

Introduction to the Conceptual Framework

In the late 1990s, the College of Education, acting as the Professional Education Unit (PEU) at Western Michigan University, adopted a conceptual framework based on a vision of the “reflective practitioner.” Faculty, candidates, and school partners participated in on-going discussions of the conceptual framework through several means, including the School/University Partnership Team meetings, meetings of the PEU Curriculum Committee, and meetings of candidates preparing for and participating in clinical experiences. As a result of input from these sources, two changes occurred. First, the description of the “reflective practitioner” was updated and re-written to provide detail about reflective practice. The updated statement is included in this document. Also, in the summer of 2004, candidate outcome statements included in the conceptual framework were changed to clearly reflect the expectations of the Michigan Department of Education. The Curriculum Committee of the Professional Educators’ Board adopted the seven “entry level standards for beginning teachers” from the Michigan Department of Education as the outcome areas for the unit’s conceptual framework. Subsequently, the Professional Educators’ Board executive committee approved the change.

Evaluations for candidates in the initial programs in teacher education now reflect the standards. The standards are introduced to candidates during their professional education courses, serve as the basis for pre-internship and internship evaluations, and are being used to structure the candidates’ exit portfolios. Moreover, the values and expectations which support the “Reflective Practitioner” framework undergird the programs and experiences in the PEU.

The conceptual framework for the Professional Education Unit is consistent with the mission of the university: “Western Michigan University is a student-centered research university, building *intellectual inquiry, investigation, and discovery* into all undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. The University provides leadership in teaching, research, learning, and public service.” Likewise, the reflective practitioner involves the learner and learner’s experiences in the construction of knowledge, providing opportunities for exploration and articulation of own ideas, personal beliefs, knowledge, and experience (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Reflective Practice and the Reflective Practitioner

Reflection

Reflection is defined as “the mental process of trying to structure or restructure an experience, a problem, or existing knowledge or insights” (Korthagen, 2001, p. 58). It is also viewed as a mental process meant to increase understanding and provide direction for improvement, whose outcomes can be influenced by both personal and contextual variables (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001). The reflection that takes into consideration social, ethical, and moral perspectives has the potential to affect community and produce long-lasting changes.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice has been widely researched, starting with John Dewey in 1938, who introduced the idea of *reflective thought*, described as an active consideration of any belief in the light of the prior knowledge and future objectives (Dewey, as cited in Korthagen, 2001). Schon (1983, 1987) distinguished between *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. Reflection-in-action involves experimentation and constructing of a new theory of the unique case in the present moment. Reflection-on-action takes place after the action itself and involves inquiry into the personal theories that lie at the basis of one's actions, with the ultimate goal of changing future actions.

As an outgrowth of Schon's research, Killion and Todnem (as cited in Reagan, Case, & Brubacher, 2000) distinguish among three types of reflection: reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-for action. The first type, reflection-on-action takes place after an event, while reflection-in-action refers to reflection in the midst of practice. The third type, reflection-for-action, serves to guide future action. Reagan, Case, and Brubacher (2000) provide a similar interpretation, indicating that reflective practice involves what the teacher does before entering the classroom (e.g., preparation), while in the classroom, and after leaving the classroom.

Reflective practice is "an inquiry approach to teaching that involves a personal commitment to continuous learning and improvement" (York-Barr et al., 2001, p. 3). It implies "a deliberate pause to assume an open perspective, to allow for higher-level thinking processes" (York-Barr et al., 2001, p. 6). These higher-thinking processes allow for a careful examination of personal beliefs, goals, and practices, meant to deepen understanding and lead to actions that improve student learning. The deliberate pause assumes "a purposeful slowing down of life to find time for reflection" in which a psychological space gets created to allow for an open perspective to be held (p. 6). An open perspective means living mindfully in the present moment and being open to other points of view. This open attitude fosters the emergence of new understandings and more effective responses. Reflection also involves the presence of higher-level thinking processes, such as inquiry, metacognition, analysis, integration, and synthesis. The focus of reflection usually involves an examination of personal beliefs, goals, and practices. Personal beliefs significantly influence our ways of thinking and acting. Goals indicate desired outcomes and intentions, which through the process of reflection can be easily adjusted, creating room for more realistic ones. Practice refers to one's repertoire of skills, dispositions, and abilities in specific areas. A desirable outcome of reflection is deeper understandings and insights, which constitutes the foundation for new forms of action. The new understanding and insights need to translate into outward behavioral changes, otherwise they will not produce differences in students' lives.

Sparks-Langer and Colton (as cited in Reagan, Case, & Brubacher, 2000), identify three elements of reflective practice: the cognitive element (which refers to the knowledge that teachers need to have in order to make good decisions in their teaching-related activities), the critical element (concerned with the moral and ethical aspects of practice in education), and the narrative element (which stems from teachers' accounts of their own experiences in classrooms).

Grounded in constructivist learning theory, reflective practice seeks to identify, evaluate, and change the beliefs and assumptions that guide and influence our actions (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Reflective practice places a main focus on *learning*, by actively involving the

learner and learner's experiences in the construction of knowledge, providing opportunities for exploration and articulation of own ideas, personal beliefs, knowledge, and experience (thus its emphasis on experiential learning), ongoing analysis of personal theory-in-use, and designing activities that are collaborative in nature. Reflective practice was also conceptualized as both a professional development strategy and problem-solving strategy (Osterman et al., 2004). As problem-solving strategy, reflective practice involves individuals working together to critically examine their own practice to resolve critical issues. The power of reflective practice is greater when observations, assumptions, and interpretations are shared openly in a collegial setting.

Korthagen (2001) conceptualizes reflective practice as a professional development strategy and makes a clear distinction between action, learning, and reflection, indicating that learning improves the quality of the action, and action exposes systems' failure, thus creating learning needs. This process is also known as the *spiral of professional development*, which represents the process of action, learning from that action, and improving on the action which will further reveal new areas of learning needs.

The Reflective Educator/Practitioner

A reflective educator is one who is committed to improvement in practice; assumes responsibility for his/her own learning; demonstrates awareness of self, others, and the surrounding context; develops the thinking skills for effective inquiry; and takes actions that align with new understandings (York-Barr et. al., 2001). Reflection can be developed at four levels: individual, partner, small group or team, and schoolwide. *The reflective practice spiral* starts at the individual level (as one develops his/her individual reflection capacities), which can influence the reflection that occurs with partners and in small groups of which the individual is a member. As group reflection develops and expands, it has the potential to spread throughout the school (York-Barr et. al., 2001).

Korthagen and Wubbels (2001) identify the following characteristics and attributes of reflective teachers:

1. Reflective teachers are capable of consciously structuring situations and problems, and consider it important to do so.
2. Reflective teachers use standard questions when structuring experiences.
3. Reflective teachers can easily answer the question of what they want to learn
4. Reflective teachers can adequately describe and analyze their own functioning in the interpersonal relationships with others.

The capacity of being reflective also appears to correlate with specific personal attributes. Korthagen et al. (2001) describe these correlates:

1. Reflective teachers have better interpersonal relationships with students than with other teachers.
2. Reflective teachers develop a high degree of job satisfaction.
3. Reflective teachers also consider it important for their students to learn by investigating and structuring things themselves.
4. Reflective student teachers have, earlier in their lives, been encouraged to structure their experiences, problems, and so on.

5. Reflective teachers have strong feelings of personal security and self-efficacy as teachers.
6. Student teachers with teaching experience who have a high degree of self-efficacy focus in their reflections about their teaching on the students. When they have a low sense of self-esteem they focus on the self.
7. Reflective teachers appear to talk or write relatively easily about their experiences.

DeMulder and Rigsby (2003) researched the transformative effects of a professional development program focused on reflective practice on K-12 teachers. The following characteristics were attributed to participation in this program:

1. Ability to see children and classrooms through new lenses and perspectives.
2. Newfound professional voice, judgment, and power
3. Greater knowledge of and sense of self.
4. Improved writing style and ability to communicate.
5. Improved teaching practices and changed educational philosophy:
 - a. Teaching/helping students to consider moral issues, to be open to new ideas and different views, to collaborate with others, and to connect material to their own lives
 - b. Becoming a moral professional (more caring, trusting, willing to take risks, and gain courage)
 - c. Stronger relationships with students (more attuned, more aware of learning styles)
 - d. Giving students choices
 - e. Developing interest in theory and research
 - f. Developing reflective practice
 - g. Modeling lifelong learning
 - h. Listening to others
 - i. Building community
 - j. Behaving as a learner (admitting and learning from mistakes)
 - k. Increased teaching effectiveness
 - l. Renewed enthusiasm and determination
 - m. Increased interaction with parents
 - n. Measure success by students' learning
 - o. Improving student's learning
 - p. Focusing on continuous improvement
 - q. Improved thinking and organizational skills
6. Improved professional and personal relationships
 - r. appreciation/understanding of other teachers' investments
 - s. strengthen ties with colleagues
 - t. mentor other teachers
 - u. inspire younger colleagues
 - v. willingness to seek help
7. Role model and advocate for others

Reflective Strategies

The reflective practitioner engages in a variety of activities with narrative character, meant to provide a richer understanding of the experience and facilitate further learning and inquiry. Some of the narratives may be developed orally or in writing and may be structured or unstructured. Of these narratives, the most widely used are journals, critical incidents, portfolios, the left-hand column (as a means of uncovering assumptions), questioning, and personal inventories (Osterman et al., 2004). Besides these self-evaluative strategies, reflective practitioners involve in assessment of student learning, through the use of tests, observations, rubrics, project-based activities, oral presentations, and student portfolios. In addition, reflective practitioner also takes into consideration the organizational conditions that support learning, through a careful assessment of the resources, and the district/school/classroom's culture climate and policies (Osterman et al., 2004).

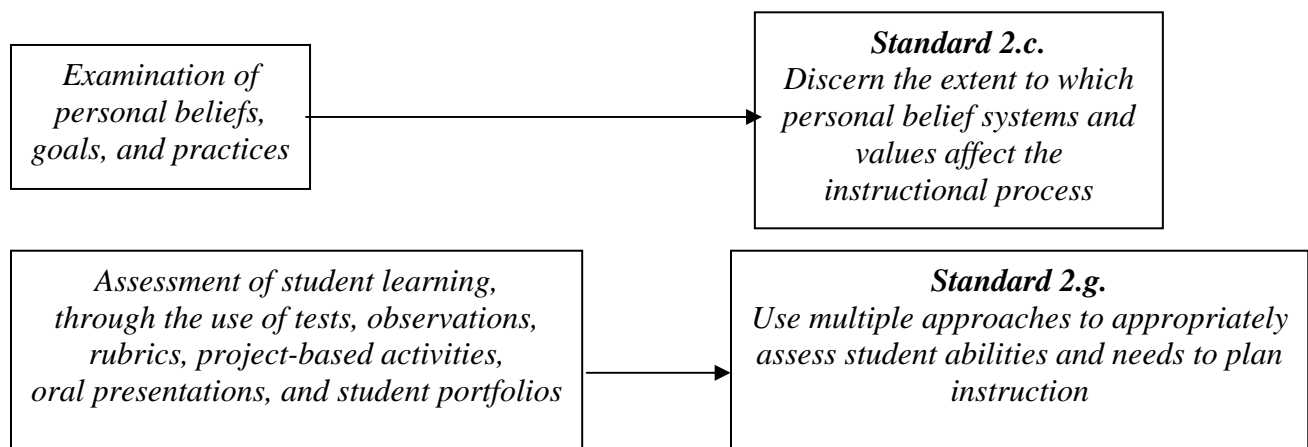
Connections between the WMU model of reflective practice and state of Michigan standards

The idea of reflective practice is congruent with and fits well within the expectations of the state for Michigan educators. More specifically, the involvement in reflective practices is conducive to achievement of the expectations stated in the standards for Michigan educators.

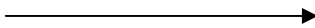
Reflective practitioners seek to continuously meet the state requirements for their profession; however, some of the state requirements and expectations for Michigan educators are deeply ingrained in the personal practice and philosophy of the reflective educator. To illustrate this, reflective practitioners demonstrate an awareness and respect for varying points of view (standard 1.g.); examine their personal belief system and its impact on instructional process (standard 2.c.); use appropriate assessments of student learning to plan future action (standard 2.g.), engage the student in meaningful activities that promote exploration and articulation of own ideas, leading to the construction of new knowledge (standards 3.b. and 3.f.); engage in ongoing meaningful self-evaluation and reflection on others' professional practice (standard 5.h.); maximize learning through designing collaborative activities and involving the local community (standard 6); and reflect on personal practice to support student learning through the use of technology (standard 7).

Reflective practice involves:

Corresponding standard:



Awareness of self, others, and the surrounding context



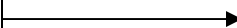
Standard 1.g.
An ability to understand and respect various points of view and the influence of own and other's ethics and values

Engaging the learner and learner's experiences in the construction of knowledge, providing opportunities for exploration and articulation of new ideas, personal beliefs, knowledge, and experience



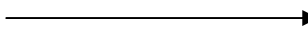
Standard 3.b.
Help students access and use information, technology, and other resources to become independent learners and problem-solvers
Standard 3.f.
Engage students in practical activities that demonstrate the relevance, purpose, and function of subject matter to make connections to the world beyond the classroom

Ongoing analysis of personal theory-in-use; partner reflection, group reflection, and schoolwide reflection (the spiral of professional development)



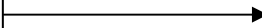
Standard 5.h.
Engage in meaningful self-evaluation and reflect on the professional practice of colleagues

Designing activities that are collaborative in nature



Standard 6
Commitment and willingness to participate in learning communities

Reflecting on personal practice to improve/maximize student learning



Standard 7
Use information age learning and technology operations and concepts to enhance personal/professional productivity

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