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メタデータ	言語: English 出版者: 公開日: 2016-03-24 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: トレルファ, ジョー, TRELFA, Jo メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	<a href="https://kobe-cufs.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/2032">https://kobe-cufs.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/2032</a>

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# Whatever happened to 'reflective practice'?

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## Abstract

Donald Schön's (1983, p. 1987) seminal work exploring the practice of professionals introduced the notion of reflective practice to describe and discuss professional artistry. Since then, literature and practices in the area have grown such that reflective practice has now become "relied" on (Clegg et al., 2002, p. 131) as a "promised land" (Papastephanou & Angeli, 2007). Code (1993, p. 27) compares rhetoric, in this case the claims made about reflective practice, to statements on a 'display screen' that become familiar and taken-for-granted. In this chapter, I will be identifying and questioning the assumptions contained in this familiar and taken-for-granted rhetoric, setting it alongside the complexities of professional practice, leading to the suggestion we haven't seen 'reflective practice' around for some time, whatever happened to reflective practice...? The chapter will conclude with suggestions for ways forward taken from a larger piece of work, my current doctoral research.

Key words: reflective practice, professional practice, doubts, challenges, reflection-in-action.

## 1 Introduction

In my earlier chapter in this publication I addressed the question ‘what is reflective practice’ through charting key principles and practices of reflective practice in order to support understanding and open up discussion. My aim there was to enable readers to locate aspects of reflective practice from elsewhere in the book as well as theories from wider reading of literature to key dimensions and debates. Analysis was structured around Paulo Freire’s (1996, p. 82) observation that each era “is characterised by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values and challenges” that are dialectically constituted. Considering reflective practice as such a theme given its prevalence and popularity, emphasis focussed on the *ideas* underpinning reflective practice as well as its *concepts*. Through that discussion a number of problematic matters emerged, although for the purposes of that chapter emphasis on overarching *hopes* followed by core *values* proved relevant.

Here, then, I return to those matters of concern in order to explore them in depth, and do this through reference to *doubts* and *challenges*, the remaining elements of Freire’s (1996, p. 82) frame. I draw on theory as well as the perspectives of students engaging with reflective practice during their higher education programmes. The latter stems from small-scale research I carried out in 2010 with students and professionally qualified practitioners<sup>1</sup> in two jurisdictions of the UK (Trelfa, 2010); small-scale research in 2014 with a group of students in Japan (Trelfa & Tamai, ongoing); and from my continuing current doctorate research (Trelfa, ongoing). Participants discuss their espoused and tacit theories of the purposes and practices of reflective practice, and from this research some themes are included below<sup>2</sup>. My intention is to open up critical discussion of the literature and practices of reflective practice. Earlier I established that reflective practice has developed such that it is now “relied” on (Clegg et al., 2002, p. 131) unproblematically, and indeed as a “promised land” (Papastephanou & Angeli, 2007) that will provide whatever is needed or expected of it. We assume we know reflective practice well in terms of it being something that teachers engage in, their ‘critical analysis of working practices to improve competence, promote professional

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<sup>1</sup> Where I use the term ‘practitioners’ it refers to those engaged in the specialist craft and service of particular professions. Sometimes I use the term to distinguish between those individuals who are full time in the workplace to those who are students, i.e. individuals combining fieldwork with university attendance. I also use it in places as a generic term to refer to both. The context for the word will indicate how I am using it.

<sup>2</sup> Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

development, develop theory and help them make sense of complex and ambiguous practice situations' (Cowdrill & Dannahy, 2009, p. 117)<sup>3</sup>. We readily believe that as a result of them doing this they, and the profession of teaching, 'will be stronger' (Barnett, 1990, p. 76). The earlier chapter explored the associated *ideas, concepts, hopes* and *values* that together shape the notion of reflective practice as the "bedrock" of professional practice and professional identity (Finlay, 2008, p. 2) that we know it to be. We understand this will be achieved through a process of "structured experiences, personal reflections, and guided feedback" (Furze et al., 2011, p. 412) in the guise of reflective journals, groups and supervision. In the discussion that extrapolated these underpinning *ideas, concepts, hopes* and *values*, however, doubts began to surface; it becomes apparent that we do not 'know' reflective practice as well as we thought we did and we might begin to wonder 'whatever happened to reflective practice?'

The *doubts* to be discussed in this chapter relate first to the unearthing of tacit beliefs, and the accompanying values involved of disclosure, vulnerability and candour, and then to the models and stages of reflective practice that have been created for a range of reasons but which also enable engagement with concepts and practices that can otherwise be confusing. These *doubts* will be examined in turn as I summarise how we think we know them to be, and then lay out the issues that cause us to question 'whatever happened to reflective practice'. The concluding section considers the resulting *challenges* pertinent to moving understanding of reflective practice forward.

## 2. Doubts created by the ideas and concepts relating to unearthing the tacit

To start, then, in the earlier chapter it was established that the approach of reflective practice to professional practice is that every decision, action and intervention is mediated through the person of the teacher, so their emotions, associations, assumptions, mood, knowledge, understanding, and so forth; and, in the fast-paced dynamic of their practice these are necessarily unconscious, so tacit and implicit rather than known and explicit (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Polanyi, 1958). This is how we know reflective practice to be. Reflective practice offers an approach and tools through which to unearth and explore those elements in order to develop and hone effective and improved service to others. In the UK, research participant Christopher talks about reflective practice being "*fundamental*" to him, a "*prism*" through which he "*view[s]*

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<sup>3</sup> Where I use single marks in a quote it indicates that I am maintaining argument flow by removing incidental words and changing tense whilst still attributing the point to the original author.

*life and work*” and that otherwise he would lose “*self and identity*”. Karen talks specifically about it enabling her to develop “*self-awareness about [her] own practice*” without which she “*wouldn't be able to improve*” (Trelfa, 2010). Mei in Japan describes how reflection after a lesson means she moves “*from the buzz of information in the classroom*” to being more focussed and considered instead. She talks about being “*objective*” as opposed to “*overly emotional*”. Miki explains that through reflective practice she can acknowledge her feelings towards the students and their impact on her teaching (Trelfa & Tamai, *ongoing*). Reflection as “a kind of self-understanding leading to some kind of enlightenment or learning” (Berman-Brown & McCartney, 1996, p. 20) is the *only* purpose of reflective practice for Israeli philosopher, Nathan Rotenstreich (1985). He concludes the “separation of the individual from the context” and their recognition of their “status of an ‘I’” provides freedom, and this sentiment can be seen in the research participant statements.

The ground for the participant experiences stem from the assumption that is essential and integral to reflective practice, that unpacking espoused theories of action unearths tacit beliefs, feelings and values which otherwise would remain invisible. However, even in their original work on tacit and espoused theory of action, Argyris & Schön (1974) note problems. They highlight that the theories and rationales articulated by individuals can be “inaccurate representations of the behaviour they claim to describe”. This being the case, and given it is so fundamental to reflective practice, it is pertinent to explore the matter further.

To this end it is useful to draw on Daniel Kahneman's (2011, p. 13) “metaphor of two agents” in his thesis of the mind as he explores judgement and decision making; his thesis illuminates significant issues at the heart of reflective practice in its assumption that it unearths the tacit. The American Professor of Psychology and Public Affairs Emeritus refers to the first ‘agent’ as ‘System 1’; it is the mode of thinking that “operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of control” (2011, p. 20), providing fast impressions that make immediate responses possible. System 1 is clearly the mode of thinking that reflective practice endeavours to counter. The second ‘agent’, ‘System 2’, consists of “subjective experience of agency, choice and concentration” or, the deliberate and “conscious reasoning self” (2011, p. 21); as Kahneman (2011, p. 21) observes, “When we think of ourselves, we identify with System 2, the conscious, reasoning self that has beliefs, makes choices, and decides

what to think about and what to do.” This is certainly the case for reflective practice and it is the mode it emphasise. However, it was suggested above by Argyris & Schön (1974) that the theories and rationales articulated by individuals can be “*inaccurate* representations of the behaviour they claim to describe”. Kahneman’s analysis offers that whilst we might *like* to identify ourselves as functioning from System 2, in reality ‘only a fraction of its capacity is engaged’ (2011, p. 24). For the most part, then, rather than from a mode of agency, choice and deliberation, we operate from System 1, so automatically, quickly, with no sense of control, and therefore find it difficult to consider our behaviour as being actuated by anything more complex.

Kahneman proceeds to explain that this is because System 2 is only ‘mobilised’ when System 1 does not have an answer, or is surprised, challenged, or when ‘increased effort is needed when an error about to be made’ (2011, p. 24-25). First impressions here may conclude that this is entirely fitting to reflective practice given that surprise, challenge and uncertainty were identified as the pivotal in Donald Schön’s original work on reflective practice; it would follow that at such times System 2 thinking would kick-in, and that through the practices of reflective practice we can learn how to facilitate this to ensure it happens. It is, however, pertinent to reiterate that System 1 is the mode of thinking we operate from for most of the time, but also as Kahneman also emphasises, System 2 thinking is significantly slower than System 1. At best, then, engaging with reflective practice will take a ‘leap of faith’, as discussed in the previous chapter, particularly when practitioners are first getting to grips with reflective practice. But it will also take effort. Effort makes a contribution and difference to the way that something is experienced and to the outcomes. Applying this to reflective practice, where effort is instrumental, perfunctory or non-existent, that will influence both how reflective practice is approached and whether the outcomes are felt to be rewarding and relevant to effecting service to others, in turn creating a self-fulfilling prophecy that it is indeed a waste of time and effort (Phan, 2009).

Further, having understood that there are profound issues to do with mode of thinking that relates to unearthing the tacit, instead of being able to identify, articulate and explore tacit influences that underpin action as if they provide ‘true’ access to ourselves, Kahneman argues System 1 operates via a range of mistakes. He discusses these as: cognitive and visual illusions (that we are hard wired to think/believe/see things as we expect them to be but are in fact not the case); biases (“what you see is what you get”); and, anchoring effects

(reliance on immediate, familiar, expected and predicted theory and information). These ‘trick’ System 2 thinking; it is on these illusions and mistaken effects that System 2 thinking deliberates. On top of this is, of course, the wider debate regarding the notion of feelings, beliefs, values existing as if located inside an “intact coherent self waiting...to be recorded through language” (Spry, 2011, p. 503). The contested ‘self’ is outside the scope of this chapter, but it is sufficient to note that the idea of an intact, coherent, ‘true’ or ‘core’ self cannot be taken as fact.

Therefore, *doubts* in relation to the fundamental *ideas* underpinning reflective practice materialise through an understanding of the way the mind works, instead of what could otherwise be perceived as a naïve assumption that unearthing tacit beliefs, values, feelings and so forth automatically and unproblematically leads to ‘true’ self-awareness.

It is an argument that finds further support from recent research into memory. For example, Herlihy et al (2012, p. 662) review literature on autobiographical memory, “explicit memory of an event that occurred in a specific time and place in one’s personal past”. Their work is relevant here given the parallel to material that reflective practitioners draw on albeit in a work context. Herlihy et al specifically focus on people’s recall of events leading to, and necessary in, the process of seeking asylum. They highlight that as the gap between the event and recall increases, so memories become dominated by association and the familiar rather than the particular and distinct. It is, of course, something that has significant implications for those seeking asylum since the process involved includes assessment of accuracy and genuineness, something not matched in reflective practice, unless, of course, reflective practice is used to account for one’s actions as part of a disciplinary or other institutional or legal process where it’s possible outcomes can be considered as somewhat similar (‘somewhat’ being emphasised here). In other words, the stake of the gap involved and its impact on memory for teachers will not be as high as it is for asylum seekers, but, the relevance relates to the overwhelming prominence given to memory recall in literature and practices of reflective practice. The earlier chapter identified how attention of mainstream theory and approaches is predominantly on reflection *on* an incident, session, or period of professional practice, via writing in diaries, discussion groups, and talking in periodic supervision, all of which *clearly* involve a gap after the event. Applied to reflective practice, then, Herlihy et al’s research shows how the activity of reflection becomes based on the representative, described and engaged with in ways that are familiar and general rather than particular and distinct. If we add to this Kahneman’s theory that thinking is systemically

based on illusion, bias and anchoring then one may start to question the point of reflection-on-practice at all. At best reflective practice is not how we assumed it to be.

Thus, having seen how an analysis of modes of thinking exposes issues that go to the heart of reflective practice with regards to unearthing the tacit, it is also now apparent that the practice of reflective practice centered on activities which are reliant on the articulation of tacit theory of action *after* the event also proves problematic. Whilst Kahneman's thesis is not without its critics (Earl, 2012) and further research is indicated (Martin, 2012), however, it would appear that typical understanding of reflective practice is based on assumptions that do not accurately represent or reflect cognitive functioning. Indeed the realm from which we function for most of the time, System 1, argues is in fact "radically insensitive to both the *quality* and *quantity* of the information that gives rise to impressions and intuitions" (Kahneman, 2011, p. 86) (*emphasis added*), thus being hard-wired to ignore the issues raised here, despite our best intentions.

Perhaps, then, our best intentions could involve learning to operate from System 2 via concerted effort. Even though we function in an unconscious, automatic, uncontrolled thinking mode for most of the time, AND deliberation, agency and choice is a slower mode of thinking, AND even though System 2 is reliant on being fed information from System 1, which comprises of tricks of illusion, bias and so forth AND we are hard wired-to ignore the quality and quantity of that information, perhaps in focussed periods of reflective practice we can learn to engage System 2 thinking.

Such a line of argument could be brought to bear on an explanation of and justification for the developmental epistemology of reflective practice that dominates theory and practice, a discussion of which was included in the earlier chapter. We can now defend this position with the knowledge that "subjective experience of agency, choice and concentration" and a deliberate and "conscious reasoning self" (Kahneman, 2011, p. 21) (System 2 thinking) do not arise easily or spontaneously. Thus it follows that we could be able to develop and hone System 2 thinking via the 'dedicated time and effort' (Gelter, 2003, p. 337) of reflective practice.

### 3. Doubts created by models and stages of reflective practice

It is to this end that models and stages of reflective practice have been created. Not only do they enable those using reflective practice to cope with confusing *concepts*, as has been seen,



they can also facilitate effective and increasingly competent engagement. In the earlier chapter a number of stages and models for reflective practice were identified and within literature, professional programmes and the professions themselves these are typically approached as diagnostics (through which to assess depth of engagement in reflective practice and fitness to practice), and as a process that orientates and facilitates the development of criticality. Students teachers will be provided with, for example, literature on models and stages, proformas to be completed that guide their reflections, and clear expectations about the nature of group dialogue and supervision they are to engage with. In the UK, Karen identifies how the models she was provided with gave her “*the opportunity to reflect on a key issues in a session or conversation*” so that she did not “*miss relevant and important issues*” and Jon says it meant he was able to “*slow things down*” and not be “*oblivious*” of them (Trelfa, 2010). In Japan, Barnara explains how guidance she is given helps her to ask herself “*many questions, so why I did so and why I felt so*”, and as a result she is enabled to “*move forward*”.

Given the pivotal role of models and stages, *doubts* emerging in the earlier chapter relating to the number and nature of stages signal that further exploration is needed. To do this, how we understand models and stages to be part of reflective practice is presented below, but when posed alongside exploration of *doubts* we can begin to wonder ‘whatever happened to reflective practice?’

To begin with it is asserted that the early stages of reflective practice involve a teacher critically appraising their assumptions, those that shaped their professional actions. This would appear to be a fundamental and essential aspect we associate with reflective practice. However an investigation of the literature reveals it to be contested (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Jarvis, 1992). Mezirow (2000), for example, contends that learning can be newly acquired or be an extension of established learning, with *or without* challenging personally held assumptions. Similarly, Van Manen (1977) suggests three equally valid stages of engaging in reflective practice, the first being reviewing options *without* critical appraisal of assumptions and the third stage where a change in perspective is essential.

We could consider these theories as helpful if taken to imply that not all processes and outcomes of reflective practice are the same. Thus to learn to inhabit System 2 would be useful to appreciate that it involves awareness of a number of stages, all being valid in themselves, but that these relate to the learning situation (nature, purpose, context), and thus

we can also appreciate the difference of the final stage in relation to effecting agency and conscious thinking. However, reference to just a few of the theories concerning stages immediately exposes *doubts* here since the number of stages and what they involve is hotly disputed. For example, stages number from two (Adams et al., 2002), to three (Kim, 1999; Burgoyne & Reynolds, 1997; Atkins & Murphy, 1993), four (Leung & Kember, 2003; Mezirow, 1991), five (Zeichner & Liston, 1996), six (Dray & Wisneski, 2011), seven (King & Kitchener, 1994; Dreyfus, 2001) even nine (Perry, 1970). What they involve, and how they can be facilitated, is therefore problematic, and the implications in terms of assessment (of the extent to which a teacher is or is not engaging in reflective practice) is also of concern.

Not only is there disagreement concerning the number and constituents of stages, Cranton (2006, p 59) points out that whilst they may not intend to imply reflective practice is linear, "their very nature" suggests otherwise. They proffer a right and therefore implied wrong way to reflect, and a reification of the process into a simplistic one-size-fits-all process. In the UK, Michelle speaks of finding models useful in terms of shaping her reflections but also that they "*cut things off*", in other words, that they sharply delineate what she can and cannot include. Jade describes how she feels "*trapped*" by them. Thus, models and stages, via guidance, instruction and templates can be perceived as "*being told to reflect in boxes*" (Jade), the experience of having to attune or adjust one's reflections according to what is expected and required. This has an added overlay for student teachers given they are engaging in reflective practice as part of their professional programme which they are ultimately going to pass or fail. A significant number of students talk about whether they should engage in their *own* journey and

*in which case if you've been on a journey then surely you pass because you've learnt something at the end, or is it a journey against which you've got to tick these kind of boxes?*

Thus, reflective practice becomes "*a task to be done rather than to be embedded in practice*" (Janice), essentially a hoop to jump through. Indeed, the UK research participants went further and connected this with a wider "*culture of hoop jumping*" that is increasingly endemic throughout institutions, which is greatly impacting on the nature of professional practice. Concerns about reflective practice becoming instrumental holds further resonance in relation to the notion of transformation introduced in the earlier chapter. Clearly, a

transformational epistemology of reflective practice becomes restricted and reduced in 'hoop jumping' climates, whether due to the practices of reflective practice or the wider work environment. This is aside to transformation being of issue in higher education programmes anyway given the formalised nature of predicting outcomes that accompany courses, of assessing whether it has happened or not, and then measuring it through a grade. How *do* we assess transformation – and therefore how do student teachers evidence it? How do we ensure equity given arguably those who have more need to develop personally have greater opportunity to evidence it compared to those who are more personally accomplished/ mature/ balanced and yet still may experience personal transformation?<sup>4</sup>

The *doubts* relating to models and stages of reflective practice have direct and immediate consequences. Students in the UK talk about censoring, making up, and lying in their reflective diaries, groups and supervision (Trelfa, 2010; Trelfa and Telfer, 2014) and in Japan of making changes to fit the audience (Trelfa & Tamai, *ongoing*). This is matched in wider theory. Wallace (1995) writes of accounts being “laundered” (cited in Platzer et al., 1997, p. 114), Hobbs (2007) of people ‘faking and hating’ the whole affair, and Hargreaves (2004, p. 200) identifies three key narratives which are quickly identified by staff and student teachers alike as being “legitimate” so that as long as one or another are expressed (in diaries and dialogue) then it will be deemed that they are engaging in reflective practice properly and effectively. These ‘legitimate narratives’ are: “valedictory” (i.e. ‘there is a crisis – I recognise the problem, turn the situation around and win the day’), “condemnatory” (‘there is a crisis – I - or someone else - made a poor decision, the outcome was negative, no-one wins and I feel guilty or angry’), and “redemptive” (‘I was faced with a situation that exposes me [belief, value, behaviour] in some way, but through reflection I ‘redeem’ myself and thus ‘improve’ my professional practice’).

In sum, rather than models and stages unproblematically supporting development of System 2 thinking, they risk asserting a process which is reliant on those engaging with them to articulate information deemed as relevant and correct, and for utilitarian purposes only (Barnett & Griffin, 1997). Thus, whilst teachers may appear to be engaging in disclosure, with vulnerability and doing so with candour, the *nature* of those expressions can be questioned: they learn to perform and evidence the ‘legitimate narratives’, become

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<sup>4</sup> Post-structuralism (e.g. Lather, 1993) and post-qualitative research (e.g. St. Pierre) challenge the whole notion of ‘grand transformation’ altogether, a broader discussion outside the scope of this chapter but important to highlight as a footnote.

competent in the skill of being *seen* to be reflective, and suppress rather than critique and examine their practice. Lester's (1999, p. 46) concepts of "map-reading" and "map-making" are helpful to discussion here. Exploring the way in which 'students and developing practitioners find their way in their professional territories', Lester distinguishes between 'map-reading', that is compliance with implicit and explicit instruction, and 'map-making', which involves 'moving between frames of reference, creating new ones, and working within spaces where practice creates rather than follows the map'. Thus, models and stages encourage (or, at least are experienced as encouraging) map-reading rather than the hoped for map-making formulated in the key *ideas*, *concepts* and *hopes* of reflective practice. We thought we understood reflective practice as map-making, but an excavation of *doubts* shows otherwise. Whilst it could be countered that perhaps those with least professional experience (student teachers) lack knowledge and ability and therefore are more likely to 'map-read' (Schön, 1983; 1987; Dreyfus, 2001), this undermines the whole premise of reflective practice itself, that *everyone* brings tacit beliefs, values, theories, to their professional practice that can and should be unearthed.

#### 4. Doubts created by the emphasis given to disclosure, vulnerability and candour

A final area of *doubt* to be considered picks up on disclosure, vulnerability and candour, the *values* underpinning reflective practice identified in the earlier chapter and referred to above in relation to appearing to be engaging with, and expressing, them, when in reality they are instrumental and empty. This, of course, would not describe the experience of all teachers, nor indeed necessarily any individual teacher all the time. Phan (2009), for instance, observes a significant difference between practitioners who take a 'performance' compared to 'performance-avoidance' approach to reflective practice, and he compares both of these to a 'mastery' orientation. In his conclusion the extent of effort is an important variable in all three. To this I add that an individual may not be one or the other of these all the time; their effort will be influenced by time, tiredness, and life commitments and events outside of work, all of which alter as life/work progresses.

Moreover, in my research when participants engaged from a performance or mastery approach, it could still be a problematic experience and they referred to this as 'unwanted personal therapy' (Trelfa, 2010). For these practitioners, the reflective activities of writing and dialogue encouraging, prompting and requiring the unearthing and re-visiting of personal material was uninvited, and/or with a person or people they themselves had not chosen. Further, the understanding of reflective practice for the people they were supposed

to be supervised by or sharing with might be confused, or shaped towards expectations of therapeutic intent. In such circumstances reflective practice provoked anxiety. Hal talks about it in terms of “*a big gaping hole... I may not come out of alive*”, others that they are willing to engage with reflective practice on their own but not when it is made public. It is not surprising, then, that for some the whole process is “*traumatic*”. When asked about this, Michelle goes on to explain

*Something might happen, do you really want to know why, that might link back to something in you personally aside from the work, and that might be a conflict of values or something, do you really want to expose that? You can deal with that inside yourself, you know it links to something in your past but how traumatic to write it down in a way that someone reading it is going to understand without knowing the rest of it and understand it correctly and not just take, you know two different people can read the same thing and take two different sorts of things away from it.*

Of course some research participants found the therapeutic interlude that can at times be part of reflective practice conducive to improved professional practice, but they speak of this experience being dependent on the others they have been engaged with (tutor, group) and express difficulty in imagining how they might continue with it on their own (Trelfa & Tamai, *ongoing*). Interestingly, others note how the pedagogy of reflective practice operates in opposition to that of the wider institutional and ideological culture. For instance, Liz (UK) observes that in her profession she is guided towards *not* showing vulnerability as otherwise she would be judged as not coping, and Miki and Babara (Japan) that reflective practice brings meaning to their teaching whereas outside of this it is typically and simply approached as the design and delivery of materials to enable students to pass exams. It is pertinent to consider how these individuals might be supported to maintain what is an apparently meaningful and/or subversive practice in-post, and after a number of years in-post.

## 5. Doubts and the rhetoric of reflective practice

Having explored a number of *doubts* it will prove useful to further advance discussion by considering them as central to the rhetoric surrounding reflective practice. Rhetoric is part of discourse, the latter defined as “not what is said [but] that which constrains and enables what *can* be said” (Barad, 2003, p. 819) [*emphasis added*]. Rhetoric are claims within

discourse that have the specific purpose of persuasion and motivation (Shrag, 2003), the linguistic operations that aim to persuade people to accept the discourse. We can visualise it as a “screen” as a result of which discourse can present itself as neutral and ‘fact’ instead of a construction (Code, 1993, p. 27). Key aspects of the discourse concerning reflective practice have been explored but when the rhetoric is unpacked we can begin to realise reflective practice is not as we thought it to be, ‘whatever happened to reflective practice?’ However, stark critique can take on a feel of “easy ammunition” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 41), not my intention in this chapter. I am not offering one set of ‘truths’ to supersede others or critique as justification for its own ends, but am wanting to open up critical discussion of literature and practices of reflective practice, and, as a result, move understanding forward. Throughout this chapter I have shown how participants speak positively of their broader experiences of reflective practice, hence I am not reaching a conclusion to do away with reflective practice altogether. Of course the negative participant experiences could be dismissed as being the result of poor facilitation and supervision, or inadequate and limited understanding of reflective practice spaces and processes, but the experiences were common across the ‘random’ participants and in more than one country, then they have to be considered. Further, reflective practice holds the requirement for the private and personal to be made public in some form so that practitioners can question their practice assumptions (Hedges, 2010): how the personal frames perspective is important to becoming a ‘reflective practitioner’ (Johns, 2004) and it keeps professional practice grounded. The *challenges* for reflective practice, then, the final element of Paulo Freire’s frame, is to find ways to consider and practice reflective practice that are befitting to the functioning of mind, and that acknowledge and tussle with the other *doubts* raised here, rather than to proceed as if they do not exist. The *challenge*, then pivots on how to take reflective practice forward.

Zygmunt Bauman (1999, p. xiv) argues that ‘practice’ is “order making”, it ‘trims down the range of possibilities’. He states that when this involves people, the purpose of practice is to “[increase] the probability of certain patterns of behaviour while diminishing, or eliminating altogether the likelihood of other kinds of conduct”. Thus whilst the former may involve creativity and design, the latter overlays it with a requirement of “obedience to the desired preferences”. Not only can we see this in professional practice, where the ‘desired preferences’ have been shaped over time (by governments, institutions, organizations, disciplines, professionals, narratives, discourse, need, etc.), we can now see how ‘reflective *practice*’ also ‘trims down the range of possibilities and requires obedience to those desired preferences’. ‘Practice’ orders what is messy; it imposes and reinforces

ritualised activity over a rich complex landscape of what it is to engage in classroom settings.

## 6. Getting to know reflective practice differently: aporia

Part of the rhetoric related to reflective practice involves there being a single (overarching) identifiable story that has a clear accountable narrative. Even when student teachers represent indecision and alternative perspectives, these are still pinned to an overall story that has a clear beginning, middle and end. This misses the multicursal<sup>5</sup> routes and dead-ends of professional judgement, and denies or minimises the complexity of professional practice. Consideration of aporia is useful here, meaning “A lack of resource...a perplexity achieved by an encounter with the previously unthought, an uncertainty about where to go next driven by a desire to progress” (Heidegger, 1945/ 2002, p. 41). In relation to reflective practice, aporia, then, refers to the multitude of paths, uncertainty, perplexity, and dead ends that characterise the labyrinth of professional practice (Burbules, 2000; Derrida, 1993/ 1995) whilst in contrast current practices involved in the ‘doing’ and ‘using’ of reflective practice centre on retrospective “two-dimensional representation of the surface” of what happened and where one went, (Kuby et al., 2013, p. 3). This does not capture the messiness of engagement. Indeed, in sharp contrast to the developmental and transformational epistemologies of reflective practice discussed as dominating the literature, aporia is about

Epistemic emptiness: at that moment, one knows nothing, and does not know what to think or say or do next, there is no path in sight, there are too many paths to choose from, one cannot recognise a path is already there...[or]the path is apparent but one cannot or will not follow it. (Burbules, 2000, p. 179).

Derrida (1993/ 1995) likens the experience to approaching and standing before a ‘border crossing’, with all the uncertainty and emotions this involves. Therefore, rather than an emphasis on telling stories about practice, which inevitably have to be guided through models and stages, and treats the telling of them as unproblematic, focus could be on capturing and conveying the messiness of professional and reflective practice.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Multicursal’ is a term associated with labyrinths (in contrast to the unicursal, meaning singular, path of mazes) referring to complexity, difficulty, multiple paths, dead-ends and retracing ones steps.

### 6.1 Getting to know reflective practice differently: bodily knowing

Instead of an overwhelming concentration on cognition as if this was an easy process and one that accesses an internal self waiting to be articulated, a focus on aporia would support teachers to become aware of their bodily knowing, their felt sense, their feeling of the moment when “One recognises something as something ... and moves toward insight and understanding” (Burbules, 2000, p. 177). Hans Gelter (2003, p. 340), Swedish Associate Professor in Experience Production, highlights how “the ‘I’ experiences the world half a second after the ‘me’ has compiled it and already made decisions of how to act” therefore, bodily knowing will be an important area for theory and practice, especially given the issues highlighted in relation to System 1 and 2 thinking discussed above. Clearly, professional practice is realised through the medium of body (Coward, 2005). If we regard the body and mind as “intertwined” (Kinsella, 2007, p. 408), although practice *decisions* may indeed be organised in the mind, bodily knowing as being influential in informing this could be a focus for reflective practice.

Estola & Elbaz-Luwish's (2003, p. 704) research reveals teachers are aware of a number of “body positions” during their professional practice, from their bodies being the first aspect that students pay attention to, their bodies being the ‘figure that students copy’, and to the toll of “physical labour” of teaching on their bodies. The authors discuss this in terms of awareness of the significance of bodily “presence”, so the “physical fact” of being there, but also their “body positions” as “tools of the language of practice” that enable them to enact moral agency (2003, p. 714). Shaw's (2004) research with 90 psychotherapists provides evidence of three different themes of bodily knowing in professional practice: ‘body empathy’ or resonance; ‘body as receiver’ (i.e. being physically affected); and ‘body management’ (i.e. dealing with own body and that of client). In the profession of counselling, Pack (2009) describes counsellors using integral and essential understanding of their ‘bodies as a site of knowing’ to inform their practice. She explains how their “awareness of various bodily sensations [becomes] a guide connecting them with the unspoken content of trauma” and thus it is essential that they tune in “with the experience of their own bodies” (2009, p. 49).

Teachers too could be encouraged to learn about their bodies as a site of knowing via reflective practice.



Noting a dearth of “focus on noncognitive ways of knowing including embodied knowing” in the social professions, Sodhi & Cohen (2012, p. 120) set out to address the gap in their research and found that practitioners “embraced and trusted their embodied knowing as a valid source of knowledge”. They show how practitioners can identify internal reactions, learn to understand and trust them, and then process and use them to guide their interventions and by doing this they “become more effective” (2012, p. 131). Ross (2000) describes somatic countertransference in psychotherapy and more generally, Preston & de Waal (2002) write about emotional transfer or contagion when working with people. Barnacle (2009, p. 32) sums bodily knowing up as “the life of the gut” and puts forward a case for “*re-thinking* the central role that reason has traditionally been accorded in accounts of learning and understanding” [*emphasis added*]. Dekeyser & Leijssen (2005) distinguish between ‘body orientated responses’ where a professional practitioner is aware of their bodily knowing and explicitly refer to and use it in their practice, and ‘body based responses’ where practitioners respond from this awareness but do not necessarily refer to it directly.

In mainstream literature on professional and reflective practice then, these aspects of practice remain invisible. Without language, concepts or encouragement to consider bodily knowing, practitioners will not articulate it. Without methods to privilege bodily knowing that are at least comparable to the models and proformas of reflective practice that favour visible and cognitive aspects of practice they will remain unacknowledged. Without theory to underpin all this, if considered at all, focus will move into the cognitive realm as soon as possible, if not start and end there altogether.

### 6.3 Getting to know reflective practice differently: confessional practices

The problematic nature of confessional practices (those reliant on disclosure, vulnerability and candour) as a way to engage with reflective practice has also surfaced as a theme within the discussion of *doubts* that indicates change here too is needed. Foucault (1976) highlights how confessional practices generate information, but the extent to which that information is simply a reflection of the “multiple intentions and desires” of those doing the asking (Scheurich, 1997, p. 62) means that as an approach, whatever the original intention, it becomes a form of surveillance and control (Saltiel, 2010). Ecclestone & Hayes (2009), Furedi (2004, p. 2006), and Lasch (1979) contextualise this experience into the wider “cultural climate that fosters suspicion about private behaviour” and emotions (Furedi, 2004, p. 66). Here, ‘the private’ is a problem unless and until it is opened up for public scrutiny

although then it is judged as a different kind of problem; because these are shaped within a growing context of distrust of professions and professionals, certainly the case in the West, then ironically it leads to a diminished rather than empowered sense of self (Furedi, 2004). To move reflective practice forward, tools that rely on 'reflective scraps' rather than written and verbal accounts would initiate an individual to highlight significant prompts and experiences for *themselves*, would take emphasis away from confession and, as a result, move the focus away from 'artful constructions' of identity and practice (Saltiel, 2006, p. 141). The 'scraps' would enable more immediate capturing, *and* a more 'messy' engagement; links, patterns, learning could be identified from some, all or one, and it is this that can be shared publicly.

The *challenge* for reflective practice, then, is to find ways to conceptualise and facilitate engagement with the messiness of practice, discussed here in terms of a labyrinth and aporia. The identification and discussion of *doubts* reveal that ironically current rhetoric around reflective practice encourages "a clear separation between means and ends" (Biesta, 2007, p. 9). Although *some* practitioners might note the means of messiness and aporia as realities of practice, this is rendered invisible when agreed and accepted concepts or theories do not acknowledge or validate them, and when prescribed reflective practice methods require a speedy withdrawal to regain an 'epistemical' focus instead. Given that mindfulness "entails being fully engaged and interacting in the present" (Mishna & Bogo, 2007, p. 522), introduced in an ever-increasing range of social professions, one might wonder why I am not advocating this here. Rosch (2007, p. 260) observes that people do not choose to engage in mindfulness out of whim, but because "their moment to moment everyday experience hurts". Like reflective practice, mindfulness can be approached in a cavalier and mindless way. Moreover, and again similar to reflective practice, terms can be poorly defined, claims weakly evidenced and emphasis on "constant ego monitoring" not helpful (Cavill, 2010, p. 263). I also see it getting tied into to a growing focus on 'happiness', now a United Nations scale translated into governmental objectives but which risks tipping into emphasis being placed on people to be "cheerful, outgoing, goal-driven, status seeking, extravert" (Miller, 2008, p. 591). For my conceptualisation of reflective practice, happiness - and mindfulness - are orientated to the self, and a particular kind of ideologically determined citizen-self based on positive-thinking and self-help, which is to the neglect of a critique of systems and oppressions. The notion of reflective practice being fundamentally about service to others that I frame at the outset and in my first chapter becomes lost. The ways to move reflective practice forward being proposed here offers grounded, defined and

theorised approaches that develop a critical practice aimed towards service to others, which, significantly, pivots on reflection-*in*-action.

In sum, as we begin to realise that reflective practice is not as we thought it to be and ask ‘whatever happened’ to it, the answer I suggest is that the significant area of reflection-in-action has been neglected, and under-theorised.

#### 6.4 Getting to know reflective practice differently: reflection-in-action

To get to know reflective practice differently, I suggest focus should be on aporia, alternatives to confessional practices, and on bodily knowing; and, that the practices of reflective practice needs to move away from being reliant on ‘experts’ providing packages of appropriate knowledge (via models, stages, proformas) against which individuals interpret or limit their experiences. Reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983; 1992) is pertinent here. Argued as “core” to professional artistry (Finlay, 2008, p. 3), it is ‘knowledge’ ‘woven’ into practice that professionals tacitly apply, but importantly ‘knowledge’ of a different kind, as this discussion has suggested.

Reflection-in-action was introduced in the earlier chapter, and to remind us here, it refers to teachers who “think about doing something while doing it” (Schön, 1983, p. 54), so in “a stretch of time within which it is still possible to make a difference to the outcomes of action (Schön, 1995, p. np). It was important to Schön’s original writing on reflective practice, but is the least theorised area, both in his own work and in the subsequent wider body of literature (Eraut, 1994). Where reflection-in-action does appear it is “incoherent logically and irrelevant practically” (Newman, 1999, p. 154). This said, it is also important to note that Schön’s original work has been “selectively plundered” and “in such a way that the original vibrancy and open possibilities have been charged with a stereotyped cycle of reflection” (Sweet, 2010, p. 187). To develop a different and better understanding of reflective practice, I contend that we first need to recognise how for some time we have not seen it around as we assumed it to be, therefore need to get to know it again, and to do this I suggest we need to progress the notion of reflection-in-action. This involves: approaching reflective practice as being and becoming not an act, act<sub>2</sub> or product; appreciating the functioning of mind and subjective experience; developing a focus on aporia, so on arrival, experience, awareness of links, bridges, connections, that is, “the craft of making one’s own way” (Burbules, 2000, p.173-4); developing mechanisms, language and

encouragement that facilitate bodily knowing such that we “bring the body in from the educational margins” through a ‘pedagogy of embodiment’ (Satina & Hultgren, 2001, p. 531); and honing an approach that enables the “catching of self in the act” (Macintyre & Buck, 2008, p. 318), the ‘falling into trust with the body as the medium for sense-making’ (Satina & Hultgren, 2001, p. 316).

Whilst the research I draw on (Trelfa, 2010; Trelfa, *ongoing*; Trelfa & Tamai, *ongoing*) indicates evidence of reflective practice being central to professional practice and development of one’s professional identity, a discussion of *doubts* and *challenges* reveals that the dominant weight of literature and practice of reflective practice has become confused about, militates against and thus stifles the very processes it wishes to promote. *This* is what happened to reflective practice and my intention here has been to offer ways forward in order that we can get to know it differently, explored in further depth in my current research.

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