

Reflection in education



Teacher Education
through School-based
Support in India



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TESS-India (Teacher Education through School-based Support) aims to improve the classroom practices of elementary and secondary teachers in India through the provision of Open Educational Resources (OERs) to support teachers in developing student-centred, participatory approaches. The TESS-India OERs provide teachers with a companion to the school textbook. They offer activities for teachers to try out in their classrooms with their students, together with case studies showing how other teachers have taught the topic and linked resources to support teachers in developing their lesson plans and subject knowledge.

The TESS-India OERs are supported by a set of guidance documents for teacher educators aimed at all those tasked with educating teachers, including initial teacher training and continuing professional development. These guidance documents offer teacher educators further practical guidance on key practices to support them in their work to embed the pedagogy modelled in TESS-India OER and Indian education policy. They include ways of organising networks and facilitating teachers' meetings, guidance on running participatory workshops and developing reflective practitioners, as well as how to use action research to improve practice. Further resources will be added later. These guidance materials will be available on the website for teacher educators or other educators.

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TEGN_Reflection

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Reflection in education is ...

'a disciplined enquiry into the motives, methods, materials and consequences of educational practice. It enables practitioners to thoughtfully examine conditions and attitudes which impede or enhance student achievement' (Norton, 1994, quoted in Taggart and Wilson, 2005).

Therefore in the professional contexts of training, teaching or school leadership, reflection refers to the act of thinking constructively about your own profession practice, with a view to improving it wherever possible. As teacher educators, teachers or school leaders, it is easy to fall into the trap of employing the same techniques and approaches repeatedly. However, because every training, teaching and leadership context is distinct, and all individuals respond differently according to their existing knowledge and experiences, it is important to routinely evaluate the effectiveness of your practice and consider whether it can be improved to ensure that you constantly maximise everyone's opportunities for learning.

Reflection may appear to be a time-consuming addition to your workload. However, it is time very well spent, not only because it becomes more automatic in time, but also because the impact can be transformative – both in terms of your professional development, and the effectiveness of your training, teaching or leadership.

How does reflection for professional development fit in the Indian context?

Traditional 'transmission' models of teaching and learning consider knowledge and skills to be directly transferable capacities that 'experts' impart to their students in a one-size-fits-all manner. In this view, if students fail to acquire these capacities, it is their fault.

In contrast, contemporary perceptions of teaching and learning regard the development of knowledge and skills as a process of co-construction between individuals. This process requires teachers to pay attention to the sense that their students are making of their experiences and their role within this process so that they can respond appropriately to the evolving needs of all their students.

This approach to teaching and learning lies at the heart of the NCFTE (2009), which considers the development of reflective skills to be 'the central aim of teacher education' (p. 19). To this end, '[p]rogrammes need to aim to help teachers develop a repertoire of skills for reflective practice, such as making pedagogical sense of learner understanding and errors' (p. 38), while teacher educators need to give feedback that is 'appropriate, of good quality, [and] sufficient for teachers to become reflective practitioners' (p. 54).

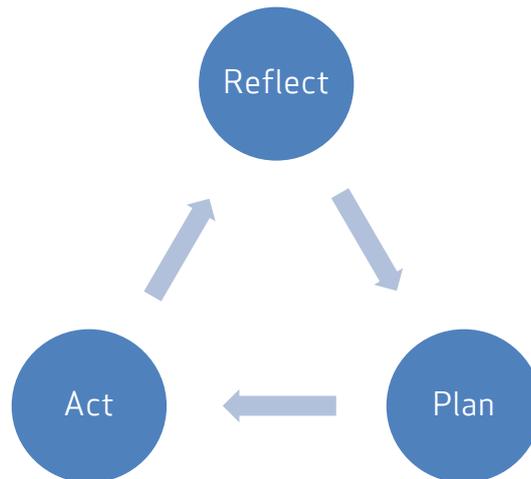
Currently, there is also a requirement to include reflection in Cluster Resource Centre Monthly Meetings.

The reflection cycle

Reflecting is part of a cycle of professional development that involves three elements:

- *Reflecting* actively on your teaching or leadership, and identifying which elements are effective and which could be improved. To do this you will need to pay attention to aspects of your teaching and leadership (observing).
- *Planning* how to modify your practice in the light of such reflection.
- *Acting*, that is to say, implementing a change within your training, teaching or leadership activities.

Acting is then followed by *reflecting*, and the cycle continues.



The focus of reflection

As a teacher educator, you are responsible for both applying the reflective process to your own role and for supporting the development of reflective skills among the pre- and in-service teachers that you are working with.

Reflection in teaching is primarily concerned with questioning pedagogic practice. Questions may be about professional values, prior experiences, attitudes or prejudices that may influence teaching or as well as aspects that may need improvement. Reflection may question ideas such as inclusion, language use, ways of questioning students, time management, giving feedback, correcting and assessing, and the training or school curriculum. It can also involve thinking about the environmental, financial, organisational and ethical factors that impact on existing or new ways of doing things. It is not about being self-critical – it is important to recognise the positive along with an honest assessment of areas that need to be developed.

The reflective process will often lead to learning from colleagues and students, by observing and talking to them or by asking for feedback. Reading books, journal articles and online features provides a further learning opportunity.

Reflection is thus about setting aside time to think and learn about a particular situation or practice and then identifying and planning actions. Very often, small changes to classroom practice can have a very marked effect on student learning.

Note-taking in a learning journal can be very helpful in this process. Writing in a journal can encourage the reflective process and can be a useful tool in reviewing professional development over time.

Developing teachers' reflective practice with TESS-India OER

TESS-India materials are designed to support the professional development of Indian teachers and school leaders, and include prompts for reflection with the videos. For example, the commentary accompanying one of the School Leadership videos says:

In this video you listen to a school leader who is struggling with the challenge of involving parents. She explains that, while there may be communication issues, once a dialogue is established, it becomes easier to resolve factors which adversely affect a student's learning.

Involving parents in the school is a key factor in supporting students' learning. How do you encourage your students' parents to visit your school? In what other ways might you encourage parents to support their child's learning?

Reflective prompts are also integral to the text-based resources. Coming under the heading 'Pause for thought', these often accompany the case studies and activities. Here are some examples:

Pause for thought

- Were your students pleased to share their language knowledge?
- Did you encounter any difficulties in trying to find out which languages your students know? If so, what were they?
- What could you do as a follow-up activity with your students?

The next prompt refers to a case study and a teaching activity that the teacher has undertaken:

Pause for thought

Mrs Mehta's lesson involved quite a lot of writing and recording on the backboard, by the students themselves as well as the teacher. What do you think are the advantages and potential disadvantages of this approach?

Now think about how the activity went with your students, and reflect on the following questions:

- What responses from students were unexpected? Why?
- What questions did you use to probe your students' understanding?
- Did you modify the task in any way like Mrs Mehta did? If so, what was your reasoning for this?

Using reflection as a teacher educator

The questions or prompts in TESS-India OER could be used with teachers and school leaders in many different ways. You could:

- encourage teachers to spend a few minutes considering these questions at the end of their lesson and making a few notes in their learning journal
- use the questions as a starting point for discussion in a teachers' meeting when teachers have been using the TESS-India OER in their lessons
- require teachers to develop responses to these questions as part of the assessment within a formal programme of study
- use them as prompts for discussion in mentoring
- encourage teachers to discuss these questions with colleagues in weekly school meetings.

Now pause for thought for yourself:

- Consider your own practice; do you include reflection as part of every training session? If so, could these times be developed more?
- Do you make time to reflect on your own practice? Would keeping a journal help you to reflect more deeply and more often?

- Write a set of three questions that might help you reflect on your practice in order to make it even more responsive to the teachers and school leaders that you train.

References

National Council of Educational Research and Training (2005) *National Curriculum Framework (NCF)*. New Delhi: NCERT.

Taggart, G. and Wilson, A.P. (2005) *Promoting Reflective Thinking in Teachers: 50 Action Strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Questions to prompt reflection on professional practice

Here are some general questions that could be adapted to your purposes:

What seemed to go well? How do you know? What might be the reasons behind this?

What did not work in the way you thought it would? Why might this be?

Where there unexpected responses? Were they interesting or difficult to deal with? How did you respond? Could you have used the unexpected responses better?

What areas could you develop to make your practice even better?

How might you find out what others do in the areas you have identified for improvements? How can you plan for continuing to develop?