



MODELLING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS: THE ROLE OF TEACHER EDUCATORS

SARAH FLETCHER

University of Bath, Bath, U.K.

AN ESSAY-REVIEW OF *DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: LEARNING ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH MODELLING*

Loughran, J. (1996). London: Falmer Press (ISBN 0 7507 0515 9 & 0 7507 0516 7)

"Developing Reflective Practice" documents the results of a longitudinal research study into the development of reflective practice in a group of student teachers in a pre-service education programme. The book is organised into four parts: Conceptualising Reflection; Learning through Modelling; Exploring Student-teachers' Thinking; Reflection "in practice"; and eleven chapters. John Loughran sets out strategies he employs to promote reflective practice among his student teachers. These strategies constitute his model wherein he opens up his own thought processes on his teaching to public view and encourages his students to comment on his own practice as a teacher educator. He invites them to write comments in response to those he records in a diary where he notes how he approaches teaching his group of pre-service teachers and how he feels about the practice of teaching in which he has been engaged with them. He also offers his students a running commentary on his thinking while he is engaged in teaching them.

Through opening up channels of communication in this way, Loughran aims to give his students an insight into the myriad decisions and the subtlety of information processing that are the essence of a teacher's daily work. It is also so they can realise that there are no hard and fast rules in deciding upon a suitable

strategy for working with students; it is not only acceptable, it is often advisable to change tack, to be flexible, not only in the planning but in the performance phases of teaching. Later in the book he attempts to evaluate the effect of these open-house strategies upon his students through a series of personal interviews with some of his group and a detailed analysis of their diary writing through which they communicate their thoughts on their progress as beginning teachers. He quotes extensively from his own journal and his interviews with his students and presents the reader with insights into how, he believes, student teachers learn about reflection, develop reflection in their own teaching and can be spurred into adopting a reflective approach through sharing the reflections of an experienced teacher educator.

Reaching a Definition of "Reflection"?

Unfortunately, there is still little consensus of opinion about what constitutes reflection (Calderhead & Gates, 1993) and how it can be recognised in action. I looked to this book to give me a clear and concise definition of the term and to provide me with a well-substantiated model for promoting reflective practice among my novice teachers. It is not immedi-

ately obvious how the author is using the term "reflection" in his own model. Certainly much of the information and data one might expect is contained within the pages but this is not a guide-book for modelling reflective practice so much as a professional researcher's account of his work.

I did not feel Loughran's use of "reflection" in the sense that underpins his model revolving round thinking pre, during and post teaching experiences was entirely clear until the beginning of chapter 10. As both LaBoskey (1993) and Calderhead (1993) point out, reporting on an extensive review of the literature "the meaning of reflection was not consistent among the theoreticians, researchers or teacher educators who employed the term." The book needs a clear definition at the very beginning of the first chapter to give us an insight into Loughran's own use of the term. Without this, the reader might refer in the first instance to seek a dictionary definition of "reflection" (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1979) and find that it can have strongly pejorative overtones: "make disparaging remarks"....

I appreciate the full and clear account of Dewey's and Schön's studies of reflection in the opening chapter but Loughran's own standpoint could be contextualised more clearly at an earlier stage. Does he agree wholeheartedly, for example, with Dewey's definitions and phases? Has he reservations about reporting his reflections on his own teaching by thinking aloud before, during and after a teaching experience? Might his own reflections, that he reports in an undoubted spirit of honesty, be value-laden? I would have welcomed greater examination by Loughran of some of the implications of his model. Surely there is an inevitable process of sifting, of selection of information to report on by any proponent of a model of simultaneous and retrospective reporting no matter how impartial they might seek to be. I can envisage occasions where I might run the risk of appearing to offer a model of the content of my own reflections as an ideal where I was seeking to model the process of reflection. Similarly I would like to have seen greater awareness of the affective and content filters employed by Loughran's own student teachers. Since such a filter is exhibited by very young children (Schön, 1987,

p.105) it would be unrealistic to discount its use by graduate students.

Reaching a Suitable Audience?

Where I do support Loughran's model is in his readiness to encourage teacher-educators like myself to consider their credibility in the teaching world. As Russell and Munby (1992) explain, "Every teacher educator faces a continuing challenge. Can you walk the walk as you talk the talk?" Without thorough reflection on our own practice as teachers it is all too easy to neglect our teaching skills as we engage ourselves in our research and our writing.

John Loughran's book is largely successful in meeting its stated aims, but as he himself says in the opening section:

in teaching there is not necessarily one way of doing something

and the use of journal writing and thinking aloud would be more readily adopted by some teacher-educators and on some occasions more appropriately than others. This is not to diminish the importance of Loughran's work. Importantly, it is one answer to the call in Russell and Korthagen (1995, p.192) for teacher educators to confront Jack Whitehead's question 'How do I help my teacher education students, and finally their students in schools, to improve the quality of their learning?'" Though teacher educators might not choose to adopt Loughran's techniques, if they examine their own practice with a view to refining it to provide a professional model for their students, the book has served its purpose. My own opinion is that Loughran's model is likely to promote the development of skills and habits of reflection in my student teachers (McIntyre, 1993). I am less convinced giving a running commentary on one's teaching is a model all teacher educators could or should adopt. Thus, while this book might well act as a spring board for teacher educators considering strategies to improve their own practice by making their students aware of the complexity they will encounter in their teaching, I am not convinced that the strategies would be suitable or attractive to all teacher educators. As Tabachnick and Zeichner (1991) so rightly say:

there is not a single teacher educator who would say that he or she is not concerned about preparing teachers who are reflective. (p. 1)

What I find exciting about Loughran's work is that he marries his dual role as a teacher and professional researcher; one aspect of his work is illuminated and extended by the other. Thus I fully support the intention of Loughran's work and I admire the thoroughness and honesty of his reports on his search while not holding entirely with the universal viability of the model that he proposes. In his recent presidential address to the British Educational Research Association, Professor Donald McIntyre called upon the audience to place equal value on their work as teachers and researchers. At the same time he highlighted some of the differences between the twin roles of academic and professional researchers. Loughran's model could use fully be applied and researched by teacher educators working in schools as well as in Higher Education Institutions. In my experience, in England and Wales, in parts of Spain, and, I am told, in at least one Initial Teacher Education partnership scheme in Australia (the James Cook University, North Queensland) student teachers are taught for a substantial part of their course by school-based teacher-educators or mentors.

As it stands, the style and manner of reporting of the research are less likely to be accessible to school-based teacher educators than to Higher Educators based teacher educators. Though the book is relatively short, it contains a great deal of detailed information about the work of leading researchers in this field, most notably, Dewey and Schön. The lack of a common format giving a summary section at the end of each chapter needs to be addressed if there is, as I hope there will be, a second edition of this work. Some of the paragraphs (notably the one relating initially at least to Polanyi's work (p. 74) cover too much ground and the content could usefully be expanded and split into further, headed subsections. I do have some problems with how he has set out his thinking the diagrams (in particular on p. 22) which are not always clear and would benefit from further explanation in the text to support them.

A Methodology for Modelling "Reflection"

With a wider audience than Higher Education based teacher educators in mind, Loughran could usefully have added a subsection setting out the series of steps at the beginning of this account to guide other teacher educators wishing to adopt his model. As it is, the steps are there within the book but not always made sufficiently explicit. Unfortunately, as Wiles, Niles, Magliaro, and McLaughlin (1990) report, teachers and in particular school-based teachers/teacher-educators are short of time and schools are difficult environments for reflective thinking. Mike Berrill (1993) the co-ordinator of one of the leading School Centred Initial Teacher Training centres in Luton, England, calls for Higher Education and schools to have a shared language of reflection and a shared research culture and this book could do more to address this need. I think Loughran's premise that teacher-trainers should examine and make public their practice is sound and commendable. In its present form, I wonder how Loughran's model, resting both on thinking aloud and journal writing could be transferable for use by some other teacher educators given their very different teaching situations.

Loughran admirably justifies the use of journal writing with his students though personally I found his own journal writing style a little irritating at times. Similarly I found his reflections on reflections about his students in the case study section in chapter 9, rather confusing. As Loughran states, he adopts the format for presenting case studies that employs columns of case and commentary. This strategy is intended to enhance the readers' understanding of the issues being raised. The commentary in the right hand column is organised so that it occurs next to the issue being raised by the case study. In practice, however, I did not always find that Loughran's use of this potentially valuable methodology was successful.

For me the commentary does not always sufficiently or appropriately illuminate the case. At times the case study is not just a representation of information gleaned but appears to be as interpretative as the commentary. "At one

point, (Sarah) seemed to recognise how her actions affected different students", (p. 134). In another extract, we are presented with a case study but are not told WHY Perry does not agree with testing his pupils. I am interested in Perry's handing over of responsibility to John to decide what will be video-taped and discussed, and surprised that John apparently allows this to occur. What is it that the commentary is supposed to tell me that the case study does not?

Journal writing is well embedded in many initial teacher education courses to encourage student teachers to reflect upon their experiences. I fully concur with Adler's call (1991) for teacher educators to "investigate more systematically the education of the reflective practitioner" and I feel that the substance of Loughran's book offers one way of doing this. However, mindful again of Adler's advice, "We would do well not to look for the 'one best way' a strategy or a set of strategies that work well with all students and at all times." (p. 148) Loughran's contribution to the growing store of literature relating to reflection is that he is providing a "broader base of evidence and understanding" into the nature on reflective thinking. He sets out current ideas about reflective practice in considerable detail and devotes a substantial section of his book to explaining the various conceptualisations of reflective practice (Schön, Cruikshank, Dewey et al.)

Writing is but one form of communication and if I have a criticism of Loughran's own methodology it would be that he seems over ready to promote writing to record the existence of reflection. I would like to see Loughran and others concerned with de-mystifying "reflection" by taking account of Polanyi's observation (reported in Russell & Munby, 1995) "that one's knowledge is far more extensive than what can be put into words." There is a need to find other models to empower and encourage our student teachers to engage in a professional dialogue grounded in reflection on the practice and philosophies of teaching.

Implications of Modelling "reflection"

If Loughran holds to his principle that "teaching needs to be interactive" there is a

possibility that by the very process of thinking aloud he may be so involved in presenting his reflections simultaneously that there is the danger that he will miss an opportunity for simultaneous interaction with one of his student teachers. This is one of the problems about reporting a model by writing alone. As a reader, I was enthralled by much of reported interviewing with the students but I needed to see, to be present perhaps, to appreciate the subtlety that Loughran's model surely has. As he admits, it is very difficult to report such an interactive and dynamic model in writing. Clearly Loughran has established a bond of trust between himself and his students and this is entirely laudable. Any strategy that can contribute to building such a bond of trust is to be applauded. I admire the honesty and openness of John Loughran's comments and his willingness and enthusiasm to share his successes and failures with his students and with his colleagues.

Given that Loughran's main intention is to display to his student teachers that he does reflect, then he achieves his purpose. It is less clear whether his model would necessarily work for other teacher educators and whether it works equally well with all of his students. This uncertainty arises perhaps from the manner in which Loughran analyses the results of his research. Underlying his analysis there seems to be a more or less whole-hearted acceptance of Dewey's principles. I would have appreciated a greater critique of these terms grounded in Loughran's expertise and experience as a teacher-educator. Does Loughran accept, for example, the validity of every definition of attitude and phase in equal measure or does he, like LaBoskey (1993) feel that "Dewey's attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness are more critical to the reflective process than the specific steps"?

There seems to be an underlying assumption that reflection is necessarily a worthwhile activity in that it constructively informs future practice. This view appears to concur with that expressed by Valli at the Conference of the American Educational Research Association in Boston. According to Tabachnick and Zeichner (1991, p. 2) she said "as long as teachers reflect about something, in some manner, whatever

they decide to do is all right since they have reflected about it." As Gore and Zeichner point out "Neither Cruikshank nor Schön have much to say about what it is that teachers ought to be reflecting about." (1991, p. 120) Loughran appears to subscribe to this view. I am not sure that I fully know what Loughran's students are being encouraged to reflect upon in the course, except when he is giving a running commentary or writing in a shared journal. How does he assist them to structure their reflective consideration of their own professional practice?

Some students, of course, are clearly more adept at reflection and already apply it constructively to all aspects of their life, not just to their early steps in teaching. I tend to McIntyre's view (1993, p. 43) indicating my reservations by comments in parenthesis, that reflection (can be) a "more central means of learning for experienced practitioners than ... it can be for (some) novices." I also hold with the view of Tabachnick and Zeichner (1991) when they say that "we do not accept the implication ... that teachers' actions are necessarily better because they are deliberate or more intentional". There is a place in good teaching, I believe, for following instinct or "gut reaction" rather than detailed analysis. It is not always necessary as a teacher to define and examine every step that has led you to make a decision. With teachers purportedly making over 1000 decisions per day in the course of their work (Ted Wragg, Annual Conference of the Association of Language Teachers, Exeter, 1996) to expect them to examine and speak aloud or otherwise report on each decision would plainly be impractical.

I wonder if Loughran's model takes sufficient account of the individual and preferred learning styles of his novice teachers at different stages in their journey towards professional competence. Some of John Loughran's own students were clearly mystified, at least initially, by his tactic of thinking aloud. When time for preparing beginning teachers is as pressured as it is in the United Kingdom (the Postgraduate Course of Education lasts 36 weeks only and the Government requires that 24 weeks be spent in school) one wonders if there is a place for "training" students in reflection, rather than letting them learn by "osmosis". In fact,

although the author says that this is not his intention (p. 18), modelling could be seen to be a form of training. If requiring them to report what they think in writing is not a form of training in reflection, what is it?

I have some concerns about the apparent insistence on writing down reflections John Loughran's practice is often based on. On one occasion his students are becoming frustrated at not being able to voice their opinions in an interactive session with him. His response is apparently to tell them to write their opinions down. Certainly this would effectively slow down the proceedings but there is a strong possibility that it had stifled the spontaneity of the interactions and that some of the students might have decided that if this was their tutor's solution to answering their queries they might not bother to voice them at all next time.

The irony is that he claims that "my students are given immediate access to the thoughts that influence my understanding of my teaching and their learning as it is unfolding". I question whether Loughran's model can be truly spontaneous if his students cannot make a reciprocally spontaneous suggestion about issues raised in seminars about teaching. The exchange of information by journal writing while certainly valuable, cannot replace the dialogue of spoken as opposed to written conversation. As Loughran himself points out, "Being asked to communicate in written form can be a restriction for some." (p. 78)

Are there perhaps some aspects of the reflective dialogue that John Loughran is seeking to share with his novice teachers that are more appropriate to journal writing than others? There is too little conclusive evidence that he has considered this possibility in framing his model. I looked for substantial evidence of reflection by the author on his own model: how might he modify it in future? If Loughran subscribes to the view of Polanyi that all knowledge has a tacit dimension through which understanding is possible, he could make the tacit more explicit by further reflection upon the viability and value of his own model.

When Loughran decided to introduce his model of talking aloud and journal writing to communicate with his students, did he challenge his students as Adler (1991) suggests, to examine their pre-existing beliefs that they

have brought to their teaching? This might bring them further insights into their values that shape their decisions as teachers. As Zeichner and Liston (1987) highlight, "Our experience has taught us that much unlearning has to go on before students are willing to accept the need for a more reflective approach to teaching." I needed to see more evidence of this essential ground work in Loughran's writing and though I am sure that he must take account of it in some way as a means of deciding when to start using his model for reflective practice, I did not find it clearly expounded in the text of his book. So I think more attention may need to be paid to the preparation of students to enter into a reflective dialogue both with themselves and their teacher educators.

What he is less successful at doing is what Howie (1995) called for in a paper delivered at the European Conference in Educational Research in Bath, namely (empowering) "teachers in schools and staff in Higher Education (to) discuss and identify the conditions and actions necessary to promote the professional development of the new teacher". I wait in hope for a book that will enable this dialogue by giving a shared language and setting a shared culture between school and Higher Education Institutes relating to reflection in the context of Initial Teacher Education.

The problem for teacher educators who might decide to take on Loughran's model in the worthy intention of informing and improving their own practice is that as Sparks-Langer et al. (1990) point out, "Some events lend themselves more readily to critical social interpretations than do others." (p.29) Journal writing and thinking aloud are likely to be useful strategies for communicating and encouraging reflection, but not universally so. There will be occasions when these strategies are likely to impede the very communication that they are intended to promote.

Explicit analysis of practice can be a valuable tool in learning to teach. As Korthagen (1993) says, "We are convinced that rational analysis of one's own behaviour as a teacher is an important tool in one's professional development. However, ... it gives student teachers a one-sided view of teaching and this may present the impression that good teaching is determined

by rationality." Any model or models concerned with promoting reflective practice must surely take account of the affective and spontaneous aspects of good practice.

Conclusion

I support Loughran's stand, echoed in Manning and Payne (1993), that teacher education must focus on the intellectual development for pre-service teachers. I am less convinced by Loughran's analysis of his student's observation in interview and video extract that reflection has taken place. Perhaps the difficulty stems from a difference in perception regarding the meaning of "reflection". If reflection simply means thinking about something in a deliberate and purposeful way then I agree that there is evidence of reflection in Loughran's reports of his research. If, however, reflection is taken to mean thinking about something in a deliberate way with the purpose of applying the knowledge derived from this to improve practice, I am slightly less convinced by Loughran's findings.

Others (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Wiles et al., 1990) have set out models with the intention of promoting reflective practice: Loughran's is but one. As one tool in a teacher educator's armoury it is undoubtedly useful but just as classroom teachers need a range of strategies from which to select the most appropriate in a particular context so too do teacher educators. Loughran rightly sets down the essential need (also highlighted by Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) for trust as an essential feature in any environment where reflective practice is to flourish. Like Osterman and Kottkamp, he holds to the view that (p.45) "Reflective practice requires a facilitator" and certainly he exhibits the qualities of a facilitator "who is confident enough to make his or her thinking public and therefore subject to discussion."

There is much to commend in this book while I would not employ some aspects of the methodology since they are not fitted to my preferred teaching style and the teaching/learning environment in which I operate. I have no doubt that it will be widely read and appreciated by many teacher educators.

References

- Adler, S. (1991). The reflective practitioner and the curriculum of teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 17(2), 139–150.
- Berrill, M. (January 8, 1993). It's time we were frank. *The Times Educational Supplement*.
- Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (Eds.). (1985). *Reflection: Turning experience into learning*. London: Kogan Page.
- Calderhead, J., & Gates, P. (1993). *Conceptualizing reflection in teacher development*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Copeland, W. D., & Birmingham, C. (1993). The reflective practitioner in teaching: Towards a research agenda. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9(4), 347–359.
- Gore, J. M., & Zeichner, K. M. (1991). Action research and reflective thinking in pre-service teacher education: A case study from the United States. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 7(2), 119–136.
- Howie, C. (1995). Can school mentors aid the development of reflective practice in student teachers? *Paper Presented to European Conference on Educational Research*, 1995.
- Korthagen, F. A. (1993). Two modes of reflection. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 9(3), 317–326.
- LaBoskey, V. K. (1993). A conceptual framework for reflection in pre-service teacher education. In J. Calderhead & P. Gates (Eds.), *Conceptualizing reflection in teacher development*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Manning, B. H., & Payne, B. D. (1993). A Vygotskian-based theory of teacher cognition: Toward the acquisition of mental reflection and self-regulation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9(4), 361–371.
- McIntyre, D. (1993). Theory, theorising and reflection in initial teacher education. In J. Calderhead & P. Gates (Eds.), *Conceptualizing reflection in teacher development*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Osterman, K. F., & Kottkamp, R. (1993). *Reflective practice for educators: Improving standards through professional development*. California: Corwin Press.
- Russell, T., & Korthagen, F. (1995). *Teachers who teach teachers*. London: Falmer Press.
- Russell, T., & Munby, H. (1992). *Teachers and teaching: from classroom to reflection*. London: Falmer Press.
- Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco, CA Jossey-Bass.
- Sparks-Langer, G. M., Simmons, J. M., Pasch, M., Colton, A., & Starko, A. (1990). Reflective pedagogical thinking: How can we promote it and measure it? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(4), 23–32.
- Tabachnick, B. R., & Zeichner, K. M. (1991). *Issues and practices in inquiry-oriented teacher education*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Wiles, T. M., Niles, J. A., Magliaro, S. G. & McLaughlin, R. A. (1990). Promoting reflective practice among beginning and experienced teachers. In R. T. Clift, W. R. Houston, & M. C. Pugach, (Eds.), *Encouraging Reflective practice in education*. New York & London: Teachers' College Press.
- Zeichner, K. M. (1991). Action research and reflective teaching in pre-service teacher education: A case study from the United States. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 7(2), 119–136.
- Zeichner, K. M., & Liston, D. P. (1987). Teaching student teachers to reflect. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 23–45.