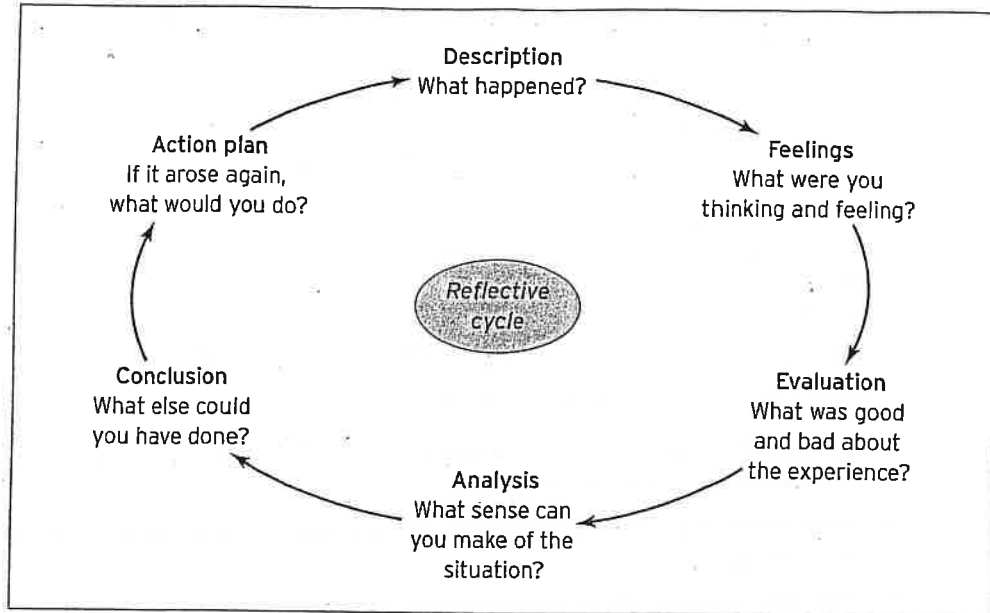
At the heart of becoming a teacher is, above else, being a learner – a lifelong learner. To learn one has to ask questions, of oneself and of others and to know that this process is valued and shared.

(DoE NI, 1999: 82)

One advantage of the reflective process is that learning gained from one experience can be used and adapted to fit another. Reflective learning is cumulative and can be described in cyclical terms. Figure 4.1, adapted from the work of Gibbs (1988), shows the many elements involved in the process.

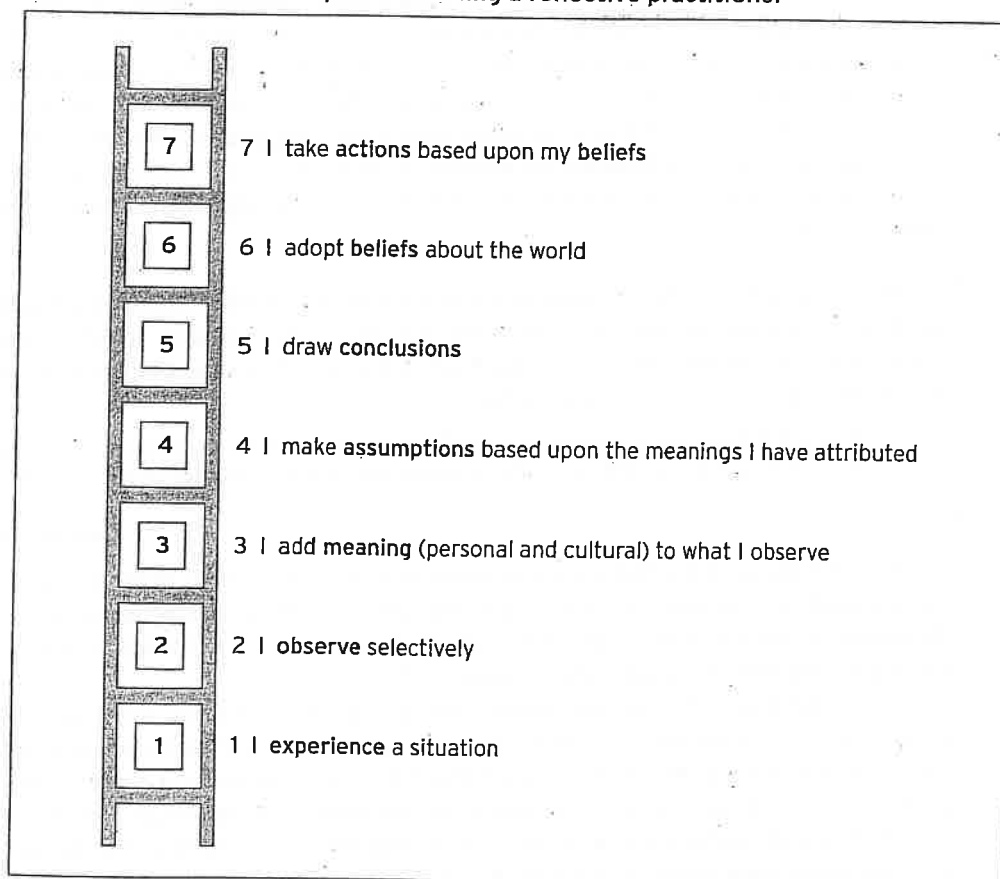
The model shows that self-awareness, critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation are all necessary for reflection. You will have met these terms in Chapter 3 when thinking about higher-order thinking skills (see Table 3.6); their definitions are provided in the glossary. The cyclical process involves monitoring, evaluating and revising our approaches and practices continuously. To do this, teachers need opportunity and time to think about their skills, to read recent and relevant research, to engage in research themselves leading to evidence-based practice, and to strive continuously to develop high standards in their work. The focus on continuing professional development is demonstrated in the new licensed to practise award, with lecturers expected to undergo, on an annual basis, some form of training or development as a requirement of their continued registration as a qualified teacher (QTLS). It is to be hoped that the model adopted will encourage lecturers in the sector to engage in research that will inform their practice and lead to opportunities for practitioners to influence externally developed frameworks for learning and teaching.

Figure 4.1 The cyclical nature of the reflective process



Source: Gibbs (1998)

Figure 4.2 The seven steps to becoming a reflective practitioner



Source: Argyris (1991)

Source: Keeley-Browne, L. (2007), *Training to Teach in the Learning and Skills Sector*, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, pp. 52-55.