The Reflection Quadrant. A way to guide reflection

Mart Ottenheim, University of Applied Sciences Leiden, Leiden, the Netherlands

In a changing world were the Internet and computers play an important role in the lives of many students, a teacher should change his ways of teaching by using these new technologies. Those are not the only changes a teacher should adapt to. Culture changes, relations between men and women change, economics and jobs change and most important, the way children learn change. The teacher must be able to constantly follow these technological and social changes and adapt his/her teaching accordingly. This can be done passively, slowly changing with the flow but it is much more effective to react to the changes in an active manner by reflection on one's own actions (Schön, 1983).

Several ways of reflection can be categorised (Pinsky et al., 1998): anticipatory reflection, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Shulman, 1987; Irby, 1992; Schön, 1983; Eraut, 1994). Anticipatory reflection is done prior to an action. Reflecting-in-action is done during teaching, seeing one's own actions and acting in response to it. Reflection-on-action is done after the action; looking back on the experience and trying to learn from it. The growing importance of reflection in education is part of a changing paradigm from knowledge based action to experienced based action (Boud, 1999).

Several models of reflection have been put forward in the field of education, nursing and medicine focusing more on a descriptive way of reflection (Schön, 1983; Smyth, 1989; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2002; Verhagen, 2011) or on deeper levels of reflection (Boud et al., 1985; Moon, 1999; Korthagen, 2004). Most often reflection models focus on the person himself in a situation like the STARR-model (Verhagen, 2011) or the reflection cycle of Korthagen (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2002), which are used often in The Netherlands. Several other instruments have been suggested to facilitate reflection. Portfolios are seen as a tool to stimulate reflection (Dornan et al., 2002) but not all users grade it as useful (Pearson & Haywood, 2004) leading Mann et al. (2009) to suggest that the supervision associated with the production of the portfolio may have an important role since other studies showed that to be an important factor in developing reflection (Teekman, 2000; Gustafsson and Fagerberg, 2004). Moon (1999) advocates a journal as an instrument to facilitate reflection. In the journal the reflective practitioner keeps a first person record about his actions, thoughts and feelings.

The Reflection Quadrant proposed in this paper, helps the teacher to not only to look at his own actions and reasons behind these actions but also forces the teacher to take into account his social environment. Reflection on one's own behaviour is not the same as evaluating. An evaluation determines objectively if goals are achieved and benchmarks are met. Typical remarks about a lesson in an evaluation are: ‘the students worked hard’; ‘the lesson was orderly’ or ‘at the end of the lesson all students new how to write the letter k’. These observations are the start of reflection and the questions proposed by Smyth (1989) can be used to describe the situation (What do I do? What does this
mean? How did I come to be like this? How might I do things differently?). These questions however, do not guarantee that deeper layers of reflection are reached and often help is needed to access these deeper layers. The Reflection Quadrant can best be used under supervision of a teacher educator who asked questions to facilitate deeper reflection (Calderhead & Gates, 2004; Mann et al., 2009).

**The Reflection Quadrant**

In The Reflection Quadrant only one corner - labelled ‘ME’ - is dedicated to the person that reflects. Two other corners are dedicated to people that influenced the reflecting person (them ➔ ME) and people that are influenced by the reflecting person (ME ➔ them). The last corner is reserved for all the others in general and the relation with ‘them’.

The model always starts with a concrete experience. Working with students of education or in-service teachers the following procedure can help to explore the corners of The Reflection Quadrant.

**ME**

Something happened and you reacted to it. You did something to achieve some kind of goal. You saw something of importance. Ask yourself questions like:

- What happened?
- What do I feel?
- What do I think?
- What did I do?

Use objective and subjective questions. Describe the situation and couple your insights to your own learning goals.

**Them ➔ ME**

In education you are never alone. There is always someone looking and watching you. When you are a pre-service teacher that may by your supervisor furthermore there are always students in the classroom that constantly form opinions about you and judge you. These others may help you but also interfere with your own ideas and goals. Ask yourself questions like:

- What was there influence on you during this experience?
- Did they help or interfere?
- What was the result?
- How did that feel?
- What was the effect on you?

It does not just concern your supervisor but also parents, friend, lecturers or even politicians. Their influence is often indirect. Just the presence of a supervisor or anybody else looking at you during your lessons may have a strong influence on your functioning. What was that influence? Was it positive or negative? How did the class influence you? The composition of the class, their background; your connection with them influences how you act in the classroom. What was it like in this occasion?
The Reflection Quadrant. A way to guide reflection

ME -> Them

Inevitably you influenced on others, actively but also passively. Your presence alone has influence whether you want it or not. In education having an influence on students is the goal, you teach, you educate, you coach children. You have specific goals to reach with every activity you do. Next to these short-term goals you also have long-term goals for the whole class and for individual (or even all) students. The goals are linked to student needs and school wide goals a benchmarks.

Next to students you will influence your supervisor, colleagues, parents, school management and supervisors from the school of education. You are a part of a much larger structure called ‘School’. From all these perspectives you should ask yourself questions like:

- How did I influence the other?
- Did I help them or interfere?
- Did I accomplish my goals?
- How did that feel?
- How did that make them feel?

Them

Every experience involving other people shapes your opinion of the other people, ‘them’. But also institutions can be ‘them’. Schools have their own culture and separate goals. What do you think of them? In the case of your students. Are they adorable? Cute? Is your supervisor wonderful or a witch? Do you agree with the pedagogical climate in the classroom or school? Your opinion has no meaning on the larger scale of things but when argue correctly it can shape your own teaching. Valid arguments can refer to scientific theory but also emotions can play an important role. Something might just not ‘feel right’. That is often a sign that further digging is necessary.

‘They’ also form an opinion of you. ‘That is a good student!’ ‘This one should never get a degree!’ ‘He/she organizes her/his work nice but...’ This could be a founded opinion but it could also just be envy or jealousy. Anyway you leave an impression on the other. What would that be? How do you want to be remembered by children, parents, or colleagues? Does the imago you project concur with the imago you want to convey?

Cycle

After exploring the corners of The Reflection Quadrant students can use that information to explore deeper layers of themselves (Korthagen, 2004).

- A good teacher should be able the success of failure of an action to his or her own skills in education.
- All teachers have beliefs about what good education is and how it looks like in the classroom. The Reflection Quadrant can be used to pinpoint those beliefs and couple them to valid educational models and research.
- Even if two teachers have the same educational skills and beliefs, there educational practice may look very different because they are different people. Good reflection reveals the identity of the teacher as an individual and a
participant of his environment and culture. That understanding has a strong effect on the many choices a teacher makes on a daily basis.

- Many teachers experience teaching as something more than just a job. It is a mission in life, a vocation, a fulfilment of a life worth living. On the long term it is important to know why you are a teacher and why you should always struggle to become the best teacher you can be. The Reflection Quadrant might contribute modestly to this understanding.
**The Reflection Quadrant. A way to guide reflection**

**Literature**


Mart Ottenheim, University of Applied Sciences Leiden, Zernikedreef 11, 2333 CK Leiden, the Netherlands. ottenheim.m@hsleiden.nl
The Reflection Quadrant. A way to guide reflection

**ME**
- What do I feel?
- What do I think?
- Evaluation! How did it go?
- Personal goals

**Them → ME**
- How did others influence you?
  - ... helped you?
  - ... interfered?
- What effect did this have on you?

**What do they think about you?**
- What opinion do they have about you?
- How are you judged?

**ME → Them**
- How did you influence others?
  - ... help them?
  - ... interfered?
- How did you keep order?
- Did you achieve your goals?

**Them**
- What do you think of them?
  - Competence?
  - Function?
  - Goals?