Abstract

This research was motivated by a desire to learn more about reflective teaching, and by the need in the Cayman Islands to accumulate a body of knowledge addressing local issues in all disciplines, including aspects of teaching and learning. A qualitative instrumental case study was employed. Six broad research questions guided the study. Participants included four seasoned teachers. The field research made use of interviews and documentary analysis. Interviews focused on participants’ experience and observations regarding the research areas. Lesson plans were used to confirm the participants’ observations. By analysing similarities and differences in the respondents’ views, I outlined the extent to which they made use of elements of reflective teaching in their lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation. Finally I offer implications of the results for teacher education and training globally and locally.

KEY WORDS: teacher education, reflection, reflective teaching, Cayman Islands

INTRODUCTION

The advantages of teaching reflectively are many – for individual teachers, the teaching profession, and schools that are willing to employ it and encourage its use. For example, reflective teaching demands that teachers
employ and develop their cognitive skills as a means of improving their practice. They will recall, consider, and evaluate their teaching experiences as a means of improving future ones (Farrell 2001; Coyle 2002). Reflective teachers develop and use self-directed critical thinking and ongoing critical inquiry in their practice, self-initiated and not administratively decreed. This results in the development of contextualised knowledge (Hyrkäs, Tarkka, and Paunonen-Ilmonen 2001; Calderhead 1992, 141). Reflective teachers think critically, which involves being willing to question, take risks in learning, try out new strategies and ideas, seek alternatives, take control of learning, use higher-order thinking skills, and reflect upon their own learning processes (Elder and Paul 1994; Halpern 1996). They discuss and analyse with others problems they encounter in their classrooms, which could result in improved classroom encounters in the future (Cunningham Florez 2001).

These teachers must be subject-conscious as well as standard-conscious, because the model promotes the individual as responsible for identifying subject content deficiencies and, through the act of reflection and through being autonomous, address such deficiencies (Zeichner and Liston 1996, 10–11).

Reflective teaching also demands that teachers use and develop their affective skills as a means of improving their practice. They use their intuition, initiative, values, and experience during teaching, and exercise judgment about the use of various teaching and research skills. This model of teaching demands taking personal risks, for the teachers share their perceptions and beliefs with others (Markham 1999). They also identify the personal significance of a classroom or school situation, which naturally includes the disclosure and examination of personal feelings (Reiman 2002). Additionally, they engage in the disclosure of ideas, receiving and giving feedback as a part of a collaborative experience (Day 1999a), and confront their uncertainty about their teaching philosophies and indeed their competence (Cunningham Florez 2001).

---

Reflective teaching also demands that teachers use and develop their affective skills as a means of improving their practice. They use their intuition, initiative, values, and experience during teaching, and exercise judgment about the use of various teaching and research skills. This model of teaching demands taking personal risks, for the teachers share their perceptions and beliefs with others.
If teachers honed their cognitive and affective skills via reflective teaching, they could improve their ability to react and respond as they are teaching – to assess, revise, and implement approaches and activities on the spot. They could also develop further self-awareness and knowledge through personal experience (Cunningham Florez 2001; Bengtsson 1993). Importantly, this could aid in encouraging teachers in their role as autonomous professionals by encouraging them to take greater responsibility for their own professional growth by deepening an awareness of their practice, set within their particular socio-political contexts.

As stated above, schools also stand to benefit from reflective teaching. For example, reflective teaching can lead to creative and innovative approaches to classroom and school situations and problems, and this could eventuate into improved learning opportunities for students. When this happens, the school could boast improved student learning. Reflective teaching requires self-examination that involves assessing personal beliefs and values (Cole 1997; Hyrkäs, Tarkka, and Paunonen-Ilmonen 2001; Calderhead 1992, 140). It also involves engaging in discussions that lead to self-understanding and self-improvement, which could result in becoming a better teacher-learner and thus facilitates necessary changes in self, in others, and in teaching context (Coyle 2002; Posner 1989; Eby and Kujawa 1994, 6–7; Hyrkäs, Tarkka, and Paunonen-Ilmonen 2001; Hatton and Smith 1995). Reflective teaching also involves critical thinking, which aids teachers in being deliberate and intentional in devising new teaching methods rather than being a slave to tradition, or to challenge schools’ accepted ways of teaching (Posner 1989).

Reflective teaching enables teachers to analyse and evaluate their own practice, school, and classroom relationships, and to use what they have learned to inform decision-making, planning, and future action, and this can result in school improvement (Calderhead 1992). The model places value on both the individual and the development and implementation of knowledge derived from thinking critically about the practice of teaching, which can result in improved competence and standards in teaching and learning (Hatton and Smith 1995; Farrell 2001; Coyle 2002). These benefits of teaching reflectively underline its value and role in encouraging effective teaching and teachers.
CRITICISMS OF REFLECTIVE TEACHING

Despite its obvious benefits, there are criticisms of reflective teaching. For example, there is confusion regarding the meaning of the term. Underlying the apparent similarities among those who embrace the model are vast differences in perspectives about teaching, learning, and schooling. Further, the term is vague and ambiguous, and there are many misunderstandings as to what is involved with teaching reflectively (Zeichner and Liston 1996, 7; Hatton and Smith 1995). An examination of these criticisms shows that the difficulty with the model rests in its conceptualization – the underlying and varied beliefs, values, and assumptions embraced by those employing it – and not in its usefulness as a model of teaching.

Do Coyle, responding to these and other criticisms, points in the right direction when she calls upon educators to make explicit their interpretation of reflective teaching, rooted in their particular political and social context. Despite these and other criticisms, a sample of the writings on reflective teaching suggests its international appeal. Sources cited in this paper are from Canada (Cole 1997), Australia (Hatton and Smith 1995), the United States (Zeichner and Liston 1996), the United Kingdom (Day 1999a, 1999b; Ghaye and Ghaye 1999; Coyle 2002), Finland (Hyrkäs, Tarkka, and Paunonen-Ilmonen 2001), and Singapore (Farrell 2001).

AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

Given the benefits of reflective teaching and its international appeal, I launched an investigation to ascertain the extent to which seasoned teachers in the Cayman Islands use elements of reflective teaching in their lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation. By examining these aspects of teaching, I identified actions and thoughts indicating teachers’ use of the various elements of the practice.

For example, all respondents use questions as they plan, implement, and evaluate lessons, and the questioning of various aspects of teaching is linked to reflective teaching (Zeichner and Liston 1996). Two respondents spoke of recall or “flashbacks” during lesson evaluation as a means of improving
future lessons. This act is connected to reflective teaching as discussed by Coyle (2002).

Another respondent read reports of research on teaching and used the findings to improve lesson planning and implementation, and still another carried out research with a view to improving lesson planning, implementation, and her teaching overall (Elder and Paul 1994, 34–35; Halpern 1996).

**Reason for the Investigation**

The need for the investigation was initially brought into sharper focus when a search of the Cayman Islands National Archive, college libraries, and the Teachers’ Resource Centre at the Ministry of Education yielded no literature addressing reflective teaching, lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation. This suggested that locally the areas were under-studied, and the limited local literary resources supported this assumption. Second, while the literature on reflective teaching had grown substantially over the past several years, both in the field of teacher education and specifically in the area of reflective teaching, additional research that combined reflective teaching, lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation were needed. Third, I found that literature that examined separately the areas pertinent to this study tends to focus primarily on pre-service teachers. As a result of my initial exploration of the literature, I concluded that there was a need for additional studies of the research areas, particularly from the perspective of seasoned teachers.

**Methods**

Participants, sample, and instrumentation

I used an instrumental case study method, which involves using the respondents to provide insight into the concerns of the study. The participants were four female teachers – William, Maxwell, Shawn, and Louis (obviously these are pseudonyms).
I used the process of purposeful convenient or opportunity sampling in their selection. I considered them “information-rich” (Guba and Lincoln 1998) because they were able to illuminate or provide insights into the issues of central importance to the research.

Interviews and documentary analysis (which took the form of teachers’ lesson plans) were the data collection methods employed. The main instrument used for the collection of data was a semi-structured interview schedule, which I piloted twice (Wragg 2002). Interviews focused on participants’ experience and observations. The lesson plans were used to confirm the participants’ observations.

**DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE**

The data from the interviews (which were transcribed from tape recordings) were analysed using “within and cross-case” analyses. This meant that an analysis was done of each participant’s views as was a cross-examination of emerging categories to discern findings that were common to all four cases. I also used direct interpretation of the data, which involved looking at each case and drawing meaning from it, and categorical aggregation, where a collection of instances was sought with the hope that issue-relevant meanings would emerge (Creswell 1998).

I looked across all the responses to the interview questions to identify similarities and differences. By highlighting similarities and differences from what was said or how the respondents said it, I constructed an understanding of their use of elements of reflective teaching in their lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation, from their perspective and mine.

Three useful categories emerged from the within-case analysis: students (S), teaching context (TC), and mechanics (M). As I read and reread the interview transcripts and listened to the tapes, I noted certain words and phrases repeated, events outlined, and thoughts expressed that I used to define each category.

Students refers to the use of students in peer evaluation or their engagement in other activities specifically geared to facilitate the acquisition of information, or references made to students’ well-being, welfare, activities,
roles, and learning styles. Teaching context includes policies, teaching and teaching material/supplies, facilities, school responsibilities, school physical layout, and school philosophy and how each respondent interpreted, conformed, interacted with, and utilized these aspects in their practice. Mechanics emerged from the data because the responses were replete with descriptions of when, how, and what was done during the respondents’ practice – for example, respondents engaged in long-term or short-term planning and included activities that aided students in acquiring certain skills and attitudes about the subject being taught.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Generally, I conclude that three respondents employed reflection in thinking about and questioning aspects of their teaching that related to students and student activities. Therefore, I classified them as “more reflective teachers” (Posner 1989, 21–27). While they all reflected on their schools’ context, they did so in relation to student activities and how best to utilize their classroom and other school facilities.

During lesson implementation, all respondents employed reflection-in-action as an element of reflective teaching. They usually “frame” (Schön 1987) students’ inability to grasp a concept being taught, or students misbehaving, as the main problem that caused them to make unplanned changes during a single lesson. According to Schön, framing means that the teacher selects – in a qualified and circumscribed sense – what will be treated as the problem. By setting the boundaries of his or her attention to the problem, the teacher imposes on it a coherence that allows him or her to say what is wrong and in what direction the situation needs to be changed. Three teachers seemed to make use of other elements of reflective teaching consistently – for example, self-evaluation, reflecting on teaching context, personal beliefs about teaching, and values.

While all respondents evaluated their lessons, only two seemed to employ “flashbacks”, which indicated their engagement with elements of reflective teaching during lesson evaluation.

Decisions and adjustments to lesson planning, implementation, and eval-
uation resulting from and facilitated by reflection influenced the teaching context or situation. In the case of William, there was a disagreement between what she believed the students should know and what the curriculum suggested they should learn. After reflecting on the issue, she adapted the content of the lesson to match her belief. No doubt, some degree of learning did occur, and the decision and subsequent actions she took worked in that context – that is, her classroom.

Again in the case of William, after reflecting on certain happenings in her school (for example, her dissatisfaction with a certain school policy or the behaviour of her colleagues) and how these affected her mood, she adjusted how she taught the lesson.

Maxwell’s decision (after reflection) to share her lesson evaluation with only a select colleague, because other colleagues did not exhibit appropriate interpersonal relationship skills, was another instance of an issue in the context of the school influencing lesson planning, implementation, and, especially, the process of lesson evaluation.

Reflection also aided the respondents in developing self-awareness and knowledge through personal experience (Cunningham Florez 2001; Bengtsson 1993, 3). This argument can be extended to suggest that reflection could, more importantly, help teachers in their role as autonomous professionals by encouraging them to take greater responsibility for their own professional growth and deepening an awareness of their practice, set within their particular socio-political contexts (Coyle 2002).

I also conclude that the respondents, by applying reflection, had developed both an understanding of their context and self-awareness. For example, as outlined above, Maxwell’s refusal to share openly with colleagues could indicate an understanding of her context or situation and an awareness of “self”. A similar observation could be made of William and her response to school policy and her colleagues’ behaviour. The fact that she was able to iso-

---

Reflection also seemed to be a tool to safeguard feelings and emotions, preserve self, and preserve one’s job. Above all, it helped respondents to cope with perceived contextual challenges. Bullough et al. (1999, 381) make the point that when the teaching context presents a serious challenge to self, “strategic defensive adaptations”, or coping strategies, emerged.
late her mood, which was affected by certain externals, could indicate an awareness of self and an understanding of her context or situation.

The examples given above, along with the results of the study, also demonstrate that Louis, William, and Maxwell, via reflection, were able to adjust how they functioned when their beliefs, practical knowledge, and mood were challenged by contextual situations and circumstances.

I will extend this conclusion to suggest that it was their professional disposition or attitude – that is, being more reflective teachers – that determined their response to the challenges. For more reflective teachers, contextual challenges to their beliefs, practical knowledge, and mood provide an opportunity for personal and professional growth in understanding context and improving practice.

This is so because, as the results of this study show, such occurrences provided opportunities to question and, by so doing, led to decisions about and adjustments to lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation that were conducive to learning and sensitive to context or situation. Decisions and adjustments (being conducive to learning) were likely to strengthen beliefs and practical knowledge, positively affect mood, and, ultimately, improve the teaching context.

Less reflective teachers, in contrast, might not see any connection between contextual challenges and their beliefs, practical knowledge, and mood. They might view the challenges exclusively as problems needing solutions and would not question self or the impinging factors but would look for solutions in a programme or technique (Zeichner and Liston 1996; Bullough et al. 1999).

An overview of Shawn’s responses to the interview questions reflected the idea of Zeichner and Liston (1996) posited here. Her responses were not introspective: she did not mention self, feeling, mood, values, beliefs, or personal assumptions. In addition, she applied mainly “what works”, devoid of reflection, to address contextual challenges. She commented, “After a couple of years you know what works and what definitely does not work, and there are times when certain things won’t work but this is when you have unforeseen circumstances which you don’t plan for, and experience comes in very handy.”

Reflection also seemed to be a tool to safeguard feelings and emotions, preserve self, and preserve one’s job. Above all, it helped respondents to cope
with perceived contextual challenges. Bullough et al. (1999, 381) make the point that when the teaching context presents a serious challenge to self, “strategic defensive adaptations”, or coping strategies, emerged. Coping strategies may be indirect – for example, changing the way one thinks about or physically responds to a situation to reduce its impact – or active – for example, taking some action to change either oneself or the situation.

I conclude, based on the work of Cooley and Yovanoff (1996), that reflection can facilitate these coping strategies. In their study of how to cope with perceived contextual challenges, Cooley and Yovanoff proposed a modified version of the Peer Collaboration Program. Its strength was the use of reflective problem-solving interactions between two teachers about student-related problems. An overview of the process closely resembled the activities commonly employed by a reflective teacher – for example, framing the problem, as promoted by Donald Schön (1987), and asking questions, as suggested by Zeichner and Liston (1996).

The respondents in my study seemed to employ these kinds of coping strategies based on their use of reflection. For example, Maxwell decided not to share her lesson evaluation with all colleagues because of seemingly negative responses she had received which apparently affected her emotionally, according to the work of Cahill (2003) and Mcgaugh (2003), given that she was able to vividly recount the experience in the interview. By the definitions of Bullough et. al. (1999), Maxwell was employing an indirect coping strategy by changing the way she thought about or physically responded to the situation, and she was being active in her coping in that she took a particular action to reduce the impact of the situation.

William decided to teach the lesson even though the contextual situation affected her mood negatively, but the way she taught the lesson (after reflecting on the issue) also had to do with coping. At that time she felt it necessary to write notes on the chalkboard for the students to copy, instead of employing activities that were interactive and demanded verbal communication between the students and herself. I interpret her decision as one that protected the students from a possible negative interaction that could have resulted from her mood.

In addition, I could interpret her action as an act of safeguarding her job and hence herself. Here again, William was employing an indirect coping
strategy by changing the way she physically carried out the lesson, and she was being active in her coping in that she took a particular action to reduce the impact of the situation.

What, then, are the implications of these findings?

**GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The results of the study emphatically point to the fact that schools’ contexts exerted influence. Therefore, I believe that they should be monitored to reduce the negative effect they may have on teachers and, by extension, on lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation. I also suggest that teachers should be thoroughly engaged in the monitoring process via reflection (Cole 1997). Reflection enables them to analyse and evaluate their own practice, school, and classroom context, and this can result in school improvement.

I suggest that a requirement of both pre- and in-service teacher education programmes should be to prepare and enable teachers to develop their ability to adjust lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation according to school contextual factors. This could be achieved via the application of reflective teaching and thinking. Posner (1989) suggests that reflective teaching would allow teachers to first interpret experiences from a fresh perspective and to act in deliberate and intentional ways to devise new ways of teaching.

In other words, one fundamental principle of a teacher education and training programme should be to enable teachers to address school contextual issues via reflection. Day (1999a, 216) seems to support this idea when he states: “A necessary condition of effectiveness as a teacher is regular reflection upon the three elements that make up teaching practice; the emotional and intellectual selves of the teacher and students . . . and the conditions that affect classrooms, schools and students’ learning and achievements.”

Another way to state this is that, among other things, a necessary condition of being an effective teacher is to be able to reflect on your context. There is a need to encourage both student and seasoned teachers to reflect on the various contexts in which teaching occurs.
An understanding of the variety and nuances of teaching contexts and how they influence teaching generally, including reflective teaching, would help to prepare teachers to adjust and function effectively. A number of writers including Cole (1997), Van Manen (1995), and Day (1999a) discuss the impact of context on reflective teaching.

Calderhead (1992, 143), quoting Goodlad, makes the point that schools frequently did not present an environment supportive of experimentation, innovation, and reflection. However, the consensus is that reflecting on contexts is necessary to being an effective teacher, a point already highlighted in the foregoing discussion and with which I am in total agreement. Van Manen (1995), addressing student teachers, aids us in understanding why this is so. He believes that while student teachers may be knowledgeable and well versed in various components of teaching and learning, when they enter the classroom they sometimes become disillusioned, for what they have learned has not prepared them well for the reality of the classroom.

I will add that given the ever changing nature of today’s classroom, it is likely that seasoned teachers also face challenges that they might not have encountered previously. As a result, they might become disillusioned because their experience has not prepared them to face these new challenges. Developing the art of reflecting both reactively and proactively should be seen as a partial solution. Learning the art of reactive reflection should aid in the deconstruction of what happened in the classroom; asking questions should reveal what caused the teacher to feel unprepared and disillusioned. Then proactive reflection should enable the teacher to learn from the situation and make adjustments for future classes (Coyle 2002).

Why should we include a study of the contexts in which teaching occurs in a programme of teacher education and training? Including this area should sensitize teachers to the functioning of schools. Contexts include teacher accountability, workload, an understanding of schools’ culture, policymaking and implementation, authority and organizational relationships, bureaucratic educational systems that exist outside the school yet still influence the school, the functioning of the school as an organization, and how to balance these against the demands of being an effective and reflective teacher.

A study of the contexts of teaching could also encourage empathy on the
part of student teachers for those who are involved with the task of administering a school. Studying contexts could enable both seasoned and student teachers to see the school’s organization as a whole, and to recognize how the various functions of the organization depend on each other and how changes in one part affect the others. This ability would become even more relevant in the event they were required to act in an administrative role.

**Local Implications for Teacher Education and Training**

While the Cayman Islands Department of Education provides in-service activities, and the Cayman Islands’ draft education bill, part XIV (H), states that every teacher has the right to reasonable access to professional training and development, whether basic or otherwise, there is no formal written document that guides the in-service training programme locally. Even if there were, hurricane Ivan destroyed all known ones. Informal conversations that I had with officials from the Department of Education revealed the sense of an ad hoc approach to this aspect of teacher education and training.

When the draft education bill is passed into law, as it currently stands, it would establish compulsory in-service training in the education system in the Cayman Islands. However, it would not articulate the “how” of professional training. This provides an opportunity to articulate a potentially useful conceptual framework as a starting point or catalyst for further discussion in this area, based on the findings of this study.

From the study, I found the following to be pertinent elements of the teaching and learning process: students’ cognitive and affective needs, administratively mandated policy, teachers’ beliefs, practical knowledge (knowing what works), mood, and the use of questions. These elements were pertinent because the respondents frequently engaged with them. A useful
conceptual framework for the local teacher education and training programme should aim to develop teachers who are sensitive not only to the cognitive but also to the affective needs of students, and who can adapt administratively mandated policy to their unique context. It should develop teachers who are able to critically examine their beliefs and practical knowledge as a means of improving their practice. Teachers should be able to effectively address school contextual and other issues that trigger moods that are counterproductive to the application of appropriate lesson implementation, and to use and focus questions as a means of improving practice.

What is required in the ever changing, demanding, and sometimes difficult school context is that teachers employ a model of teaching which incorporates an understanding of their particular contexts, personal beliefs, practical knowledge, and particular content knowledge. This model should enable them to survive the many contextual challenges and irritations and allow them to draw on knowledge to solve problems that are unique to their particular teaching situation. This model should also facilitate creative and innovative approaches to classroom and school situations and problems, which should evolve into improved learning opportunities for students. Reflective teaching provides an excellent opportunity to achieve these.

REFERENCES


Cooley, Elizabeth, and Paul Yovanoff. 1996. Supporting professionals-at-risk:


Copyright of Journal of the University College of the Cayman Islands is the property of University College of the Cayman Islands and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.