

disciplinary boundaries, and indeed even to learn from each other in improving the effectiveness of our own use of critical reflection. This seems highly counterproductive in a growing field. How, then, do we account for such glaring gaps?

It may be that the very popularity of critical reflection is also its undoing: it becomes difficult to develop systematically the quality and effectiveness of reflection in a climate where its meaning and value are assumed and therefore relatively unarticulated and unjustified. Perhaps also the very educational culture which supports the value of practice experience in a reflective practice tradition, also works against its best interests by not also subjecting it to rigorous debate, systematic investigation using a variety of methods, and informed awareness of its complexities, differences and shared understandings. Perhaps we assume that reflective practice is simply a matter of practice, learnt best by doing it? And does this therefore preclude other, more academically inclined approaches to knowledge-making?

What is the way forward for an approach and set of teaching practices which have already gained ascendancy, perhaps before their 'academic' justification? How do we 'trouble' this less critical version of critical reflection? By asking this question we do not mean to suggest that critical reflection is not something of value and relevance in current workplaces and learning institutions, and indeed within broader social contexts. Clearly, the need for reflective abilities is evidenced by current workplace and social changes, and the degree to which they have caught the imagination of so many different groups. But how do we further the cause of critical reflection so that it is not used for purposes we did not intend, co-opted by contradictory interests, simply used in harmful or at best ineffective ways, or even written off as too sloppy or indeterminate?

Part of the answer to this may lie in our need to examine reflectively our own assumptions about critical reflection and the cultural practices and climates which may support its undiscerning use. Perhaps there is a need not only to value the practical nature of the approach, but also to develop more inclusive ways of understanding, representing and researching the great variety of benefits we know, from our own experience, that it provides. There may need to be more and other ways of representing our experiences of critical reflection; ways which can also speak to the more sceptical amongst us, and illustrate how such a process might be used to good effect in a variety of very different settings. The flexibility of reflective practice may in fact demand that there be much more inclusivity in the way it is researched.

## 2 Unsettling reflections: the reflexive practitioner as 'trickster' in interprofessional work'

*Sue White*

[T]rickster is a boundary-crosser. Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and trickster is always there, at the gates of the city and the gates of life, making sure there is commerce. He also attends the internal boundaries by which groups articulate their social life. We constantly distinguish – right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead – and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. Trickster is the creative idiot, therefore the wise fool, the gray-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of sacred profanities. . . . the origins, liveliness and durability of cultures require that there be space for figures whose function is to uncover and disrupt the very things that cultures are based on.

(Hyde 1998: 7–9)

The 'trickster', as the anthropologists call the ubiquitous, mischievous, character in ancient indigenous folk-tales and myths from many cultures, is a marginal figure. Trickster is travelling, passing through, amongst and between, 'keep[ing] the world lively and giv[ing] it the flexibility to endure' (Hyde 1998: 9). Trickster is a boundary crosser, but also a boundary creator, exposing new distinctions, making the usual strange. Trickster is Hermes in Greece, Coyote in North America, Krishna in India, the Monkey King in China, the Raven in Nordic myths. Often breaching morals and mores, trickster invites the possibility of new values. Because of the association with breaches, the term 'trickster' carries pejorative connotations, as in 'confidence trickster'. Indeed, in the myths, trickster is often deliberately deceptive, and in invoking the metaphor of 'reflexive practitioner as trickster' here, I am not suggesting that professionals learn to lie and dupe, rather I am trying to bring to light another aspect of the trickster – trickster's ability to 'shift', to turn many ways.

Reason 2001); autobiographical/biographical, autoethnographical and self-study methods (White 2001; Chamberlyne *et al.* 2004); narrative methods (Hall 1997; Lieblich *et al.* 1998); and discourse analysis and deconstructive methods (Ellermann 1998; Taylor and White 2000). The idea of reflexivity seems to span both, as an approach which can both be used to research and learn from practice (Taylor and White 2000). And indeed, in a critical approach to knowledge making, the goal of becoming critical combines both educational and research functions. The classic work of Carr and Kemmis (1986) is written in this tradition.

Of the above ideas, those of transformational learning, action learning and research, narrative research, discourse analysis and reflexivity are probably the most interrelated with critical reflection. Transformational learning, as developed by Mezirow and others (see Mezirow 2000), places emphasis on how we make meaning (and decisions to act) from experience. Critical reflection is an essential part (but only a part) of this process. Likewise, in the action learning and research traditions, the focus is on learning from actual activities, and critical reflection is also an integral and articulated phase (but only a phase) of this process. Narrative research (and therapy) to some degree overlap with the idea of critical reflection in that by using the central tool of personal 'stories', some reflection on (and deconstruction of) personal experience is therefore entailed in any change process. Linking the ideas of language and discourse with our understanding of critical reflection, the process of critical reflection may be likened to a process of identifying and analysing how our language and discourse may indicate the influence of dominant discourses in our thinking and practices. With regard to reflexivity, it is possible to argue that a reflexive ability is central to critical reflection, in that an awareness of the influence of self and subjectivity is vital to an appreciation of how we construct and participate in constructing our world and our knowledge about that world (Fook 2004a).

## Criticisms

What are some of the key criticisms of critical reflection and reflective practice which emerge from the literature? We have noted the confusing, sometimes undiscerning and uninformed, usage of the terms and their conflation. This has led some critics to assert that for the purposes of assessing reflective abilities at the very least there is no such thing as a theory of reflection (Ixer 1999). Certainly the atheoretical, particularly apolitical nature of Schön's original conception of reflective practice was observed long ago (Smyth 1988). Another key problem we have also already noted is the lack of research to provide empirical evidence of the value and outcomes of a reflective process. Many of the critiques centre on the actual practice of reflection. For example,

Brockbank and McGill (1998: 84–5) note that the process of reflection may simply function to reinforce or collude with current beliefs or practices, so that the quality of the experience and the facilitation of the process itself are crucial. Perriton (2004) highlights this last point by noting the difficulties in actually using critical reflection as a method. She also points up the tension, which is an issue in many educational frameworks, of how people may become critical without becoming indoctrinated. Brookfield (1994, 1995) notes the 'dark side' of critical reflection, pointing out the cultural and personal risks involved, and the fact that not all people may feel empowered by the process.

## Conclusion

Reflective practice and critical reflection emerge from this review as popular, yet complex and contested ideas. They are used and written about in a plethora of professions, from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, and for a variety of different purposes. They may be 'stand-alone' methods or approaches, or they may be envisaged as part of a broader approach of action learning/research or transformative learning. In addition, they are often terms used interchangeably with others whose meaning may be equally contested.

Beginning in Ancient times with the Greek philosophers, and continuing in the thought of Kant and the hermeneutical philosophies and later in the work of Dewey and Schön, theoretical developments of the ideas have encompassed philosophy, psychology, therapy, social theory, and education, using a variety of formulations which most recently have expanded to include postmodern and deconstructive thinking as well as notions of spirituality and emotion (Nussbaum 2001). What actually happens in a critical reflective process is largely related to the particular theoretical formulations in vogue with its exponents. The degree to which transformative change, based on political analyses of social domination, or the interrogation of culturally and historically situated 'truths', takes place, depends in part on the extent to which exponents draw on critical or related theory as an underpinning. In addition, different models and tools may be used, and the effectiveness of the experience may also be influenced by the style and skill of the facilitator, as well as the group climate and broader context of the reflective process.

Our review highlights the relatively under-researched nature of reflection, given its extensive use. On the whole there has been very little research conducted on groups outside the researcher's own milieu. Furthermore, there is little empirical research seeking to identify the changes brought about by reflection, or outcomes of the process, compared with that found in other studies. Sometimes the published studies do not outline in detail the actual research methodologies used, or the details of the reflective process and approach under study. This makes it very difficult to progress our understandings across

capacity for unarticulated assumptions to influence practice in unintentional ways).

There therefore appears to be a danger in concentrating too closely on the techniques for reflection, which may easily be co-opted for use by conflicting interests. Much of the literature therefore notes that simple techniques of reflection may not be effective if the culture or principles of reflection are misunderstood (e.g. Mezirow 2000), or indeed that the professional culture, with its capacity to shape and sustain activity and ideas, is itself taken for granted (Bilson and White 2004).

### Conditions/requirements for reflection

Whilst the appropriate culture (group, personal or organizational) in which the effectiveness of critical reflection is maximized is often referred to, only some literature spells out in detail what this might entail. Mezirow (2000: 10–16) terms this type of climate 'reflective discourse', which includes access to accurate information, freedom from coercion, an ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively as well as openness to other perspectives and new ideas. Elsewhere this has been termed 'critical acceptance' (Fook *et al.* 2000: 231), referring to a type of respectful climate in which it is safe to challenge old ideas and try new ones. Such a climate emphasizes processes of dialogue and communication, rather than closed judgements of learners' practices.

These elements are to some extent echoed in other formulations of the requirements for reflection (Brockbank *et al.* 2002; Brockbank and McGill 1998), which include features such as dialogue, holism and modelling (Brockbank and McGill 1998: 64). Most of the foregoing emphasize the value base of reflection and perhaps focus on the way the process is conducted. Other formulations are presented as 'principles' and include some of the more explicit assumptions regarding knowledge and the links between theory and practice. For example, Ghaye and Lillyman (2000a) discuss 12 principles of reflective practice, which include: 'reflective practice does not separate practice and theory'; 'reflective practice emphasizes the links between values and actions'; 'reflective practice generates locally owned knowledge' (p. 120). Sometimes an understanding of the experience of reflection also brings alive the type of culture necessary to its effectiveness. Bolton (2001: 200–1) notes features of the experience such as 'certain uncertainty', 'thoughtfully unthinking' and a 'process of letting go' which it may help participants understand to maximize benefits from the process.

Many of these features can be taken as referring to the sorts of values or beliefs which individual reflective learners need to accept in order to maximize the effectiveness of their reflection. However, there is also recognition that this resurrection of Socratic dialogue needs to be supported or created in a broader

environment (team or organization or even more broadly) in order to foster reflection in individuals, and to maximize collective learning (Gould and Baldwin 2004a; Reynolds and Vince 2004).

### Associated terms and ideas

As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to discuss the ideas of reflective practice and critical reflection in an isolated manner, since they are associated with many related concepts such as critical thinking, critical awareness, critical consciousness, critical inquiry, critical self-awareness, emancipatory reflection, and reflexivity. In some instances these concepts themselves may involve contested meanings. For example, the idea of critical thinking may be defined as similar in outcome to one of the goals of critical reflection as defined in critical theory terms: an awareness of how dominant thinking is created (Brookfield 1991: 2). On the other hand, it may be defined more in terms of the reasoning skills involved, encapsulating creative, reflective and judgement abilities in complex and uncertain situations (Ennis 1991; Plath *et al.* 1999; Resnick 1987).

In other instances the terms themselves involve their own set of complexities and theoretical developments (e.g. critical consciousness, which may be associated with the consciousness-raising tradition). In still other cases, what is common in many of the usages is simply conflated. For example, Payne (2005: 33) sees the concepts of reflexivity and critical thinking as developments of the idea of reflective practice.

It is not profitable or helpful to attempt to delineate and differentiate the separate meanings of this host of related terminology, but it is useful to note that presumably there is room for both clear and sloppy meanings of the terms to abound when such flexibility exists. Flexibility, whilst being inclusive of many traditions and theoretical perspectives, also makes it difficult to develop our understanding of such ideas, and rigorous research of them, when so many of our formulations are built upon different traditions and frameworks.

Complicating the situation even further is the fact that many conceptions of reflective practice and critical reflection are associated not just with different single terms, but in fact with different research or learning formulations or approaches themselves. In terms of learning traditions these would include: action learning (McGill and Beatty 1992); transformational learning (Mezirow and associates 1990; Mezirow 1991, 2000); consciousness-raising and critical pedagogy (Freire 1970; Hart 1990); experiential learning (Kolb 1984); the learning organization (Argyris and Schön 1978, 1996); and workplace-based learning (Boud and Garrick 1999). In the field of research associated traditions include: action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001; Bradbury and Reason 2003); co-operative or collaborative inquiry (Heron 1985; Heron and

least two levels – a lower type of experimentation level and a higher order level of conceptualization – which are then fleshed out differently by different authors. In fact most schemas recognize at least three levels of reflection, beginning with a more descriptive level, advancing to what might be termed a more reflective level, and culminating in a critical or transformational level.

What differs of course is the way the detail of these stages is conceptualized. For instance, early schemas appear relatively simplistic in contemporary times (Mezirow 1991). The three levels of content, process and premise reflection are differentiated in terms of the focus of reflection (content of problem, strategies employed in the problem and underlying premises of the problem and a questioning of their relevance). Yeung *et al.* (1999) develop these slightly through their study of students' journals, from which they devised three different types of reflectors: non-reflectors (involving habitual action, thoughtful action, introspection), reflectors (involving content, process reflection), and critical reflectors (involving premise reflection).

A later formulation of Kember's (Leung and Kember 2003) characterizes four levels of reflection: habitual action, understanding, reflection and critical reflection. These refer to the ability to advance from a state of automatic performance with little consciousness, through understanding without relating to other situations, onto a systematic consideration of the grounds for knowledge and its implications, to a final level of awareness of what is behind thoughts and perceptions.

Hatton and Smith's (1995) stages of reflective writing are a little different in the way the critical level is conceptualized, in that they link this more directly to critical education perspectives as discussed earlier. Their four levels are summarized as follows: unreflective descriptive (ability to report and interpret in personal terms; reflective descriptive (demonstrating some effort to analyse from own or other point of view); dialogic (ability to step back, analyse from multiple perspectives); and critical (ability to incorporate ethical considerations based on social, political, and cultural questioning of status quo).

King and Kitchener's (1994) levels of reflective judgement are often used, and seem to be conceptualized primarily in terms of understandings of knowledge. Their seven levels begin with conceptions of knowledge as absolute (pre-reflective levels) and advance through levels where knowledge begins to be seen as uncertain or ambiguous (quasi-reflective), to a reflective stage where knowledge is seen as constructed by systematic inquiry and evaluation of evidence. Their schema is more explicitly rational than others.

The broad theme running through all these conceptualizations is the idea that it is possible to differentiate lower and higher order levels of reflection (usually advancing from purely habitual or descriptive abilities, through stages of being able to analyse situations from other and multiple perspectives, to finally developing an ability to gain ascendancy over knowledge use and

to some extent an ability to create and manipulate its social use) through questioning the tenets upon which it stands.

These sorts of conceptualizations provide useful frameworks for differentiating the uses of reflection in different settings and also for the identification and possible measurement of the effectiveness of different reflective methodologies. What is problematic of course is that whatever framework is used (and presumably whatever features are taken as indicative of respective levels of ability) will be at least partly related to the sort of theoretical framework which guides the understanding of reflection. This will necessarily, at least in part, construct the phenomenon it sets out to investigate and describe. And since these frameworks are not necessarily shared, it is difficult to conduct research which builds upon the findings of previous studies.

### Models and tools of reflection

How is reflection carried out – what models guide the process and what tools may be used within these models? Again, variety is the order of the day, although to some extent these variations appear to be less related to theoretical frameworks than other aspects of reflection. Ghaye and Lillyman (1997: 20) note five different types of models: structured, hierarchical, iterative, synthetic and holistic. To some degree these vary according to their levels of prescriptiveness, flexibility and the typologies of reflection upon which they are based. Structured models may use staged sets of questions to guide reflection (e.g. Johns 2002). Hierarchical models may focus on guiding students through succeeding levels of reflective abilities. Iterative and holistic models may be more cyclical, and focus more on the process of learning.

A plethora of tools and techniques for reflection has been written about in the literature (Osmond and Darlington 2005), and may be used in written or verbal form, either interactively or in self-reflection. These include critical incident technique (Fook *et al.* 2000), journaling (Bolton 2001), on-line discussions (Whipp 2003), case studies, reflective or critical conversations (Brookfield 1995; Ghaye and Lillyman 2000c), narratives or stories (Lehmann 2003c), poems (Bolton 2001), fiction (Rolfe 2002), metaphors (Hunt 2001), the body and movement as resource (Risner 2002), and the 'jotter wallet' (Longenecker 2002). In addition, the analysis of ethnographic data, naturally occurring case records and reports, or transcripts of meetings may also be useful for the interrogation of taken-for-granted assumptions (Riemann 2005a; Taylor and White 2000; White and Stancombe 2003).

The specific styles of group facilitators, and particular methods and questions for eliciting reflection used in conjunction with these tools, will presumably depend to some extent on theoretical frameworks used, but of course a plethora of other factors can come into play as well (since we recognize, as reflective teachers, that there may be a gap between theory and practice and the

Critical reflection is the process by which adults identify the assumptions governing their actions, locate the historical and cultural origins of the assumptions, question the meaning of the assumptions, and develop alternative ways of acting.

It is possible to draw up from the foregoing definitions a full view of reflective practice or critical reflection which involves:

- (i) a process (cognitive, emotional, experiential) of examining assumptions (of many different types and levels) embedded in actions or experience;
- (ii) a linking of these assumptions with many different origins (personal, emotional, social, cultural, historical, political);
- (iii) a review and re-evaluation of these according to relevant (depending on context, purpose, etc.) criteria;
- (iv) a reworking of concepts and practice based on this re-evaluation.

Different usages will vary in the number and type of assumptions focused on, the types of processes involved, the criteria for review of assumptions, and of course the purposes for which the process is used.

The contexts of the uses of reflection may include learning about and improving practice, learning to develop practice-based theory, learning to connect theory and practice, and improving and changing practice. One of the more confusing and complex aspects of reflection is therefore the fact that it can be used to serve many different interests, often simultaneously, some of which may seem contradictory. It may be used, for instance, both for greater or lesser conformity, as a way to increase accountability to existing norms, but also as a way to question the 'taken for granted' which may be implicit in those norms.

In its fullest sense, then, reflective practice or critical reflection appears to apply to the use of reflective abilities in the scrutiny and development of practice. This therefore implies the use of a framework for a reflective process involving different levels and stages, with one stage at least focused on the application of reflective learning to practice itself. This in a sense adds a context, complexity, purpose and depth to the simple exercise of reflective abilities. The implication is that it may be counterproductive to undertake any reflective process (in organized learning settings) without being clear about the specific purpose and process of reflection in relation to the particular context.

It has also been pointed out that the process as defined above implies that it is an individualistic, predominantly personal or self-oriented learning exercise (Reynolds and Vince 2004). There are therefore attempts to develop

reflection as a collective experience, especially in organizational contexts (e.g. Gould and Baldwin 2004a; Reynolds and Vince 2004; Ghaye 2005).

To some extent, then, it is the way the abilities and process are theorized which provides some guidance as to the specific nature and goals of the process. Critical reflection, in this sense, may be seen as the use of reflective abilities to achieve some freeing from hegemonic assumptions (e.g. Brookfield 2000, 2001a), particularly those relating to power and its complex expression as exemplified by the work of Foucault (Brookfield 2001b). Adding a postmodern perspective allows for the hegemony to be recognized even in assumptions about the nature of knowledge and its generation itself. Recognizing this type of reflection often involves differentiating levels of reflection, distinguished by the levels of assumptions unearthed. The varying levels of reflection will be discussed further on.

Is it necessary to differentiate reflection and critical reflection? Perspectives on this question vary in the literature, since of course it is widely acknowledged that there is little consensus on the meaning and usage of these terms (Ixer 1999; Ghaye and Lillyman 2000a: xv). Some may simply see the two as intertwined (e.g. Redmond 2004), as building upon and complementing each other. Others emphasize the need to differentiate the two in order to capitalize on the emancipatory potential of critical reflection (Reynolds 1998; Catterall *et al.* 2002. Brookfield (1995: 8) argues that reflection is important in the daily business of living, but that critical reflection (with the express purpose of understanding how assumptions about power construct – and often restrict – practice) is vital if we are to make crucially relevant changes in the ways we work.

These issues will become clearer when we discuss the different levels of reflection outlined in the literature.

### Levels of reflection

It is sometimes hard to distinguish between different types of reflection and levels of reflection. At the simplest level is perhaps Argyris and Schön's (1974) conception of single- and double-loop learning, where 'single loop' refers to learning regarding already accepted values, and 'double loop' refers to learning which questions accepted values. This relates to Habermas' three domains of knowledge (Redmond 2004: 13–14; B.J. Taylor 2000): the technical (instrumental), practical (communicative) and emancipatory. Habermas' categories may be seen as a typology of domains of reflection and are widely used as a theoretical base in differentiating types of reflection, all of which need to be reflected upon in some formulations (B.J. Taylor 2000)

However, formulations of levels of reflection usually assume a staged process involved in attaining successive levels of depth, transformation or criticality. Redmond (2004: 9) argues that most approaches to reflection assume at

the family, or mental health, and how these reflect particular historical, political and/or moral positions. So, at a societal level, or macro-discursive level, we can see how language produces dominant ideas, or 'forms of thought', or 'regimes of truth' (e.g. Foucault 1980) which are taken for granted but are in fact historically contingent. For example, in contemporary Western societies there are certain dominant notions about how mothers should properly behave towards their children. These are linked to specific forms of knowledge associated with attachment theory, for example. Critical reflection at this level is about understanding the technologies of power, language and practice that produce and legitimate forms of moral and political regulation. To reflect critically at this level, practitioners need to understand the historically contingent nature of their ideas. The familiar theories and practices need somehow to be 'made strange', so that they can be properly interrogated and so that people can build their own ethics out of this analytic process. That is, they can develop the capacity to resist and transgress.

However, discourse may also refer to language used in interactions between people, or written words (e.g. casefiles). At this interactional level we may look at how facts get assembled to do professional work, or how questions get asked. We may attend to how some phrases seem to be more powerful than others (Taylor and White 2000). We need to look at the work the talk does. This is often called the 'performative' nature of language. These kinds of distinctions have led a number of commentators to subclassify discourse analysis. For example, Walker (1988) uses upper and lower case to differentiate between 'discourse' as talk in action and 'Discourse' as a body of knowledge. Contributors to the present book have used both of these meanings. For the purposes of critical reflection, it is important to understand that these forms of discourse interact with each other. Discourses (forms of thought and knowledge, which may be, for example, theories or political ideas) are reproduced within discourse (talk) at 'the point of its articulation' (Walker 1988: 55). Therefore, when analysing any conversation it should be possible to look for Discourse(s) and also to examine how words are assembled and used for a particular audience and for a particular effect (Miller 1994).

More recently there is a beginning recognition of the spiritual and existential aspects of reflective practice (e.g. Ghaye 2004), and therefore there are related attempts to introduce approaches such as Buddhist and Native American lore in developing it further (Johns 2005; Varela 1999). As Betts (2004) points out, reflective practice can be aligned with theological, therapeutic or political benefits. In this sense, theorists of reflective practice may conceivably draw upon any theories which develop these aspects of the reflective experience. As Issitt (2000:121) notes, 'the flexibility of reflective practice leaves it open to appropriation by different stakeholders' and presumably different theoreticians.

### Defining reflection, reflective practice and critical reflection

Given that a plethora of different theories may be drawn upon to develop the ideas of reflective practice and critical reflection, it is possible, to some extent, to trace different usages to the different theories or paradigms which underpin their usage. All attempts to define any phenomenon will of course vary depending on the aspects emphasized, such as the nature of the process, its purposes and motivating features. As Ghaye and Lillyman (2000c: xv) so aptly state: 'reflective practice stands for a collection of intentions, processes and outcomes'. And of course particular processes and outcomes may not necessarily be consistent with particular intentions.

A review of some of the most oft-quoted definitions of reflection or reflective practice will indicate some of these variations. Some commonly quoted definitions are as follows:

the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends.

(Dewey 1933: 9)

a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciation.

(Boud *et al.* 1984: 19)

the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective.

(Boyd and Fales 1983: 100)

As can be seen, these definitions vary depending on what aspects of learning are emphasized (cognitive, emotional, meaning, social, cultural or political), the motivating factors and the degree to which the process is systematically organized, the extent to which they specify the actual processes involved, and the inclusion of change. Stein (2000: 1) puts most of these aspects together nicely:

ranging from the broad – for example, the theories about practice that emerge (Jennings 1992), the sorts of changes students make in a reflective process (Hamilin 2004), the experience of reflection (Wong *et al.* 2001), issues of importance to students (Smith 1998) and developing models of reflection (Ixer 2000; Mamede and Schmidt 2004) – to the more specific, for example, changes in levels of thinking identified (Smith 1998; Whipp 2003; Thorpe 2004), student perceptions of specific tools (Langer 2002) and of course evaluations of specific reflective programmes (Pololi *et al.* 2001). Because the tools for and approaches to reflection, as well as the data analysed, varied markedly in each case, it is impossible to build up a composite picture of the nature and effectiveness of reflective teaching and learning strategies. This underscores one of the major current issues facing professional educators – how to ensure the continued quality development of critically reflective methods in an area of such diversity and complexity.

### **The concepts of reflection, reflective practice and critical reflection**

#### **Development of the ideas**

The idea of critical reflection has ancient origins. Socrates, for example, stressed the centrality of critical self-examination, or living the 'examined life', for ethical, compassionate, humane engagement with the world and its moral dilemmas (Nussbaum 1997). The recent resurgence in interest may then be seen as a *return* to reflection after centuries of searching for stable truths and foundational knowledge. Most contemporary literature refers to the work of Donald Schön (e.g. Argyris and Schön 1974; Schön 1983, 1987), as being formative in their development of the idea of reflective practice, particularly for its application in professional practice learning. Some authors also acknowledge the work of Dewey (1916, 1933) as being pivotal to the development of our current notions of reflection (Mezirow and associates 1990; Redmond 2004). Of course, as the ideas have developed, and different people have engaged in successive reworkings of the concepts using and adding newer theoretical frameworks, it is possible to identify several different approaches. These may firstly be categorized based on the theorists used. Redmond (2004), for instance, traces the major influences on her work to Dewey, Habermas, Freire, Brookfield, Kelly, Polanyi and Boud. She argues that there is an interconnection between their work (all are concerned with metalearning and perspective transformation) and that it can be demonstrated that there is a clear chronological progression linking them (Redmond 2004: 26).

Using a more explicitly philosophical framework, Bleakley (1999: 328) posits that there are four main epistemologies involved, which can be used to develop the idea of reflective practice into a 'holistic reflexivity'. These

are the technical rational (criticized by Schön), humanistic emancipatory (Schön), postmodern deconstructive (Usher) and radical phenomenological (post Heidegger).

In yet a third way of characterizing the different theoretical influences, Ixer (2000: 21) poses three different paradigms: 'reflection in action' (pragmatists Mead, Dewey and Schön); 'reflection as social process' (Kant and Kemmis); and 'reflection as dialogue' (Habermas and Freire). Ixer (2000) and others (Issitt 1999) have more recently attempted to draw up a framework for 'anti-oppressive' and feminist (Issitt 2000) reflective practice.

The above formulations appear to downplay to some extent the role of critical theory and perspectives in the development of the idea of critical reflection (although of course the works of Habermas and Freire are frequently cited as providing theoretical antecedents to current understandings). A more focused formulation of critical theory contributions to reflection is clearly evident and well articulated in the extensive work of Brookfield (1995, 2000) and Mezirow (2000; see also Mezirow and associates 1990) writing from the critical education tradition. In his writing, Brookfield (1995: 207–27) clearly distinguishes between the traditions inherent in the reflective practice literature, critical pedagogy, and adult education more broadly. There have also been more recent attempts to develop discourse analysis (Ellermann 1998; Taylor and White 2000; White and Stancombe 2003) and postmodern thinking in reflective practice (Parker 1997; Lesnick 2005) and of course to combine postmodern and critical theories as a basis for critical reflection (e.g. Fook 1999a; Grace 1997). The work of Fook (2002) develops these in relation to critical reflection within social work practice and also draws parallels between critical reflection and deconstruction/reconstruction. In fact, from a critical perspective (although this term of course has multiple usages) the use of critical theory, and its development for use in critical reflection, is probably one of the major defining features of critical reflection, and therefore one of the major factors which may differentiate it from reflective practice. In this sense, critical reflection involves social and political analyses which enable transformative changes, whereas reflection may remain at the level of relatively undistruptive changes in techniques or superficial thinking.

It is posited by some writers (e.g. Taylor and White 2000) that central to the notion of the critical reflection is an understanding of the capacity of language to construct the world and way we experience it. This is often known in social theory and philosophy as the 'linguistic turn' (e.g. Rorty 1992). The capacity for language to construct what it purports to describe has been theorized and researched empirically on a number of levels. Work in this area is often known generally as discourse analysis. The term 'discourse analysis' is often used as though it related to just one conceptual framework. However, it can mean a number of things. It may refer to ways of thinking about particular phenomena, such as terminal illness, childhood, bereavement, gender, race,

that derived from other means is not necessarily consistent with all conceptualizations of reflective practice and critical reflection.

### Types of literature

A great proportion of the literature on reflective practice and critical reflection appears to be geared to use in teaching. Books or articles of this type may be used either by students who are learning about critical reflection or are required to be critically reflective, or by teachers (at school or higher or continuing education levels). These include textbooks for use in a variety of levels of courses (and of course for different professional groups) and articles which are relatively introductory in nature. The content tends to describe the theory and method of reflective practice or critical reflection, presumably for direct application by students or teachers.

Textbooks range from those that might be used by a first-year cohort in a degree or diploma course (e.g. Ghaye and Lillyman 2000a), to advanced undergraduate and continuing education and postgraduate levels. They tend to give a brief overview of reflective practice or critical reflection (this may or may not include a coverage of relevant theories); an outline of a structure or process which may be used (this may include principles regarding the nature of reflection and the contextual requirements for it to be effective); an outline of other methods which may be used; some discussion of different issues which may arise; and often some examples of usage in different settings or experiences of different participants in the learning process. Johns (2002) is a relatively good example of a text which includes most of these.

It is of course necessary to have a range of material to be used at different levels and for different audiences. We do not wish to imply or argue that some books are therefore inherently better than others. And of course it may be possible to use the one set of materials for a range of audiences (depending of course on how it is used). However, these teaching materials do tend to vary in the extent of theorizing and explicit connection with more formal theories of learning, the extent of discussion of issues involved (contextual, social, political, emotional, cultural), and the depth to which the usage of specific methods is explored. Brookfield (1995) is a good example of a work which explores both practical and theoretical aspects in some depth.

Introductory articles tend quickly to define the idea of reflective practice or critical reflection, include some arguments as to why the approach and process may be useful, and then give a run-down on the chief principles involved (e.g. Kinsella 2001; Roberts 2002).

A second major type of literature is primarily about teaching and learning from critical reflection or reflective practice, written more for the experienced reflector or teacher. This type tends to include edited books with contributions on many different aspects and which may be focused on theorizing

understandings of critical reflection in more depth. Topics may include different approaches to and models of reflection; different tools and techniques; the use of critical reflection in different settings and for different purposes (e.g. supervision). Sometimes they also include case studies of the use of critical reflection programmes in different settings (e.g. Cross *et al.* 2004), and/or the reporting of experiences in undertaking reflective practice programmes or using reflective practice tools (e.g. Shepherd 2004). Many of the articles in the journal *Reflective Practice* are of these types. Examples of edited books of the above type include Mezirow and associates (1990), Brockbank *et al.* (2002), Reynolds and Vince (2004) and Gould and Baldwin (2004a).

An area that appears to be severely lacking in the literature is empirical research and/or studies which demonstrate an evidence base supporting the practice of reflection (Hargreaves 2004; Ixer 2000; Mamede and Schmidt 2004; Stein 2000). Although we recognize that the idea of what constitutes research is contested in reflective circles, in this section we are characterizing empirical research (for the purposes of this chapter only) as that which is not conducted primarily by the researcher on the researcher's own experience. This therefore excludes research conducted using methods such as personal reflections, autoethnographical or self-study methods. We do not wish to suggest that these types of research are inferior, but, in terms of learning more about the outcomes of reflection, we take the position that empirical methods (including both qualitative and quantitative approaches) are also required. We have also excluded those studies primarily conducted as an evaluation of a particular teaching programme, and articles which document the use of reflection or critical reflection as a research method. So for the purposes of this review, we are confining our attention to studies that seek to establish the nature of reflection, reflective changes, and the outcomes of the reflective learning process by non-self-study methods.

We found 37 articles or book chapters which appeared to fit this category, that is, claimed to report the results of empirical research studies on reflection or critical reflection. Most of these did not appear to build on the work of each other, and were in the main qualitative studies of a small group of students (usually the students from the classes which the researcher(s) taught). There were three studies which claimed to be experimental in design (Leung and Kember 2003; Lowe and Kerr 1998; Rees *et al.* 2005). Broadly, the qualitative studies tended to fall into two main categories: those which analysed interviews with participants (e.g. Antonacopoulou 2004; Issitt 2000; Lee and Loughran 2000; O'Connor *et al.* 2003); and those which analysed students' reflective written textual material obtained from a formal programme of study, for example, assignments and journals (Jennings 1992; Tsang 2003), email discussions (Bean and Stevens 2002; Whipp 2003) and critical incidents (Griffen 2003; Smith 1998). Some studies of course combine a variety of methods (e.g. Pedro 2005). Studies focus on a variety of aspects of reflection,



the emerging understandings of the idea of critical reflection, the chapter also explores associated terms and ideas. In the last part of the chapter criticisms of critical reflection are reviewed, key issues outlined and suggestions for further directions are made.

## **A review of current literature**

In this section we give an overview of the types of literature in which the ideas of reflective practice and critical reflection may be found. This section also serves as a guide to the parameters of the literature reviewed for this chapter.

### **The extent of the literature**

As stated earlier, there has been an increasing interest in reflective practice and critical reflection over the last few decades. We recognize at the outset that there may be a difference between the idea of reflective practice and critical reflection, and we will discuss this in more detail later in this chapter. Initially, however, we will review the literature concerning both, as they tend to be linked in most discussions. The sheer volume of the literature available attests to the popularity of these ideas. Part of the reason for this is perhaps the variety of fields in which it occurs, among them nursing (e.g. Ghaye and Lillyman 2000a), medicine (e.g. Mamede and Schmidt 2004), allied health (e.g. Roberts 2002), social work (e.g. Fook 1996; Gould and Baldwin 2004a; Gould and Taylor 1996; Napier and Fook 2000), law (e.g. Kenny 2004), management and human resources (e.g. Marsick 1987; Reynolds and Vince 2004; Seibert and Daudelin 1999) and of course education and adult education (e.g. Brookfield 1995; Mezirow and associates 1990). Some of this literature attempts to span relevance to health and helping professions more broadly (e.g. Johns 2002; Rolfe *et al.* 2001; Taylor and White 2000). There is also an extensive range of related areas, such as transformative learning (Mezirow 1991) and action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001), which also utilize the concept of critical reflection as part of a broader process. In the field of social theory, the idea of critical reflection occurs as a feature of 'reflexive modernity' (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991, 1992). Indeed, conducting a literature review has been extraordinarily difficult in what appears to be a messy and complex field in which traditional disciplinary boundaries and shared criteria for academic rigour do not always apply.

The literature falls into at least three different categories based on three broadly different purposes: it may be primarily educational in its focus (as with the bulk of professional practice literature); it may be located in the body of literature on research methodology; or it may be concerned with the development of theoretical frameworks to understand the nature of social life and/or the application of these in education or professional practice (e.g. Kemmis

1998; Quicke 1997). Obviously some literature spans several purposes so this further complicates matters. The literature reviewed in more depth in this chapter is primarily from the educational and professional practice learning traditions, although other relevant literature is referred to where it is needed to make sense of some different usages.

### **Related literature and popular usages**

Conducting a comprehensive and meaningful review is further compounded by the fact that reflection and critical reflection are sometimes conflated with other terms such as 'reflexivity' or 'critical thinking', so that although similar issues may be discussed, this will be done with reference to different literature and different theoretical traditions. This makes comparison and cross-referencing difficult. We will review the more detailed meanings of these terms and their relation to critical reflection further on.

Further compounding the area is that sometimes, perhaps because the terms are so popular, it may be assumed that their meaning is understood and that there is no need to define or articulate a particular usage of them. Indeed, there is a tendency in some literature to tack 'reflections' onto the end of an article or book and in this sense the meaning appears to be simply referring to a further level of thinking about what has occurred before (e.g. Loreman *et al.* 2005). Another feature of this type of usage is when 'reflection' is referred to but there is no explanation of what it means in detail and no reference to other literature on the topic (e.g. McDermott 2002: 205). In line with this practice, many higher education programmes that require students to undertake reflection, or to display reflective ability in their assignments, may not clarify what this means and may not provide students with relevant reference literature. As Issitt (2000) notes from her own study with women practitioners, very few who claimed to be engaged in reflection had actually read anything recently about it. Stark *et al.* (1999) also notes that many individuals may not know what reflective practice is, and in fact reflective practice may even be scarce amongst its advocates!

Popular usages can confuse meanings in other ways. For example, there is a sense in which the 'critical' in critical reflection is taken as meaning 'scoring negative points'. Lovelock and Powell (2004: 189) refer to this as a 'vulgar' usage of the term. Other authors note the tendency to equate reflection with thinking (Brockbank and McGill 1998: 84-5; Parker 1997: 8, 30).

It is interesting that popular and perhaps relatively uninformed understandings of reflective practice and critical reflection have such sway in the field. Perhaps this points to an underlying construction of them as essentially practices which are developed in the 'doing' of them rather than their more formal theorization. Such thinking would of course be consistent in some ways with the approaches themselves, but to privilege 'practical theory' over

# 1 Critical reflection: a review of contemporary literature and understandings

*Jan Fook, Sue White and Fiona Gardner*

There has been a burgeoning interest in the ideas of reflective practice and critical reflection over the last few decades (Gould 2004: 13–14). The interest has grown in a number of different professional fields as well as in a number of different countries. This makes for possibly very diverse understandings of what are also complex processes and approaches to learning and research. Moreover, the increasing popularity of reflection and critical reflection places them in danger of being used thoughtlessly and in an undiscerning manner (Loughran 2002). It is therefore important to try to map and make sense of just what critical reflection is, what is involved, how it may be used, what its effects are and how we may ‘unsettle’ the tendency for it to become formulaic and taken for granted.

In addition, because of the explosion of interest and therefore literature on critical reflection, it is difficult to track developments in the field across different disciplines and professions. This means that although there is increasing tendency for interprofessional work, it may be difficult to develop further critical reflection models, which are actually relevant across professional boundaries (Huotari 2003), and are in addition based on ‘state of the art’ levels of practice.

This book has been compiled in this spirit. We recognize the current diversity in the field and so we have tried to be inclusive in our understanding of critical reflection. By including contributors from a range of disciplinary and professional backgrounds, it will assist in documenting some of the current uses of critical reflection, and also showcase some of the newer ways it is being used, as well as some of the newer contributions to thinking about it. We thus hope to begin to provide a basis from which continuing interprofessional work and education may develop.

This chapter begins by attempting to review our understandings of critical reflection from literature drawn from different disciplines and professions, and from a range of countries as well. After a review of the types of literature and of