Reflection in Education: An Exploration of EFL Teachers' Conceptions of Reflective Practice in the UAE

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Submitted by **Helen Constantinou** *to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor in Education in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, April 2009.*

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(Signature).....

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Abstract

This study explored how six Arab EFL teachers constructed meanings of reflection, and how these meanings informed their teaching practice. The purpose of this research was to better understand reflective practice in teacher education. Dewey (1933), Schön (1983, 1987) and van Manen's (1977) theories on reflective practice guided this study. A symbolic interaction theoretical and methodological framework (Denzin, 1978; Prus, 1996) was applied.

The data were collected from teacher interviews, reflection journals and classroom observations. Five specific themes emerged from the data and were categorised within the symbolic interaction social processes of (1) acquiring perspectives, (2) achieving individuality, (3) experiencing relationships, (4) situating the act, and (5) the act of reflection (Prus, 1996). In addition, eleven sub-themes were derived from the data which illuminated how the teachers interpreted and practised reflection. The sub-themes included: (1) defining reflection, (2) questioning as reflection, (3) opportunities for reflection, (4) defining reflection from self / significant others, (5) looking back on action, (6) reflection is based on personal beliefs and educational theory, (7) encountering peers / cooperating teachers, (8) self-reflections, (9) verbal reflections, (10) written reflections, and (11) content of reflection.

The findings revealed that teachers possessed a general understanding of reflection and practised technical and interpretive levels of reflection in different contexts. Engaging in reflective practice activities encouraged the teachers to question their own beliefs and theories. The study provided evidence showing that reflection is a key element of teacher development. Reflective thinking is a vehicle that can help teachers to progress from a level where they are mainly

guided by intuition to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and self-inquiry. The study has implications for the ways in which teachers learn about reflection, and I do hope that teacher educators will find it useful.

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Chapter One

Preamble

1.0 INTEREST AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER

My interest in reflective practice stems from my early experiences as a pre-service teacher on a teacher preparation programme. As a novice teacher, I watched in awe as my mentor, Karen Balawi, taught her class in English language teaching (ELT). An eager student, I constantly questioned her, studied her approach and tried to put her curriculum into action in my own classes. Passionate about her work and patient with me as her apprentice, she would describe in detail, at my insistence, how she constructed and created the interactive encounters she produced.

In those early years of my teaching, Karen would often discuss with me my reflections and experiences as I struggled to make sense of the complexities of the classroom. Our conversations helped me to bring some structure to my practice, guiding me through uncertainties and insecurities, giving me a strong framework with which to view and shape my work. Gradually, I developed my own way of creating interactive encounters in the classroom in order to understand what I might seek and how I might think as I worked in ELT. With growing confidence and competence, I began to understand intuitively the focus of Karen's attention when she was teaching English.

It was not until almost ten years later that I realised that what Karen and I had been doing was working together as reflective practitioners – she as mentor, I as novice – unravelling moments of our teaching in ELT through reflection in order to improve, develop and survive our classroom practice. Schön's (1983) text, *The Reflective Practitioner* became a starting point for my initial research focusing on

"What happens in my Diploma One English class?". Through this research I began to understand what it might be to act as a reflective practitioner researcher and how reflective practice might be documented. I was drawn into thinking about reflective practice, how vitally important it had been to work through this model in my initial teaching, and how it continues to be a source of revival to me as I continue to grow as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). My work with novice EFL teachers stirs memories of my early teaching, and I realise how important a part Karen played in the development of my teaching style. I realise also that not everyone is as fortunate to have such a mentor.

Schön's (1983, 1987) reflection-in-action describes the components of Karen's teaching that I could not understand as a novice, her thinking and sorting through the possibilities she saw in the classroom and her decision making as she conducted that lesson. I began to develop my own understanding of the classroom, my own perception of it and my own way of utilising various teaching methods to create communicative and enjoyable lessons for my students. I was learning how to reflect-in-action as an EFL practitioner.

By far the most comprehensive analysis of reflection is found in the work of Schön (1983, 1987). Schön (1983: 56) sees that reflection-in-action tends "to focus interactively on the outcomes of action, the action itself, and in the intuitive knowing implicit in the action". Reflecting-in-action while working in EFL, a practitioner might ask: "What choices are available to me?", to set the range of possibilities for action; "If I make this decision, what might happen?", to consider the outcomes of the action; and "This has worked before, but will it work in this situation?", to consider how previous knowledge and experience might be applied in this new situation. Reflection-in-action is a description of intuitive understanding of how to act as a practitioner (Schön, 1983: 276). When Karen

worked as my mentor in helping me to address my classroom problems, she was teaching me what to look for and how to deal with situations and complex issues I was facing in my EFL teaching. Because each situation I would find myself in was unique, she was not giving me set rules to follow, but guiding me towards developing my own artistry in teaching, prompting me towards what might be important to consider and understand for my work to progress. Ultimately, through teaching me how to deal with the practical situations of uncertainty I faced in my work, she was leading me to develop my awareness of the teaching act and the classroom situation. I was improving my ability to reflect-in-action as I taught EFL.

Over the years, I have begun to view reflective practice as a vital component of any contemporary teacher professional development programme. I have wondered whether teachers would stand a better chance of reaching the students in the schools, if they reflected not only on the technical aspects of teaching but also the broader social issues that are part of the educational environment (Valli, 1992). I felt that the insights I might gain from such a study would allow me to more ably assist teachers in developing their practice.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

During the past decade, there has been increasing interest in the role of reflection in professional development, especially amongst teacher educators. Yet although many in-service programs now place considerable emphasis on encouraging and assisting in-service teachers to reflect on their practice, reflection remains a problematic notion. Concerns expressed by Ecclestone (1996) and Hatton & Smith (1995) are typical. These writers contend that reflection is accorded such a variety of meanings that it is in danger of becoming a meaningless term. As well,

they refer to the difficulties of identifying evidence of reflection and to the paucity of convincing evidence that it can in fact be promoted. Moreover, they point out that there is little evidence to suggest that teachers who do reflect are more effective than teachers who do not. These concerns must be addressed if teacher educators are to validate their current emphasis on reflection. Otherwise, as Tom (1992: viii) warns, reflection is in danger of being seen as merely "another teacher education fad".

On the other hand, proponents of a reflective orientation to professional development claim that an emphasis on reflection encourages and enables developing professionals to take greater responsibility for their professional growth by facilitating their understanding of their practice (Smith, 1997). In particular, they contend that reflection enhances awareness of consistencies and/or inconsistencies between beliefs and actions and alertness to factors influencing decision making, implications of those decisions and possible alternative courses of future action (Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Hadfield & Hayes, 1993). The consequent shift from a predominantly technical perspective on professional development to a more reflective orientation is especially evident in many in-service education programs (Valli, 1992; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1991).

As an educator interested in reform, I undertook this study to better understand reflection in teacher education. My study was also born out of a personal interest in professional development. I wanted to gain further insights into the teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, and in particular, to explore their teaching by systematically reflecting on their daily teaching activities. By learning from and through the practice of reflection, it is my belief that teachers can gain professional growth in pedagogy, which addresses one of Eccelstone's

(1996) and Hatton & Smith's (1995) concerns. I chose an interpretive orientation because I wished to focus on the meanings these teachers attribute to reflection.

1.2 FOCUS OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to examine conceptual orientation of reflection through the eyes of six Arab EFL teachers. The qualitative interpretive study was concerned with how these EFL teachers constructed meanings of reflection and how they believed these meanings inform their practice. Through analysis and interpretation of the data gathered, EFL teachers' views are highlighted, informing the reader of what they know, what they have learnt and how they experience reflective practice during their professional journeys.

The focus of this study was to discover how six Arab EFL teachers practising at the Institutes of Nursing (ION) understood and interpreted reflective practice. Also, my goal was to share the perceptions and experiences of these participants through presentation of their verbal comments and their journal writings. I was a participant observer in this study because I journeyed with the teachers in their professional development over one year, and faithfully recorded my observations of their teaching practice and other events. The study was guided by five main research questions:

i. How do the teachers perceive and understand the concept of reflection?
ii. What methods do these teachers use to describe how they learn to reflect on their practice?
iii. In what contexts do they engage in reflective practice?
iv. What do the teachers reflect upon in their practice?
v. Does my subjectivity evolve throughout the study?

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Hopefully, this study will be significant from two standpoints. First, it will add to research findings concerning reflective practice and contribute to the discussion on its usefulness and its place in teacher education, especially in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Second, it will also offer insights about improvements in professional development at the tertiary Nursing Institute where the study was conducted and it is hoped that it will suggest ways that educators support the growth of teachers.

Much of the research has focused on teacher growth while participating in staff development opportunities that occur outside the classroom. More recently, researchers have looked at what is occurring while teachers are performing in their classroom. Sparks (2000: X) stated, "a significant portion of the staff development that will lead to improved student learning should occur every day on the job among teams of teachers who share responsibility for high levels of learning for all the students represented by the teachers on the team". Rényi (1996: 34-35) also recognised the importance of teachers learning from each other during the day:

> The learning that teachers need from each other is learning that continues throughout the day, the school year, and the career. It is constant improvement of practice based on observation, feedback, reflection, evaluation, and concerted effort to try again with something new.

Along with Rényi, Fullan (1993) also emphasised teacher reflection as being a key component of teacher learning and school improvement in his framework for educational change. Therefore, given the premises from the authors above, guiding teacher practice through engaging in reflection provides a means for changes in institutional practices. Since reflective teaching is a form of staff development, one of the most important factors leading to teacher improvement

and ultimately improved student performance is effective staff development. “Effective organizations recognize that their greatest assets are the individuals within them, and so they make human resource development the linchpin for all improvement efforts” (Dufour & Eaker, 1992: 11).

Very little research has been conducted about how teachers perceive the process of reflection, and how they come to understand themselves as reflective practitioners in the classroom. Rather, most researchers have focused on the actions of the teachers (Caillouet, 1998; Cates-Draper, 1998; Gonzales, 1998; Grumet, 1999), often overlooking their views and considerations. Our understanding of reflection remains insufficient if it fails to explain the lived experiences of central players, in this case, the teachers. Very little research has been carried out in the Gulf countries in general in the area of reflective teaching. “In the context of the UAE, and as far as research studies dealing with teachers’ reflection concern, no such research studies have been reported” (Tairab, 2003: 5). Only two more studies, one by Kabilan and the other by Clarke & Otaky, both conducted in 2004, have been undertaken since then. My aim is to close this gap and contribute to this important area of teacher development.

As a teacher educator deeply committed to teacher education, I subscribe to Zeichner’s (1999) view that research should look at the kinds of reflection that take place in teacher education. Zeichner further suggests that it is imperative to look inside teacher professional development programmes to uncover complexities and provide details from the perspectives of faculty and students. He argues eloquently that this type of research is relevant to teacher educators in any cultural context. I concur with the view that teacher education should be aimed at developing teachers who can clearly identify and articulate their

purposes, and who can be counted on to give good reasons for their actions (Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

Finally, whilst I endeavour to further reflective practice, I present this work in the spirit of Heathcote's (1972: 28) proposal for opening up practice to other practitioners, "allowing one's work to be open to scrutiny knowing it will not be torn apart, but valued for what it did achieve and built on by examination". This research is my endeavour to do this.

1.4 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This study is organised into six chapters. In Chapter One, I outline the choice of topic, my reasons for engaging in this study, the focus and significance and the context of the study. In Chapter Two, I discuss the background and context of the study. In Chapter Three, I present the major theoretical perspectives that I deem important to this study and my personal beliefs. The review of the literature will not be confined only to this chapter; it will also be found in the analysis as well as the discussion of the data. Wolcott (1990) states that in our descriptive and analytical accounts, the literature should be in consort with the new data; therefore, as the analysis is ongoing, so too the relevant literature must be woven into the entire text. In Chapter Four, I provide a detailed account of the methods and data analysis procedures utilised. In Chapter Five, I present the interpretations with the relevant evidence from the literature. Finally, in Chapter Six, I consider the meanings and implications of this study.

Chapter Two

Background of the Study

The UAE has become a modern country with one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. In 2006, it had a population of 4,104,695 of which 78.1 percent were non-UAE nationals (Arab News, 2006). The reason for this unusually large expatriate population is the oil and gas industries which account for the rapid development of the country. As a result of the large expatriate community, most of which come from the Asian sub-continent, English is a common language and therefore the *lingua franca*. The UAE was formed in 1971 and before that, the Emirates that now make up the UAE were known as the Trucial States. Oil was first discovered during the 1930s, but was not exported until the early 1960s when it was discovered in commercial quantities. Subsequently, within the past two decades the UAE has managed to work its way up and now ranks among the fastest developing countries in the world. As a result, income levels are now comparable to those of the industrialized nations of the world. It was the large oil revenues which enabled the UAE to "leap the stages most countries experience as they develop and to reach the stage of high mass consumption, where they are today" (Shihab, 1997: 290, cited in Abed & Hellyer, 2001). Shihab tells how previous to the oil discovery, the economy of the Trucial States depended on subsistence agriculture, nomadic animal husbandry, pearl fishing and seafaring. He also points out that there is a positive relationship between the economic growth of the UAE and education.

2.0 EDUCATION IN THE UAE

Education in the UAE is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MOE) with primary and secondary education provided for free for all UAE citizens. Since the inception of the Ministry of Education in 1971, education has been a priority for the government and its leaders, and state schools are now well established. As of 1973, the allocated budget for education has increased more than twentyfold and now accounts for around 25 percent of total government expenditure. Educational institutes include public and private sector schools, and higher and vocational training institutes. In line with state education, substantial expansion has also taken place in the private school sector, which accounts for 38.2 percent of the total number of students of the UAE and has seen the number of private schools rise from eighteen in 1972 to four hundred in 1997-98 (uaeone.com, 2007: 2).

The statistics are evidence of the development of education in the UAE with numbers of students rising from 43,428 in 1972 to 500,000 by 1996. In 2001-2002, the total number of students was 715,510 (according to the Ministry of National Education Research, Planning and Coordination Board). Education from primary to secondary level is compulsory. Primary education lasts six years, preparatory and secondary education last for 3 years respectively. All subjects are taught in Arabic but English is taught as a second language on a daily basis. Secondary education prepares students for university, technical or vocational training. To ensure delivery of high quality education, all teachers are now required to have a university degree, and pre- and in-service programmes are being redeveloped or introduced to raise the scientific and educational skills and cultural background of teachers. Additionally, the UAE government wants to increase the number of its citizens working as teachers. A target has been set that by the year 2020, 90 percent of teaching staff will be UAE nationals.

In a widespread recognition of the need for change and improvement in UAE classrooms, many tertiary institutions (e.g. Higher Colleges of Technology, Zayed University, United Arab Emirates University) have adopted new approaches towards teacher development. Much of professional development now focuses on developing teachers who regard teaching as a creative, innovative and reflective professional practice.

2.1 ENGLISH IN THE UAE

Through contact with my students, I have come across an important fact about which very little is written but vitally important to the lives and education of Arab females nevertheless. Traditionally, women in Muslim families, especially non-married women, are discouraged and sometimes prevented from any contact with males outside the family. In practice this means that many, though not all by any means, of these students are unable to leave the house without an escort, except to attend their university or college. Since contact with outsiders is strictly forbidden, they are unable to use their English, except to communicate with their servants, most of whom are from the Philippines or from the Asian sub-continent or family members who happen to be studying English. This begs the question of whether the students are learning English as a second (ESL) or foreign (EFL) language. The role of English in this particular cultural context raises some vital issues. Pennycook (1995: 38) argues that the study of English as an international language (EIL) has lacked the "broad range of social, historical, cultural and political relationships" and that "English language teachers, therefore, have been poorly served by the limited analysis of EIL provided by mainstream applied linguistics". However, he acknowledges the importance of English in many educational systems throughout the world, the UAE included. In addition to the issue of the role of English in this society is that of the culture of an educational institute and also the students' previous learning experience. Students receive a minimum of seven years of study at secondary school, yet many are unable to hold the most basic of conversations in English. Al-Sulayti (1999: 274) explains that "there is wide agreement among educational reformers in GCC countries that the content and organization of the traditional school curriculum should be reformed", and that "educational materials should be flexible and relevant

enough to stimulate students to take an active role in the learning process. Routine learning and memorization are no longer adequate teaching strategies in the age of globalization".

Al-Misnad (1985) cites both Sayigh (1978) and Zarrugh (1980) who assert that lessons are neither made interesting nor related to the experience or previous knowledge of the students and that the educational system "concentrates on cramming students memories with information" (Sayigh 1978, in Al-Misnad, 1985: 125). In addition, Guefrachi & Troudi (1997: 1-2) contend that "one of the major problems of the current style of teacher education is that it is not teacher-centered and it relies heavily on the lecturing approach". These language-teaching approaches have resulted in a number of typical learning styles in Middle Eastern countries, with introverted learning being one of them. In the Middle East, most students see knowledge as something to be transmitted by the teacher rather than be sought by the learner. They, therefore, find it natural to integrate in modes of learning in which they merely receive knowledge and quite often fail to interpret it. Tests reward rote memorisation of reading passages or grammar rules and examples. In my own experience, students who have graduated from secondary school only expect to be advised of what pages exactly they should memorise for the exams, rather than appreciate that they will be tested on the application of skills. In speaking, they want to be able to provide the correct answer, rather than be able to communicate effectively. Therefore, students need to be encouraged to speak English in the classroom and teachers must be more tolerant of students' failings.

2.1.1 English Teachers in the UAE

It is well documented that the UAE is not self-sufficient with respect to qualified English teachers. The 2006-07 figures obtained from the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR) database indicate that there are 10,264 expatriate teachers of English. The government has been able to recruit teachers from other countries (e.g. Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Palestine) to fill staffing requirements. This situation is typical in the way in which the UAE fills its labour needs in general, by hiring hundreds of thousands of qualified people from other countries.

Generally speaking, there are more national female than male teachers for traditionally this is a respectable profession for women to go into. "Teaching is considered a good occupation for women as it allows them to work in a single gender environment. In terms of their culture and religion, this is seen as important in terms of marriage and privacy" (McNally et al. 2002: 6).

Through numerous informal discussions with my students (and based on my own observations as a working visitor to the area), I have come to the conclusion that many would not consider teaching as a profession due to their lack of proficiency in the English language. In fact, the government has recently acknowledged "that one of the causes that nationals are not getting gainful employment is their poor grasp of English language" (UAE Interact, 2007: 1). In an attempt to remedy this, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has devised and implemented a new English syllabus in all government schools over the ensuing years. For the MOE who is responsible for selecting and training teachers whilst aiming for high quality teacher training for both pre- and in-service teachers, the ultimate goal is for all teachers to have university degrees and classroom experience prior to starting their career. A great effort and expense are invested in recruiting both locally and abroad. It is intended that the variety of training and

preparation programmes in place will hone the skills of those who are already in the profession.

As part of a new strategy to meet the Vision2020 in education, the emiratisation of teaching staff is scheduled to reach 90 percent by 2020, in order to ensure that the Islamic principles and traditions of the UAE are preserved. Although quite ambitious, in view of the substantial national investment, the goal of having a teaching force that is 90 percent Emirati by 2020 may appear to be unattainable.

2.1.2 Professional Development Opportunities in the UAE

Professional development opportunities have arisen in the UAE in the last decade. As such, the UAE now hosts a number of annual educational conferences of which TESOL Arabia is the event that many English teachers do their best to attend. TESOL Arabia is also a professional development organisation for teachers who use English as a medium of instruction. Members are offered the opportunity to participate in a selection of specialised professional development courses and workshops during the conference and throughout the year.

At the Nursing Institute, English teachers are provided with funding and allowed release time to attend this conference. The majority of the department do take advantage of this. Over a three-day duration, there is ample opportunity to exchange ideas regarding education in the Arab world since many of the conference speakers are based in the UAE and GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council). About two times a year, the Nursing Institute offers continuing-education courses (usually conducted at weekends) for teachers and administrators alike to develop their knowledge and skills to perform more effectively. These courses are general enough to be relevant to both the English and the nursing teachers. As such,

some of the English staff often feel that the training in question is not closely connected to their subject area and often view these courses as uninspiring. The English teachers generally receive the bulk of their professional development through some form of one-shot workshop performed about three times a year. Sometimes, the director conducts these or pedagogues are invited in from other tertiary institutions. Many tertiary institutions (e.g. Higher Colleges of Technology and Zayed University) offer their own on-campus professional development activities open to the public. However, this is carried out during the teachers own time and at their own expense.

2.1 CONTEXT

The Institutes of Nursing, (ION[1]), Ministry of Health, (now The Institute of Applied Technology - IAT), have been in operation for 33 years and comprise five campuses. The mission of the ION is to:

> Prepare a nursing workforce, from UAE and Arab citizens, that is responsive to the actual and potential health needs of the UAE community wherever they reside. The program is committed to the preparation of generalist, Arabic speaking nurses who employ critical thinking skills and the nursing process in meeting the human needs of clients as individuals, families, and communities throughout their life span.
>
> ION Mission Statement (MOH Folio, 1998: ii)

They accept students with a secondary certificate and offer a three-year diploma programme. All entrants have studied English for a minimum of seven years within the school system. On entry to the programme most students have only very basic English skills, yet they are taught all their subjects through the English medium. The year is divided into two semesters of eighteen weeks each. Throughout the semester there are assessments and students need to pass all subjects to progress to the next semester.

Currently, the ION has more than 2,700 students across all campuses. It provides state-of-the-art facilities and excellent services. Some 400 teaching staff and 260 support professionals are employed and all hold a degree (Bachelor of Arts or Master of Arts in Nursing or English).

The English Language Department is a self-contained unit within the ION and specialises in language teaching and learning. It offers various courses (basic level to advanced level) from academic staff who all have either a BA or MA in English and are comprised of a mixture of native speakers of English and native speakers of Arabic. Facilities which include Computer Assisted Language Learning

[1] For the purpose of this study, I shall continue to refer to the establishment where my research was conducted, as the ION.

(CALL) and a large and well equipped academic library help the students to make rapid progress in their language skills.

The English Language Department's primary purpose is to ensure that all nursing students can communicate effectively within the context of their academic programmes and in their future professional lives. First year students (Diploma One) receive 20 hours of intensive general English per week. The lessons focus on everyday English. The wide-ranging syllabus aims at improving all four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Weak students are also offered the opportunity to attend structured study sessions to assist them in reinforcing what they have learnt and in improving the areas where they need most practice by using selected books, online language resources and interactive computer programmes.

Second year students (Diploma Two) undertake 12 hours of English a week. There is a shift from general English to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The syllabus focuses on material for medical students and nurses who want to work in English-speaking environments and is designed to help them communicate accurately with patients and colleagues. Extra emphasis is placed on patient care so nurses can learn and practise what to utter in different situations. There is major focus on speaking and listening which are the key skills in nurse-patient relations. Career-specific grammar, vocabulary and skills practice provide opportunities for students to develop language competence in the nursing field. Also, specialist medical terminology for effective communication with colleagues is a core feature of the curriculum. Diploma Two students attend two clinical days a week. Student achievement for Diplomas One and Two comprises two components:

i. Continuous assessment consisting of high frequency mini-tests/quizzes with one primary focus. Because students receive no advance warning of forthcoming tests, this fosters a learning environment where students have to constantly revise which as a result raises standards. Continuous assessment represents 70% of the pass mark required for promotion to the next level.

ii. Finals (30%) comprising a computer based examination and a writing task. Students must achieve an overall score of 75% or more to proceed to the next level.

Students in their final year attend clinical days three times a week. As such, English classes are now restricted to two hours weekly. The curriculum focuses on TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) preparation and upon exit of Diploma Three, students are expected to score 500+ on the TOEFL test and achieve a score of 5 in the TWE (Test of Written English – the writing component of TOEFL). The curriculum is designed to help students prepare for the three sections (Listening, Structure & Written Expression and Reading) of the TOEFL test by focusing on the academic English skills they need to succeed at an English-speaking university through TOEFL simulation tests, test-taking strategies and personalised structured study. Upon successful completion of their education at the Nursing Institute, students are awarded the degree of Diploma in Nursing which is recognised by the Ministry of Health. The employment outlook for new nurses is excellent which is a credit to the quality of teaching at the ION. Alternatively, students may choose to continue their studies and apply for a bridging-programme affiliated with the University of Sharjah and embark on a Baccalaureate in Nursing.

Chapter Three

Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I explore the major theoretical perspectives that inform this study and then examine the reflective practice approach and all its diverse parts that form the basis for the study.

3.0 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES – SYMBOLIC INTERACTION

I have been influenced particularly by symbolic interaction, a theoretical and methodological framework that is favoured for studying lived experiences (Blumer 1969; Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Prus 1996). Symbolic interaction is said to be the study of the ways in which people rationalise their life situations and the ways they interact with others, on a day-to-day basis. In order to discern and explicate their actions we must interpret their meanings (Manis & Meltzer, 1978). Prus (1996) extends this argument by stating that by inquiring into the experiences of others, researchers may learn a great deal of the life-worlds of the people they study.

George Herbert Mead (1934) laid the foundation for the symbolic interactionist perspective. For four decades, he formulated and developed this theory. He defined his approach as social behaviourism, and referred to the description of behaviour at the distinctly human level. One of his major works, *Mind, Self and Society* (1934) served to concretise his perspectives that were generally philosophical. One of the major shortcomings of symbolic interactionism is the diversity of viewpoints within this perspective. However, Herbert Blumer (1925) became a foremost spokesman who elaborated a strong

view of human and group activity. Blumer established himself as the spokesman for Mead's symbolic interactionism (Meltzer et al., 1975).

3.0.1 General Propositions of Symbolic Interactionism

My interest in viewing the participants' construction of meaning steered me to symbolic interaction. This theory deals with issues such as language, communication and interrelationships (Merriam, 1998). Symbolic interaction also perpetuates the notion of being able to put oneself in the place of others. I do believe that the symbolic interaction theoretical framework well suits the interpretive nature of this study that is centrally concerned with the meanings that the teachers construct. Nash (2000) contends that history and meaning are specific to a community and must be considered in studying a particular context. Manis & Meltzer (1978) put forward three propositions that summarise the fundamental features of symbolic interactionism which form the framework for this present study.

The first basic proposition of symbolic interaction is that human behaviour and interaction are carried on through a medium of symbols and their meanings. First, individuals bring meaning to their behaviour and then these meanings to stimuli, and finally they act on the basis of those meanings. These meanings are always socially derived from interaction with others. Symbolic interactionists recognise that individuals act and interact within networks of individuals and groups that have an impact on them.

The second proposition is that human beings are active in shaping their own behaviour. Symbolic interactionists allow humans some degree of choice in their behaviour. They can select and interpret stimuli and have the ability to interact within themselves (to engage in thought). Humans are capable of forming new meanings and new lines of action. This does not mean that human beings are not affected by different influences, but they can modify these influences to some extent by creating and changing their own behaviour. Not only

are individuals not seen as passive, but they can also engage in interactions that may result in behaviour that is different from that of the group. This way of thinking brings to mind existentialism which postulates that everyone is responsible for the results of their own actions (Sartre, 1946).

The final proposition has major methodological implications, and suggests that to understand human conduct requires study of the actors' covert behaviour. If human beings act on the basis of their interpretation or meanings, it is essential to have a clear idea of the actors' meanings in order to understand and explain their conduct (Manis & Meltzer, 1978). Mead (1934), a proponent of symbolic interaction, agreed that the study of unobservable human behaviour was necessary to understand the distinctive character of human conduct. He argued that simple observation of behaviour will not provide an understanding of the actors' view of their social worlds and hence an understanding of their conduct. The use of procedures allowing sympathetic introspection is a part of the methodology of most symbolic interactionists (Manis & Meltzer, 1978).

This study actively applies these propositions as a conceptual framework for understanding the meanings that the teachers attach to their perceptions and conduct, as they elucidate the reflective practice approach. In this study, the teachers' voices are the main vehicles through which their meanings are interpreted. By considering the propositions, I investigate how the teachers learn to become reflective practitioners. A symbolic interaction framework gives a clearer understanding of how the teachers interpret what they have acquired with respect to reflection, and how they use it to inform their practice.

3.1 REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

As I embarked on my research bursting with eagerness to determine how the teachers understood and practised reflection, I was drawn to the theoretical perspectives of Dewey (1933), Schön (1983, 1987) and van Manen (1977). I explored the teachers' understandings and experiences against the backdrop of these theoretical underpinnings. Quite a few written works and studies on reflective practice hinge on these seminal works.

Dewey (1933) was the first to introduce the concept of reflection; he considered it to be an active and deliberative cognitive process that involves sequences of interconnected ideas that take into account underlying beliefs and knowledge (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Dewey started the premise that teachers should be encouraged to become thoughtful and alert students of education, and argued that teachers should continue to grow in reflection (Dewey, 1910). He advocated learning by doing:

> Recognition of the natural course of development... always sets out with situations which involve learning by doing. Arts and occupations form the initial stage of the curriculum, corresponding as they do to knowing how to go about the accomplishment of ends.
>
> (Dewey, 1974: 364)

Dewey advocated the cultivation of three attitudes: open-mindedness, whole-heartedness and responsibility and referred to open-mindedness as "an active desire to listen to more sides than one; to give heed to the facts from whatever source they come; to err in the beliefs that are dearest to us" (1974: 29). Such open-mindedness is accompanied by a sense of convergent attention or whole-heartedness (Dewey, 1933). Responsibility he viewed as being a deliberate consideration of the consequences of actions. The "believing and the doubting game" (Elbow, 1986: 254) is closely intertwined with these attitudes and the need to scrutinise our certainty to significantly improve our understanding.

Schön (1983, 1987) expanded upon Dewey's notion of reflection. He suggested that professionals should frame and reframe the complex problems that they face, and modify their actions accordingly. He argued that the truly reflective practitioner must augment technical expertise with personal insights and artistry and referred to professional artistry as "the kinds of competence that practitioners sometimes display in unique, uncertain and conflicted situations of practice" (Schön, 1987: 22). Schön introduced the concepts of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-on-action implies looking back upon action some time after it has taken place. Reflection-in-action involves simultaneously reflecting and doing; this implies that the professional has reached a level of competence, where he or she is able to think consciously about what is taking place, and modify actions instantaneously (Hatton & Smith, 1995).

van Manen (1977) offered three levels of reflection in teaching: the technical, the practical and critical level of reflection. The technical level of reflection takes into consideration the efficiency and effectiveness of means to achieve certain ends which are not open to criticism or modification (Hatton & Smith, 1995). van Manen calls the second level practical reflection (some have termed it interpretive reflection), where the practitioner examines the means and also the goals, the assumptions upon which these goals are based, and the actual outcomes. The third level, critical reflection, encompasses the first two levels but more importantly, considers moral and ethical criteria (Gore & Zeichner, 1991). Professionals are called upon to make ethical judgments that are based on justice and respect for persons (Hatton & Smith, 1995). When a professional operates at the critical level, he or she analyzes personal action within a wider socio-historical and political-cultural context (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

Many in the teacher education community advise that the reflective practice framework for teacher education considers the cognitive, social and moral implications of teaching (Valli, 1993). Some writers claim that there is a dramatic shift in attention in teacher education programmes that use the reflective practice approach. Smyth (1989) contended that whereas from the perspective of social efficiency, scientific knowledge held a superior position within reflective practice, artistic and intuitive knowledge are also important. Proponents cite many benefits of reflective approaches to teacher education. Some see it as the vehicle for getting the new cadre of teachers involved as active partners in school renewal (Valli, 1992; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Reflection, they say, helps teachers understand and control their own teaching and learning (Zeichner & Liston, 1987), and it moulds the teacher into a decision-maker, who can help to define the direction of schooling (Valli, 1992).

A great deal of research has been devoted to the conceptual analyses of this popular slogan 'reflective teaching' in teacher education (Zeichner, 1999). Various researchers have addressed different concepts of reflective practice. Most studies have so far focused on the conditions that promote reflective practice (Cady et al., 1998; Dinkleman, 1997; Golubich, 1997; Sax, 1999) and the use of reflection journals (Caillouet, 1998; Cates-Draper, 1998; Grumet, 1999; Schell, 1998) as a principal way to foster reflection. Other researchers have looked at the context of reflection (Scully, 1997; Wang Li, 1998) and collegial reflection (Gonzales, 1998; Meyer, 1999). Research has also focused on aspects of reflective practice that are relevant to its technical as well as its social aspects (Valli, 1993).

3.1.1 Definitions and Conceptions of Reflective Practice

Not only has the considerable body of research into reflective practice led me to an educational puzzlement, it has also led me to a dilemma of what reflection is in teacher education. The term reflection has been interpreted in a number of ways and takes on different meanings and conceptions. Reflection, critical reflection, reflective practice and reflective inquiry have all been used interchangeably to delineate the same concept. Nevertheless, there is general agreement in the literature that reflection in teacher education is a special form of thought (McNamara, 1990; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). Dewey (1933: 17) reasoned that reflection always precedes intelligent action:

> Reflective thought is valuable for it emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity. It enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan according to ends in view, or purposes of which we are aware…it converts action that is merely appetitive, blind and impulsive to intelligent action.

Historically, Dewey (1933) referred to reflective practice as intelligent action and called it reflective teaching. He defined reflection as the act of active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed forms of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the consequence to which it leads and added that it involved open-mindedness, wholeheartedness and responsibility. Hence, Dewey (1916) put forward that reflection was important in the change processes of teaching through the reconstruction or the reorganisation of experiences. He maintained that teachers should investigate their practice through inquiry. Dewey asserted that all human experience is ultimately social and involves contact and communication and urged teachers to work together to enhance this process of inquiry and to actively explore the nature of the problem. In speaking about reflection, Dewey (1933) encouraged implementation of solutions after the problem had been thought over. Other researchers also agree

with the cycle of thinking and doing and thinking again and then modifying action (Noffet & Brennan, 1988).

Schön (1987), another proponent of reflective practice, expanded upon Dewey's concept of reflection. Like Dewey, he clearly linked reflection to action and suggested that the reflective perspective values the teacher's knowledge, which is situation and is considered knowledge in action (Schön, 1991). Also, he stated that reflection is purposeful, systematic inquiry into practice. Schön (1983) described reflection as central to growth and development within all professions. He argued that professional problems are complex, often devoid of easy answers and unique to each situation. Schön (1983) concluded that the teacher's own knowledge is critical to the problem-solving process. He stressed making reasoned judgements from a rational and moral perspective (Hatton & Smith, 1995).

Schön (1983, 1987) emphasised the context and time in which reflection takes place. His concepts of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action clearly defined the time frames within which both occur. These are the responses that skilful practitioners bring to their practice, when they frame situations encountered in their day to day experiences. Schön's reflection-in-action indicates reflection while action is taking place and modifying this action instantaneously. It has also been argued that there is reflection on action then modified action is contemplated for the future (Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Smith & Lovat, 1991).

Just as there are varying definitions of reflection in teacher education, so too there are different conceptions of reflective practice adding to great confusion in the field. Therefore, for the purpose of my research, I have defined reflection to be transpiring when a teacher seeks answers to the following questions: What

am I doing in the classroom? *(method)*; Why am I doing this? *(reason)*; Will I modify anything based on the information gathered from answering the first two questions? *(action)*.

3.1.2 Emergence of Reflection in Teacher Education

Reflective practice theory is said to have developed from the teaching tradition of the 1960s and 1970s (Piaget, 1967). This tradition assumed that the natural order of the development of the learner provided the basis for determining what should be taught to students (Zeichner, 1993). As it evolved into a more child-centered movement, it became grounded in a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. Constructivism is a descriptive theory of learning that points to the individual's active construction of knowledge and meaning, or the mental structures that the individual develops in, or derives from his or her learning environment (Bussis et al., 1985). According to Vygotsky (1978), the development of cognitive forms occurs by means of a dialectical relationship between the individual and the social context. Constructivism provides a compelling explanatory framework for understanding the way human beings acquire knowledge, and it implies that people create it from the interaction between their existing knowledge, the new ideas and situations they encounter.

The reflective practice approach also draws on the social reconstructionist tradition of teacher education. Zeichner & Liston (1987) argue that the social reconstructionist tradition is a movement in education that views schooling and teaching as crucial elements in a wider social movement toward a just and humane society. In this tradition, teachers are expected to think critically about the social order and use reflection to address moral and social aspects of teaching along with technical aspects. They are expected to consider the contexts in which

they work and social and political implications of their actions. In addition, they are expected to change the world by first changing their own experience.

The reflective practice approach enjoyed a revival in the 1990s with the breakdown in consensus in the field of education that the technical-rational model of teacher preparation was the most suited approach to teacher preparation. However, many educators and researchers argued that this approach failed to generate a substantial and significant body of findings to guide the preparation of teachers (Tom, 1990; Valli, 1992). Researchers also challenged the process/product research approach that fuelled teacher education. They disagreed with the way knowledge was broken down into small discrete elements independent of goals and context within much of the preparation of teachers. Critics claim that the technical-rational model of teacher preparation is an inadequate way to explain and guide teaching. "Prospective teachers will not be prepared for this type of practice if they have merely learned to transfer findings from effective teaching research to their practice" (Valli; 1992: xiv). Continued research in teacher education indicates that there is a steady move towards programmes that do promote reflection and reflective practice.

Another influence of reflective practice is the increased dominance of cognitive over behavioural psychology. Cognitive psychology has provided fertile ground for explorations into teachers' thinking, problem solving and reflexivity. Valli (1992) investigated the increased interest in cognitive aspects of teachers' planning and decision making. She also emphasised the interest in the moral bases of education, a move to teacher empowerment, an increasing voice from multiculturists, feminists and critical theorists, and a greater acceptance of ethnographic inquiry and action research. Zeichner & Liston (1987) contend that all the traditions of teacher education exhibit a variation of the concept of

reflective practice from different perspectives ranging from the technical to social aspects of teaching. Tabachnick & Zeichner (1991) expanded upon this framework and proposed several versions of reflective practice in the different traditions. These versions of reflective practice are: (a) the academic version that stresses reflection on subject matter and the representation and translation of subject matter knowledge to promote student understanding, (b) the social efficiency version that emphasises either the mechanical or thoughtful application of particular teaching strategies that have been suggested by research, (c) the developmentalist version that prioritises teaching that is sensitive to students interests, thinking and patterns of developmental growth, and (d) the social reconstructionist version that stresses reflection about the institutional, social and political contexts of schooling and the assessment of classroom action for their ability to contribute towards greater equality, justice and humane conditions in schooling and society. Zeichner (1992) also identified a fifth version of reflective practice, a generic version of reflection without much specificity about the desired purpose and content of reflection.

3.1.3 Reflective Practice in Contemporary Teacher Education

There was a surge of interest in reflective practice in the late 1980s. The literature is replete with examples of reflective practice as a reform effort (Doyle, 1990; Kennedy, 1991; Tom, 1992; Valli, 1992; Zeichner, 1983). Tom (1992) attributed this interest in reflective practice to three factors. He reasoned that many observers of the current scene believed that reflective practice was just a fad. According to his view, teacher educators were simply attracted to reflective teacher education either because it was popular or because of external pressures put on by the requirements of the accreditation agencies (Tom, 1992). He

believed that teachers were in the midst of a revolution in the way they perceived the nature of teaching and teacher education (Valli, 1992).

Many teacher education programmes have embedded inquiry into their approach to reflective practice. However, these programmes differ largely because of the various definitions of reflection, methods of implementation, time involved and faculty autonomy and responsibility (Tom, 1992). There is agreement in teacher education that the overall goal of reflection is the broadening and deepening of pre-service teachers' thinking about teaching and learning (Posner, 1996). It can safely be said that teacher educators have responded to the call for reform by identifying a goal of preparing reflective teachers, as "there is not a single teacher educator who would say that he or she is not concerned about preparing teachers who are reflective" (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991: 1).

3.1.4 Reflective Practice Frameworks

Calderhead (1989) provided a comparative analysis of the various theoretical influences on the different visions of reflective teacher education. He discussed Dewey's (1933) conception of reflection, Schön's (1983, 1987) ideas about the reflective practitioner, Schwab's (1973) concept of teaching as a deliberative practice and Habermas's (1974) notion of reflection as an element of emancipatory action. Calderhead (1989) concluded that concepts of reflective teaching employed in teacher education moved along five dimensions: (a) the process of reflection, (b) the content of reflection, (c) the preconditions of reflection, (d) the tutorial context in which reflection occurs, and (e) the products of reflection. Grimmet et al. (1990) proposed a similar theoretical framework of reflection and presented three major conceptual orientations to reflective practice based on differences in the content, process and purpose. These theories suggest that reflective practice can be approached differently and since it is a skill that is learned, teachers should become adept over time.

To add more controversy to the whole of the reflective practice orientation, there has been much discussion in the literature as to whether the reflective practice approach is a separate paradigm (Doyle, 1990; Kennedy, 1989; Zeichner, 1986). Zeichner (1986) proposed the inquiry oriented paradigm as the basis for reflective practice. He suggested that the teachers who work within a social reconstructionist paradigm (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), act upon ethical and political as well as pedagogical issues in their everyday practice. The conceptual orientation of the current study is one of social reconstructionism. The in-service teachers in this study were actively encouraged to engage in inquiry and reflective thinking.

Kennedy (1989) contributed the reflective practitioners' model as one of her two conceptions of good teaching and teacher education. She believed that reflective practitioners have a thoughtful sense of teaching within their contexts and must ultimately make choices about preferred goals and practices. Teachers who are reflective practitioners construct working knowledge out of frames of reference and alternative viewpoints. She further states that teachers use their working experience, which includes a combination of personal experience, theory, research, values and beliefs, to critically analyse and continually improve their teaching.

Doyle (1990) also proposed the reflective professional as his contribution to the reflective practice paradigm. He argued that the knowledge bases for reflective professionals include: (a) personal knowledge that the teachers bring with them to the classroom, (b) craft knowledge of skilled practitioners and, (c) proportional knowledge from the classroom, based on their knowledge, skills and attitudes. Although there are variations in the ways they launch the orientations, these researchers all view reflection or inquiry as a distinct model of teacher education, one essentially different from technocratic/behaviouristic models.

3.1.5 Conditions that Promote Reflection

Research has focused on the nature and impact of teacher preparation programmes that utilise reflective practice. A study by Richert (1990) looked at the conditions that influence the reflective capabilities of teachers through (a) journal writing, (b) portfolio-inspired reflection essays, (c) conversation with peers, and (d) conversation with teachers and peers. It looked systematically at these four different teacher education mediums designed to promote reflective practice, in order to understand the relationship between programme processes and

teacher reflection. The researcher analysed teachers' perceptions about the four structures, and how they affected teachers' abilities to think about their work. The results of this study pointed to the conditions that promoted or fostered reflection for the teachers: a structured opportunity to cogitate, reflecting with colleagues and variety in the types of structured opportunities, all emerged as important elements (Richert, 1990).

Dinkleman (1998) investigated an attempt to promote critically reflective teaching in Secondary Social Studies with three pre-service teachers as they progressed through a programme's final two semesters. The purpose of this study was to discover if the pre-service teachers deliberated on ethical and moral dimensions of teaching and if their practices were informed by these deliberations. The results of the study suggested that the participants evidenced critical reflection throughout the two semesters. Instances of critical reflective teaching also were apparent, though limited. The researcher concluded that in-service teachers influence pre-service teachers to develop into more critically reflective beings.

Sax (1999) examined the reflective practice in a teacher education programme. The study identified students' experiences of reflective practice. The researcher investigated how student teachers chose reflective practice as one of four choices that included diversity, collaboration, reflective practice and technology. She also looked at how these choices evolved over time. The research findings indicate that infusing strategic choices into the coursework of a professional education programme helps to encourage students to challenge their own beliefs and clarify their own values. The researcher also found that the use of a cohort structure and seminar class facilitated the creation and maintenance of a learning community and coordinating the goals and activities of the

coursework and internship experiences helped to reinforce effective models for teaching and learning (Sax, 1999).

3.1.6 Growth in Reflective Thinking

Some research focuses on growth in reflection. A study by Cates-Draper (1998) investigated perceived reflections of six elementary pre-service teachers during a final internship that included a weekly seminar. The researcher studied the participants' growth over time and their perceptions of that growth. She examined their preference for strategies to promote reflection and the mode of reflection. The methods used in this particular study were journal writing, responses to videotaped lessons, reflective engagement in focus groups and participation in hands-on and seminar activities. This study established that teachers do reflect, and reflections are based on classroom dilemmas and experiences. Although the strategies employed in this study developed reflection more through talking than writing, it demonstrated that teachers do grow into reflective professionals over time.

Caillouet (1998) conducted a study that focused on growth in reflective practice and used the voices of pre-service teachers. The study looked at the professional and personal experiences of three pre-service teachers and two first-year teachers. The researcher established four facts through these novice teachers' voices which were: (a) reflection requires initiation at the pre-service stage to ensure integration into the classroom, (b) effectiveness is defined by approved practices of respected supervisors, (c) reflection in practice is a difficult concept to internalise as it requires the experience and confidence of purposeful continuous practice, and (d) professionalisation is dependent on school placement and influenced by its culture. The researcher concluded that the voices of these

teachers could provide insight into tools for success and impact on pre-service training and in-service teaching.

Tairab (2003) investigated pre-service primary school teachers' reflection, and focused on how reflection could be facilitated during the teaching practice period to promote student teacher professional growth through an interpretive paradigm using Schön's (1987) model. His findings indicated that reflection was facilitated by time, opportunities and support available during teaching practicum.

3.1.7 Benefits of Reflective Practice

Reflection has been put forth as an important concept in teacher preparation with sound theoretical foundation in education. There is a great deal of consensus by researchers as to the value of practising reflection. Shulman (1987) and Richardson (1990) contend that reflective practice models are in keeping with the holistic way in which teachers actually think and act in the classroom. Thus, they have more intuitive credibility suggesting that integrating reflective practice models in teacher education is one way to develop better teaching.

Calderhead (1993) and Vacca, Vacca & Bruneau (1997) explored the nature of reflective practice. They ascertained that reflective teaching encourages teachers to analyse, discuss and evaluate practice, all of which lead to professional development. Teachers, through reflection, can and do become aware of their intuitive knowledge and engage in problem-solving that strengthens teaching ability (Vacca, Vacca & Bruneau, 1997), and promotes professional growth.

Reflective practice positively affects professional growth and development by leading to a sense of greater self-awareness. New insights are provided with

constant reflective practice, which can further enhance a greater understanding of challenges encountered by professionals (Osterman, 1993). Valli (1993) supports the view that teachers could be reflective, while being technically prepared. This results in practical decision making. She further states that teachers adapt and modify their skills in response to students' needs and curriculum goals and exercise professional judgement (Valli, 1993). Exposure to reflective approaches in teacher preparation can lead teachers to liberating educational experiences in the journey to self-reflection and reflection on their teaching practices.

Zeichner (1999) advises that there is need to present current reform efforts in teacher preparation that demonstrate the usefulness of reflective practice in training beginning or novice teachers. Research suggests that novice teachers can reflect and can be helped to learn the value of reflection in teaching and learning (Rudney & Guillaume, 1990; Pultorack, 1993, 1996) which accelerates professional growth. Therefore, pre-service teachers must be taught how to reflect, and the theme of teachers as reflective practitioners should be pursued vigorously in teacher preparation programmes, but additional resources and much patience and trust are required to get started (Wildman & Niles, 1987). Many programmes, though they have different conceptual and ideological bases, endorse the goal of encouraging reflective approaches. However, whichever way reflection is apprehended, the problem remains of whether or not its development can be fostered in intending professionals through programmes of pre-service preparation.

3.2 REFLECTION IN THE UAE

Despite the importance and relevance of teacher reflection and its practical implications for Arab educators, few quantitative or qualitative studies exist in the Gulf region involving Arab subjects in their home environment and so far, reflection in the Arabian Gulf has not received the attention it thoroughly deserves. Very little has been published on the subject and studies that focus on practical issues are few and far between. As Tairab (2003: 5) rightly points out, "In the context of the UAE, and as far as research studies dealing with teachers' reflection concern, no such research studies have been reported". It is hoped that my own research will spur plenty of similar projects in the years to come.

However, three studies that advance the cause of reflection are those of Tairab (2002), Kabilan (2005) and Clarke & Otaky (2006). Tairab's (2002) study was conducted in Malaysia and lasted 13 weeks. It focused on pre-service teachers' reflection and how it can be facilitated during teaching practice. It also explored ways to enhance professional growth through reflection. Based on Schön's (1987) framing and reframing, the study establishes that reflection which is characterised by the nature of framing and reframing, is facilitated by time, opportunities and support available to pre-service teachers. Tairab's (2002) findings are similar to mine as the teachers consistently demonstrated the ability to acquire new perspectives to view everyday teaching practices through framing and re-framing.

A comparable study by Kabilan (2004-05) duration-wise, the subjects of which a mixture of pre- and in-service teachers, concentrates on the practice of reflecting on reflections by English language teachers. The findings are presented in the students' own voices and classified under five themes: pedagogy, classroom practices, linguistic ability, collegiality and creative and critical

thinking. Similarly, the results of my own study confirm the positive influence of reflection as a pedagogical tool to guide the teachers' reflection on teaching.

A longitudinal study by Clarke & Otaky (2006) adopts a completely different format for it is based on focus groups, WebCT (communication tool and content management system) discussions and students' journals. It was conducted in response to Richardson's (2004) article which stated categorically that reflective practice is incompatible with the values of "Arab Islamic" culture and therefore not a suitable method to adopt in teacher education in the UAE. Clarke & Otaky's (2006) article summarises the findings of the two-year long study which establishes that Richardson's (2004) claim is totally unfounded and concludes that reflective practice is part of students' identity construction. Evidence from my study corroborates Clark & Otaky's (2006) claim that reflection is indeed ingrained in all six Arab participants.

With regard to reflection in the UAE which is now an integral part of teacher training, so far it has been limited to pre-service programmes. Given the cultural background of the UAE and its Bedouin traditions, it had been assumed quite wrongly that reflection would be conspicuously absent from UAE state schools Richardson (2004). This has not turned out to be true as the study by Clarke & Otaky (2006) tangibly demonstrates. If reflection is undeniably a feature of pre-service teaching, sadly, this does not extend to in-service teaching where very little research has been carried out. This situation needs to be remedied urgently if Vision2020 is to reach the highly ambitious targets it has established. The present study is an effort to ascertain how in-service teachers understand and practise reflection in their day-to-day teaching. I believe that the more that teacher educators can find about how in-service teachers view reflection through their interpretations, the better we are able to determine the types of teacher

reflection that are useful to achieve particular aims. Dewey (1933) emphasised that reflective thought is initiated by uncertainty and guided by one's conception of a goal or end print. He suggested that the development of reflection involved acquiring certain attitudes like open-mindedness and skills of thinking (Calderhead, 1989). The context for such qualities to be cultivated is important and existing research on teachers' professional learning holds promise for informing teacher educators' concept of reflective practice (Calderhead, 1989; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

3.3 FINAL THOUGHTS

Reflecting on theory, practice, reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and the types of thinking a practitioner engages in during moments of practice, I find that I am in agreement with Dewey's (1929: 13) quote, "Familiarity breeds a sense of equality if not contempt. We deem ourselves on a par with things we daily administer". Schön (1987) suggests that when a practitioner researches their own practice they begin to engage in a spiralling process of continual self-education – de-familiarising the familiar, making the ordinary extraordinary and finding new perspectives from which to view everyday life. This echoes strongly with what I have uncovered through my research.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The following discussion outlines the methodological decisions concerning the study. I explain the reasons why I chose a qualitative, interpretive study, and the philosophical assumptions underlying such a research, the research design I used, including the role of the researcher and the selection of strategies for gathering, analysing and presenting the data.

The current study falls under the broad umbrella of qualitative research. For Holliday (2007: 1), it "is seen as a social activity which is as ideological and complex as those it studies". Qualitative research focuses on understanding the meanings of people's experiences. It literally 'tells the story' from the participant's viewpoint. It is a form of inquiry which excels at generating information that is very detailed by using multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to the social phenomena in their natural setting. It also takes into account the role of the researcher as being "the researcher's constructions of other people's constructions of what they are up to" (Geertz, 1993: 9). It is the intention of this researcher to clearly represent her personal constructions in undertaking a qualitative research. The qualitative design is said to be naturalistic, interpretive and grounded on multiple methods of inquiry (Denzin et al., 2005).

Radnor (2002) outlines many terms that are used interchangeably to describe the types of qualitative research in the field. Some of the terms used include naturalistic inquiry, inductive research, interpretive research, case study and ethnography. I have chosen an interpretive approach because of the nature

of my inquiry. An approach within the interpretive paradigm typically tries to apprehend the social world as it is from the perspective of individual experience, and the focus shifts from the positivist notion to an interest in subjective world views**.** "The purpose of interpretive research is to clarify how interpretations and understandings are formulated, implemented and given meaning in lived situations" (Radnor, 2002: 4). An interpretive approach, a form of inquiry that includes description, interpretation and understanding (Radnor, 2002; Merriam, 1998), enables the researcher to comprehend the meaning that teachers construct of the concept of reflective practice as related to their experiences in their daily teaching.

Symbolic interaction is one of the interpretive traditions in which qualitative research has been grounded because of the basic propositions that this theory offers to the study of lived experience. Many writers have traced the philosophical roots of qualitative research to phenomenology and symbolic interaction (Radnor, 2002). Symbolic interaction which was developed explicitly by George Herbert Mead (1934) and expanded upon by Herbert Blumer (1969) is envisioned as "the study of the ways in which people make sense of their life situations and the ways in which they go about their activities, in conjunction with others" (Prus, 1996: 23). It takes into account lived experiences as interpreted by the individuals who interact with others in their social world. These individuals continually make sense of their interactions with others. I embraced the theoretical and methodological principles of symbolic interaction to examine the views and experiences of the participants in this study. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework I used to situate the research that I undertook to study the teachers' understanding and experiences of reflective practice.

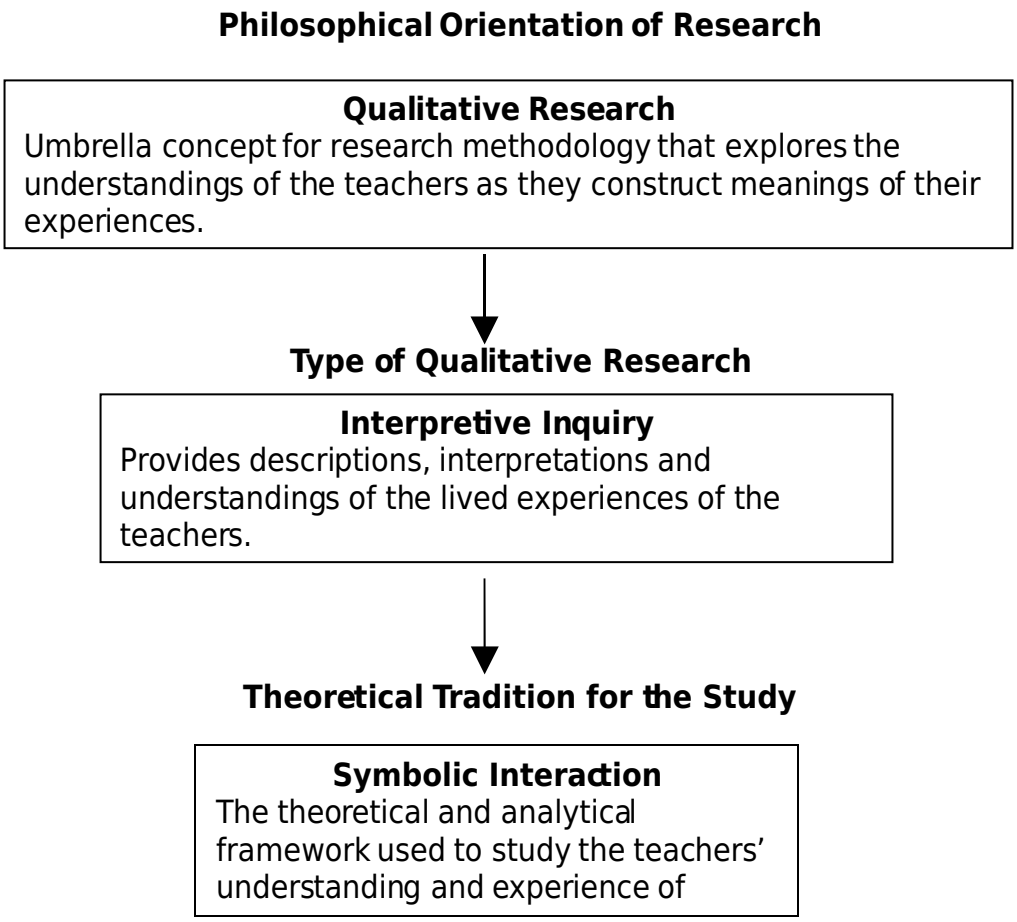

Figure 1 – A conceptual framework

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was designed to shed light on how teachers understand and practise reflection in their daily teaching. The use of qualitative research was the perfect tool to uncover the processes and meanings of the participants in this study. The role of the qualitative researcher is to find out how the people being studied understand their world (Delamont, 1992). In using an exploratory design, I examined the perception and experiences of teachers to determine how the elements of reflective practice work in their experience.

My research was guided by the following questions:

i. How do the teachers perceive and understand the concept of reflection?
ii. What methods do these teachers use to describe how they learn to reflect on their practice?
iii. In what contexts do they engage in reflective practice?
iv. What do the teachers reflect upon in their practice?
v. Does my subjectivity evolve throughout the study?

The understanding of how the participants in this study make sense of reflection is an important end in itself (Merriam, 1998). In this study I strive to portray the close-up reality through "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1993) of participants' lived experiences of their thoughts and feelings about a situation. The evidence presented in this study is supported by theoretical statements whenever possible (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Throughout this study, I was the only instrument for data collection and analysis. To be in total control and to be a true interpretive researcher, I had to be the only instrument. The human instrument can process data, clarify and summarise as the study evolves and can explore anomalous responses. The researcher can also maximise the opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information as he/she responds to unforeseen circumstances that may arise. "The researcher sorts and analyses the data, recognizing that although there are tools to assist her in the process, it is the researcher that is constantly, at each stage, making sense of things and decisions about the next steps" (Radnor, 2002: 31). Also, Radnor (2002: 31) quite rightly states that, "taking

responsibility for the work from inception to fruition is the hallmark of the interpretive researcher".

My goal was to provide an in-depth picture of the six Arab EFL teachers' understanding of reflection. By selecting a symbolic interaction theoretical and methodological approach to present, analyse and interpret the data, I wish to bring out the essence and details of the topic being studied. The focus is on the participants' meanings and I aspire to present the best possible and most compelling interpretation (Bromley, 1986). A symbolic interaction analytical framework allows rich and vivid descriptions of the events relevant to the subjects being studied. It blends the description of events with the analysis of them as it focuses on a group of six teachers, and seeks to comprehend their perceptions of events, and to highlight specific experiences that are relevant to reflective practice. Finally, the researcher is integrally involved in the study (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

4.1.1 Symbolic Interaction Analytical Framework

I have chosen the symbolic interaction theoretical viewpoints of Blumer (1969), Denzin (1978) and Prus (1996) to inform the analytical framework I used to unearth the meanings that the teachers associate with reflection and reflective practice. Blumer (1969) acknowledged that if a researcher wants to understand the actions of others, it is necessary to see the objects as *they* see them. He contends that people act towards things on the basis of the meaning these things have for them. Blumer (1969) presented four central conceptions that have implications for the way in which social action is studied:

i. people individually and collectively are prepared to act on the basis of the meanings of the objects that comprise their world;

ii. the association of people is necessarily in the form of a process in which they are making indications to one another and interpreting each other's indications;
iii. social acts, whether individual or collective, are constructed through a process in which the actors note, interpret and assess the situations confronting them;
iv. the complex inter-linkages of acts that comprise organisation, institutions, divisions of labour and networks of interdependency are moving and not static affairs.

Blumer (1969) suggests an exploratory framework to develop and fill out as comprehensive and accurate a picture of the area of study as conditions allow. It is a means of broadening and sharpening the inquiry that the researcher is engaged in (Blumer, 1969). The picture provides the researcher with a secure bearing so that the questions asked are meaningful and relevant to that which is under study, so that the problem posed is not artificial, and so that the kinds of data collected will be significant in terms of the empirical world. Symbolic interaction theory also suggests that it is important to listen to the views of the individuals under study. Denzin (1978) puts forward a symbolic interaction approach that encompasses the historical and organisational contexts that I have adopted in this study:

i. To capture the reflective nature of the participants as mirrored in their ongoing patterns of behaviour;
ii. To link the participants' symbols and conceptions of self with the social circles and relationships that furnished them with those symbols and

conceptions since it is essential to examine the social structure of the group;

iii. To ask questions in terms of situations that the participants typically engaged in the behaviours under study who were symbolically placed within the contexts and permitted a designation and description of relevant activities.

The methodological tools provided by Denzin (1978), and the social processes outlined by Prus (1996) were applied to construct an analytical framework in which the data that I collected was organised. I felt that this framework would be best suited to examining the historical as well as the social structures pertinent to the study, whilst presenting the views of the participants as they shared their lived experiences within each social process.

4.2 SITE SELECTION

In qualitative research, in addition to the selection of time, people and events, selecting a site for investigation is essential. Two vital ingredients that can help the researcher determine if an investigation is possible are having knowledge of setting and gaining accessibility to the site (DeMarrais, 1998). I chose the context for this research at a time when I was working as an EFL tutor in the Nursing Institute and was able to recruit the ION's EFL teachers to assist me with my enterprise. I felt that being a member of staff where the study was taking place could prove to be helpful (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) and would, in my opinion, enrich my research. My own role as enquirer was included within the research focus and tacit (intuitive or felt) knowledge was considered legitimate in addition to other types of knowledge. This approach also provided me with the opportunity to acquaint myself with the teachers' conditions, thoughts, feelings, actions, intentions and environment. On the other hand, this advantage (my familiarity with the sample) might possibly have interfered with my maintaining a high degree of objectivity. Therefore, I downplayed my role in order to be as objective as possible.

4.3 SELECTION OF SAMPLE

The six participants chosen for this study came from a population of fourteen EFL teachers. These teachers were purposely selected to reflect differences in age, qualifications, teaching experience, and level(s) taught. Basing my study on non-native EFL teachers stems from three facts. The body of literature devoted to non-native EFL teachers does not reflect the fact that they actually outnumber native EFL teachers (Liu, 1999). As Braine (1999: preface, ix) indicates:

> Although English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literature is awash with, in fact dependent on, the scrutiny of non-native learners, *interest in non-native academics and teachers is a fairly recent phenomenon*.

Further, despite Arab educators appreciating the significance of teacher reflection, quantitative studies in the Gulf region are few and far between (with a focus on pre-service teachers only). Last but not least, in the Nursing Institute where this study was conducted, the non-native EFL teachers outnumbered the native EFL teachers by a factor of 4 and it was my intent to present their ideas.

The reasons for basing this study on an all-female sample are twofold: the desire to give women voice and the recruitment of female subjects which was straightforward given their high number in the profession.

Table 1 – Selection of teachers based on the chosen criteria

Teacher	Age	Qualifications	No. of years of teaching	Level(s) taught at Nursing Institute
Jasmine	50s	Bachelor of Arts	16	Diploma 1, 2 & 3
Sara	20s	Bachelor of Arts	2	Diploma 1
Ayesha	30s	Bachelor of Arts	6	Diploma 1 & 2
Nadia	40s	Master of Arts	18	Diploma 1, 2 & 3
Ameera	20s	Bachelor of Arts	1	Diploma 1
Salma	30s	Bachelor of Arts	7	Diploma 2 & 3

I conducted a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 1990; Fridah, 2008) to choose the participants for this study. Purposeful sampling assumes that the researcher intends to discover and gain insight and so chooses a sample where the most can be learned. By also using the "maximum variation" strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994), participants can be selected who represent diverse or multiple perspectives, but who also identify common patterns. I strongly believe that the participants I selected represent a wide range of views on the subject of reflective practice.

4.4 PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This section portrays the six EFL teachers' profiles and their professional journeys during one academic year. The teachers were equipped with different expectations, skills and knowledge. Each portrait is unique because the life experiences of each of the teachers are unique too.

Jasmine

Jasmine is of Lebanese origin and has been working as an EFL teacher in the UAE for sixteen years. She is in her fifties, married and is a mother of three children. Jasmine considered herself to be 'a stay at home mum' for several years who slowly re-entered the workforce after her children were of school age. Jasmine is a small woman who was always very busy whenever I visited her in the classroom. She was an enthusiastic teacher who was very concerned with planning and organisation within her own teaching and in the classroom. During the interviews she displayed the same confidence in her teaching abilities as she had during her teaching practice. Jasmine felt that reflection is important to teaching:

> *I believe strongly in reflection and analysis, ultilising my strengths and working on my weak areas, always keeping the students in mind. Some people feel that reflection takes too much time and energy, but for me it is intertwined with what I do. Without it, I would be engaging in a disservice to my students.*

Sara

Sara is twenty-six years old and comes from Morocco. She has been working in the UAE for two years and is married. She comes from a family of teachers. I considered her to have a quiet and non-assertive personality. She said that coming into teaching was a life-long dream, *"I always wanted to work with*

students, and I wanted to help them sharpen their minds and prepare them for the world". Not only was Sara quiet during the teaching practice, she was also taciturn and did not elaborate much during the interviews I conducted with her. Her answers were short, very characteristic of her reserved nature, and she just was not very loquacious. She, however, wrote a great deal in her reflection journal entries, and so I relied upon them to understand her views. She shared the following thought with me during one of the interviews:

> *Sometimes you are most honest when you write. There are some things that you don't want to say verbally, but if you're writing, it comes off the top of your head, so you can write as much as you want.*

Ayesha

Ayesha is a 32-year-old Syrian, single, who has been working in the UAE for the last six years. Her undergraduate degree was in marketing and her first thoughts of teaching came when she had to do an internship at a school as part of her degree. That's when she 'got hooked on teaching'.

> *I really enjoyed interacting with those kids. They were so eager and willing to learn. That's when I realised that I wanted to make a difference to their lives.*

Ayesha exuded confidence in her knowledge and ability to teach English. She was generally a quiet woman who was always willing to listen to advice from her peers with regard to her work in the classroom. Whenever I held a conference with her after a lesson, she would be attentive and offer explanations with respect to the lesson or her performance.

Nadia

Nadia is another of the mature teachers working in the Nursing Institute. She is of Palestinian origin, in her forties and is married with two children. She has been living and working in the UAE for eighteen years. Nadia inherited her interest in teaching from her mother who is an Arabic teacher in her native country. She talked to me about her fascination with children:

> *I volunteered to work with children, and then I led outdoor adventures like cycling and camping trips. I enjoyed the way children learned and working with them through these activities was interesting. I liked their questions.*

Nadia appeared to me to have a calm disposition and she was extremely patient with her students. From very early on, Nadia was concerned about the social aspects of the students' lives. She worried about how she could influence the lives of the students. She spent a great deal of time in individual conferencing with students. Every time I walked into the classroom, she was either teaching a lesson or sitting in a corner of the room talking to a group of students.

Ameera

Ameera is an unmarried Egyptian. At twenty-four years of age, she is one of the younger teachers working at the Nursing Institute and has been teaching for a year. Ameera comes from a 'conservative family' and was 'coerced' into the teaching profession by her parents since it is considered a reputable occupation for females.

> *I never really wanted to enter the teaching profession. I mean, teachers have an endless job of marking and preparation. My dream was to become a photographer. I love to work with people and I always wanted to travel the world. But my parents would never let me do that.*

Ameera was very concerned about her race and race issues in the Nursing Institute's community.

Salma

Salma is a thirty-three-year-old married Jordanian with two young children. She has been teaching for seven years. Initially, Salma was enrolled on an undergraduate program doing geography and geology. She said that she liked earth history but soon found out that she did not want to do a technical job. She became involved in teaching through her work in geography:

> *I joined a student conservation association in Amman and spent six months teaching in inner city schools. This was an eye-opener and I immediately caught the bug.*

Salma remembered the relationships she developed with the students and when they took field trips and habitat restoration projects. She was very energetic and seemed to be an advocate for the students who were not excelling in the Nursing Institute's system. She continuously voiced her anxiety for students during our interviews and she also provided numerous examples of her reflection.

4.5 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

When I was contemplating doing my research on the conceptual orientation of reflective practice, I did not stop to consider of the implications of conducting research with colleagues. I thought only of what I wanted to find out and who could best provide me with the information I required. I was actively involved in the professional lives of the individuals being studied as I played a dual role of informal participant and researcher. Stoddart (1986, cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) stated that being non-obvious is simplified by taking part in the ongoing activities of the participants, without bringing specific attention to oneself. Being a non-obvious informal participant and researcher provided me

with a unique and flexible lens. I empathised with the teachers through their reflective journeys and established a rapport with all of them. I asked a myriad of questions and I listened intently to each one of them on many sittings. I believe that the participants of this study viewed me as a warm and considerate researcher. This facilitated my conducting the interviews. Even when I contacted them to obtain additional data, they seemed perfectly happy to oblige.

When I was conducting the interviews with the participants, I felt very connected to them. I had been working with some of them for five years. They seemed eager to share their views with me at the end of the study and to surrender their journals and they gave the impression that they were happy to share information about their experiences over the academic year. When I returned to the participants for subsequent interviews, I was able to get further in-depth responses. I probed for information until I felt they were giving similar responses as in the previous meetings. When they did so, I knew I had exhausted the topic and there was no more to tell.

Owing to my teaching background, I am well aware of the complexities that teachers face everyday in the school setting. I am also aware of the lack of planning time and meeting time needed when a teacher is trying to introduce new teaching strategies and how people are afraid of change. This knowledge may be looked on as a bias in this study but I felt during these interviews that being looked upon as a colleague and not an impersonal researcher would be more of a help than a hindrance. Radnor (2002: 31) confirms this by stating "the researcher cannot remove her own way of seeing from the process, but she can engage reflexively in the process and be aware of her interpretive framework". I have often pondered how my position has affected this research. I can only assure readers that I have reported the responses of the participants as truthfully as I

can. I have endeavoured to protect the anonymity of the participants at all stages of the research and consequently, all of the names in the study are pseudonyms.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

Data collection strategies were selected for their potential to accentuate the symbolic interaction nature. Symbolic interaction theory suggests that a researcher can obtain intimate knowledge of the participants' perspective through open-ended interviews and participant observations. Interviews, writings and observations are all "ethical allowable procedures that offer a likely possibility of getting a clearer picture of what is going on in that area of social life" (Blumer, 1969: 32). I was able to capture the covert interpretations of the teachers' understanding of reflective practice through the transcription and analysis of interviews and the examination of their reflection journals. The participants' observations gave me an "insider perspective" of the phenomena under study. Data collection was conducted over the period of one academic year (two semesters) to enable me to gather data from the six teachers in the study, analyse and write the narrative.

4.6.1 Data Sources

The sources of data included:

i. Two individual in-depth interviews with all six teachers and one additional interview during the analysis of data.
ii. Reflection journals of the six teachers.
iii. Observational notes taken during the second semester.

4.6.2 Interviews

Interviews were an important source of my data collection for the study. Kvale (2007: 9) defines qualitative research interviews as "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations". Interviews provide elucidations and interpretations through the voices of the specific interviewees who can contribute important insights into a particular situation (Yin, 1994). I explained the nature of my study to all the teachers and they agreed to do three interviews each with me. Seidman (1998) recommends three separate interviews using Dolbeare & Schuman's (1982) design of a series of three interviews. The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience. The second interview allows the participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context, and the third interview encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 1998). I requested the teachers to sign a consent form and gave each one a copy for their records (Appendix A) whilst stressing that their anonymity would be preserved. I set a time with each of them to conduct these interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, although some interviews were longer. Teachers were

informed in advance about the topic of the interviews and their duration. All the interviews were conducted in the privacy of my office. The means of trying to uncover the perceptions of individual teachers in my own research has emphasised the importance of getting teachers talking outside of the context of the staffroom. Each interview was tape recorded.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature and took on a conversational style where the teacher answered open-ended questions. Here, I asked key questions for facts as well as the opinions of the participants, and insights into certain occurrences (Yin, 1994). The interview schedules that I specifically devised for my research were designed to elicit descriptive and explanatory information that presented a picture of the participants' interpretations of the situation under study. Contrary to Radnor's (2002: 62) belief that "a good qualitative researcher 'reads' the situation in which she is interviewing and it may be better to begin at a different place in the schedule or phrase the question differently", I was careful not to change the wording, context and emphasis of the interview questions for each participant. This is in line with Silverman (2000) who suggests that the questions should be posed in the same way in order to ensure consistency. Since I used a set of questions that were guided by my research inquiries, these interviews were focused (Appendix B). However, I wanted to provoke spontaneous representations of the participants to help me to analyse how they perceived themselves as well as their experiences (Radnor, 2002). Thus, I chose to ask open-ended questions so that the participants would have an opportunity to demonstrate their unique way of looking at the world and their definitions of the situations (Silverman, 2000). Interviewing, as Kvale (2007: 105) observes, is a craft resting on the researcher's judgement rather than "content and context free rules of method". After all the interviews were

transcribed and all collected materials read, I proceeded with the analysis of data which is the most complex part of the inquiry process (Holliday, 2007; Yin, 1995) and the building of the interpretive study.

4.6.3 Reflective Journals

The use of journals may contribute to the process of professional development as the teachers reflect on teaching experiences and try to discover new relationships that might otherwise be overlooked (van Manen, 1990). Each teacher was asked to keep a weekly reflection journal in which they would write a log of all their accomplishments by naming and describing each briefly. In these journals, they recorded their reflections on curriculum matters, class activities, and social and personal issues that were significant to them (Appendix E). In addition, each teacher had to respond to the following questions each week after they wrote the reflections: 1) How do you feel about this reflection? and 2) What are your views and feelings on doing these reflections? During the semester I reminded the teachers to keep writing in their journals but as the semester wore on and they became more involved with their teaching practice, some of them failed to write some entries. At the end of each semester I requested these journals as part of the data collection for this study and each one was copied for data analysis. These reflection journals were then used to extend the views of the teachers on reflective practice.

4.6.4 Observation and Field Notes

Classroom observations were used as a supportive technique to enrich the data collected via the interviews and journals (Adler & Adler, 1994, cited in Radnor, 2002). I visited each teacher in class four times during the second semester.

Each visit lasted for a duration of 50 minutes. I made copious notes of the various activities that the teachers were engaged in as they taught lessons and my questions to them about these lessons. I also looked at other themes such as: actively engaging learners, modifying instruction, involving learners in the inquiry process, involving learners in social action, using technology and assessing student learning. I maintained a passive presence throughout, and avoided interacting with the participants.

At a convenient time after I had observed the lesson, I would meet the teacher as the students were attending their nursing classes. I would ask questions about what I had observed during the lesson, for example, *How do you think the lesson went? Why did you ignore that behaviour? What do you think you could have done?* I asked them to explain their reasons for doing or not doing particular things as they taught a lesson and in this way they were able to reflect on their practice.

I also wrote notes on the conferences I held with the teachers to discuss the students, and the involvement in the school activities and other problems they were experiencing in their teaching practice. Radnor (2002) states that observational evidence is often useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied. The notes that I wrote as I observed the teachers were used to enhance the responses of the participants as they related to incidences I was privy to. I was able to situate myself in a variety of settings that confirmed my interpretations of what the teachers had told me in the interviews.

I have used these notes as additional information to construct the portraits of the teachers. The notes were also used as a means of clarifying information given to me by these participants in the interviews and the reflection journals. These notes proved invaluable because I was able to check for clarification of

many of the teachers' responses against the notes that I had taken about particular lessons and incidences that they reported to me in the interviews.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

There is no widespread agreement on the way to carry out an anlysis of qualitative data (Cresswell, 1994). However, organisational structure must be created from the data in order to give it meaning (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Furthermore, each stage of the analysis must be broken down into controllable elements that will enable the researcher to decipher the words and actions of the subjects studied. I filed the interviews and organised the narratives of each teacher as suggested by Wolcott (1998). The observations/field notes and transcriptions were numbered for each participant who was subsequently assigned her own number.

The data collected from this study were analysed on a continual basis using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This non-mathematical data analysis process was used to guide me through identifying themes and patterns within individual cases and across the six cases (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This approach provides the researcher with the means to analyse each individual case for emerging themes and patterns and then compares those results with additional cases to identify any emerging themes and patterns. The symbolic interaction generic social processes were appropriate categories to use in this study because of my interest in listening to the views of the teachers. These social processes provided the framework for the views of the teachers to be heard. Each social process pinpointed a particular element of the teachers' experiences, such as their understanding of reflection, the process, context and the content of their reflection. Calderhead (1989)

identified these as elements of reflective practice. As I explored the generic social processes (Prus, 1996), I realised that each one provided the structure through which each research question could be addressed. Table 2 displays how I associated each social process with the appropriate research question.

Table 2 – The research questions as applied to the social processes

Research questions based on the elements of reflective inquiry (Calderhead, 1989)	Social processes (Prus, 1996)
How do the teachers perceive and understand the concept of reflection?	• Acquiring perspectives
What methods do these teachers use to describe how they learn to reflect on their practice?	• Achieving individuality • Experiencing relationships
In what contexts do they engage in reflective practice?	• Situating the activity
What do the teachers reflect upon in their practice?	• Doing the activity
Does my subjectivity evolve throughout the study?	• Applying all the social processes

A goal of this study was to discover how the teachers understood the conceptual orientation of reflection in teaching and how they experienced reflective practice. The themes that emerged answered the research questions that illustrated the process, content and context (Calderhead, 1989) through which the teachers developed their understanding and practice of reflection in teaching.

The data gathered were organised and assembled by date, data collection method, interview question and study question. This assisted me in identifying change and growth in each participant. In addition, results from each participant's interviews, journals, classroom observations and researcher field notes were combined, compared and analysed across all six cases for prevailing themes and patterns. This was accomplished by listening to the audiotapes for key words and phrases. Initially, this step was completed by listening to each

participant's tape from beginning to end on three separate occasions. Then, the tapes were listened to according to each individual question. I read the interview transcripts pertaining to each interview question and during each of the listening and reading steps, common words, phrases and potential themes were recorded. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985: 347), the essential task of categorising is to bring together into temporary categories those data bits that apparently relate to the same content. It is then important to ''devise rules that describe category properties and that can, ultimately, be used to justify the inclusion of each data bit that remains assigned to the category as well as to provide a basis for later tests of replicability''. Therefore, themes were categorised using the research questions as a framework from which to start. They were colour-coded and further analysed for common patterns, similarities and differences. In ensuring the reliability of the data, themes and patterns were distinguished if they were evidenced from two different participants, and when appropriate, two different sources. To assist in organising this process, a matrix was designed around the identified themes to illustrate the frequency of responses and different data sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, the matrix's design was specifically organised to identify and categorise each data source by teacher and theme. Dates were also used to identify when specific data sources were recorded. In Table 3, I present one example of the matrix that I developed to record recurrent themes.

Table 3 - An example of thematic analysis

Teachers	Theme - Content of reflection - Diversity of needs
Jasmine	• Needs of students • Dealing with problem students • Class management
Sara	• Dealing with mixed ability classes • Catering for students' specific needs • Standardised testing issues
Ayesha	• Inability to meet students' needs due to diversity • Students' behaviour • Special needs
Nadia	• Students with special needs • Students with issues • Building trust
Ameera	• Identifying students' needs • Pupils with special needs • Bad behaviour • Building up a good rapport with students
Salma	• Students' diverse needs • Dealing with parents/guardians • Difficult students

The researcher being the instrument of data collection may pose a potential limitation, "human instruments are fallible as any other instrument" (Merriam, 1998: 20), because mistakes can be and are made, opportunities can be missed and personal biases may interfere in the conduct of the research (*ibid*). However, it was with great care that I transcribed and represented the participants' words in the study. The use of a symbolic interaction analytical framework afforded me some objectivity. Denzin (1978: 4) advises that researchers refrain from substituting their own perspectives for that of the people they study when they "take the role of the other in concrete situations". In taking the role of the other, I recorded how the teachers wished to or acted in certain circumstances.

4.8 TRUSTING THE DATA

4.8.1 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research the issues of credibility, trustworthiness and correct interpretation are paramount (Ely, 1995; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In order to ensure credibility the researcher must use procedures that minimize investigator bias. The procedures used in this study include member checks where the participants read the interview transcripts to verify the information they gave. The views of the teachers were extracted from the interviews and the weekly journals without alteration except for changes in grammatical structures to reflect as far as possible what the participant wanted to say (Nespor & Barber, 1995). Information from the interviews and the weekly journals provided the convergence of at least two pieces of data (Ely, 1995). As I sifted through the data, I was able to check my notes when a participant related an instance that I was privy to. For example, in one case, the teacher gave an account in her journal of the way the cooperating teacher treated her in the classroom. I was able to recall an incident where the teacher had indeed spoken to me about the cooperating teacher's behaviour towards her. In this way I managed to verify most, if not all, of the occurrences shared by the participants in the interviews.

Since the major aim of this study is to give voice to the participants in order to understand the concept of reflection in teaching, looking at contradictory pieces of data from participants in the study is another method for providing well elaborated descriptions of the teachers' views. To conceal this side of the data would be to impose my own sense of order to the data (Scheurich, 1995). One answer offered by Scheurich (1995) to move away from being ambiguous and indeterminate is to share the researcher's training, and social position. As a researcher who was also an EFL teacher in the Nursing Institute from which these

participants were drawn, it is important to mention my subjectivity in the inquiry process. (The role of the researcher was dealt with in the section "Role of the Researcher").

Other strategies that help to establish the veracity of qualitative research include using a colleague or peer for impartial advice. I enlisted the help of a colleague who had just completed her doctoral dissertation to read and edit my paper from draft to final product. Her numerous suggestions strengthened the value of my conclusions (Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

4.8.2 Ethical Issues

Ethics play an important role in qualitative research. Stake (1994: 44) observes that, "qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manner should be good and their code of ethics strict". There are ethical dilemmas presented when one collects, analyses data and disseminates findings (Merriam, 1998). As I interviewed the participants, I was aware that some information revealed to me in confidence could have profound implications. Fictitious names have been assigned to the research participants (and the individuals they refer to) to protect confidentiality. I assured the participants that I would not use their real names and suggested an alias that they agreed to. Thus, to protect their privacy, I changed their names and held in confidence what they shared with me (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Nevertheless, because some of the data and descriptions may uniquely identify the participants, it might prove impossible to preserve absolute anonymity.

4.9 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF MY RESEARCH

Whilst conducting my research, my combined role as curriculum coordinator and researcher turned out to be quite challenging. It was a truly new experience, and one that continued to provoke my mind as I was conducting this research. My own subjectivity forced me to continuously evaluate and reassess the study. As the teachers shared their stories, I struggled to retain my objectivity in integrating them into this study. Throughout, my subjective stance was placed after the presentation of the teachers' views.

The present study has certain limitations that need to be taken into account when considering its contribution to teacher education. It was restricted to a small number of EFL teachers in one tertiary Nursing Institute in the UAE. Whilst the method of working and researching in the same setting presented advantages such as availability and marginal cost, it also raised difficulties over sampling. The six participants in this study were not randomly selected; therefore, the sample is unlikely to be representative of the population as a whole. As a result, it is difficult to generalise the findings of this study, because of the limited non-random sample in a single institute. Ideally, I would have liked to have studied a larger sample (say, 15 teachers) in order to analyse the data which then might have yielded radically different findings. Criticism could also be levelled at the researcher owing to the relatively small number of interviews. Due to time constraints, only three individual interviews per teacher were conducted. Perhaps more interviews, and maybe even group interviews *("Truth is reached through discussion")*, would have been more beneficial to the present study in order to exchange ideas and stimulate interest. Finally, I can only assume that the participants were honest in their responses. The fact that I used three research techniques (triangulation of methods) to gather the data should however strengthen the validity of it.

Chapter Five

Interpretation

In this chapter I present the views of the teachers pertinent to the research questions. The teachers' voices formulate their definitions of reflection, the process and the context of reflection, the content of reflection (Calderhead, 1989) and explicate how these concepts influenced and shaped their understanding and practice of reflection in teaching. In applying a symbolic interaction analytical framework to the study, I used the generic social processes put forward by Prus (1996) to categorise the themes that emerged from the data. These processes allow the teachers' voices to be heard, conveying aspects of the advent and growth of reflection among these participants on their journeys to grow into reflective practitioners (Prus, 1996).

5.0 EMERGING THEMES

Themes are classified under the five main social processes to address the first four research questions relating to the participants. The social processes are: (a) acquiring perspectives, (b) achieving individuality, (c) experiencing relationships, (d) situating the act of reflection, and (e) doing the act (Prus, 1996). I have ascertained eleven major themes emanating from the data that I have categorised within each of the five social processes. These themes group together the similarities in the data, whilst also pointing out the subtle differences that arise owing to the individuality of each participant. Table 4 outlines how I linked the research questions to the appropriate social processes, and the themes that emerged from the data within each social process. After each theme has been explored, I examine my subjectivity and the understandings I have gained

from the teachers' interpretations in answer to the fifth research question (see Table 2, page 60). Here, I relate my perceptions of the themes and my personal view of my influence on the teachers.

Table 4 – Research questions linked to the social processes and corresponding themes

Research Questions	Social Processes (Prus, 1996)	Themes Arising out of Data
How do the teachers perceive and understand the concept of reflection?	• Acquiring Perspectives	➢ Defining reflection ➢ Questioning in reflection ➢ Having opportunities to reflect
How do these teachers describe how they learn to reflect on their practice?	• Achieving Individuality • Experiencing Relationships	➢ Reflection is learned from self and significant others ➢ Reflection on action and for action ➢ Reflection is based on personal beliefs and educational theory ➢ Encountering peers
In what contexts do the teachers engage in reflective practice?	• Situating the Act	➢ Self-reflection ➢ Verbal reflections ➢ Written reflections
What do the teachers reflect upon in their practice?	• Doing the Act	➢ Content of reflection

Teachers' interpretations illuminated the concept of reflective practice. I quote them extensively to reveal convergence and distinctiveness in the understandings of reflection that each constructed. I have selected illustrative quotes from the interview data and reflective journals. I have analysed the data fully aware of how I may have slanted and shaped the responses of the teachers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To analyse the data, I followed Lincoln & Guba's (1985) suggestion that anything that allows us to deepen our understanding by using multiple data sources is advantageous. Lincoln (1990), however, quite rightly cautions that people should never be used solely as a means to another's end, no matter the context. In this regard, I made decisions with respect to the choice of data to present in this study.

5.1 ACQUIRING PERSPECTIVES

The social process 'acquiring perspectives' is the umbrella category under which the first research question, "How did the teachers perceive and understand the concept of reflection?" is answered. The teachers acquired their perspectives through clarification of their own definition of reflection, questioning and opportunities to reflect. These three themes revealed how the six teachers gained understanding of the concept of reflective practice during the course of their daily teaching.

5.1.1 Defining reflection

Definitions are the basis on which individuals show their grasp of a particular concept. The literature indicates that there are many definitions and interpretations of reflective practice in teacher education, rendering matters quite difficult, methodologically speaking. Sparks-Langer et al. (1990) posits the view that the exact meaning of the term "teacher reflection" is difficult to pin down. However, definitions are valuable tools to reveal how these six teachers understand reflective practice. The symbolic interaction framework used in this study underscores the importance of definitions for the teachers. Blumer (1969: 17) states that "one has to get inside the defining process of the actor to understand his actions". The table below summarises the views of the six participants.

Table 5 – Teachers' definitions of reflection

Participant	Definition of reflection	Model
Jasmine	• General thinking processes.	➢ Vygotsky
Sara	• Reflection on- and in-action.	➢ Schön
Ameera	• Reflection on-action.	➢ Schön
Ayesha	• Socially linked to life experiences. • Reflection on-action.	➢ Vygotsky ➢ Schön
Nadia	• Reflection on-action.	➢ Schön

	• Re-evaluation of actions.	➢ Dewey
Salma	• Pedagogy. • Reflection on-action.	➢ Habermas ➢ Schön

All six participants held clear views with respect to reflection. Jasmine linked reflection to general thinking processes. She said, "I just keep thinking about things, I write about them, think about them, I just think about things that I'm doing and reflect on that".

Sara's definition of reflection was based on her thinking about her actions and what she could have changed: "Reflective practice to me means thinking about what you are doing, looking at what went well, what didn't go well, and what you could have done differently".

Similarly, for Ameera, reflection was "Looking back on an experience one has encountered to see what one could change to make it better next time, or to improve one's skills".

Ayesha's definition of reflection was more personal and linked to her life experiences: "It is a process … you are acting in certain ways or you are living your life a certain way and things are happening to you, it [the process] poses questions to you about how you can change or what you need to do". Ayesha extended her definition of reflection to thinking back on what she had done. She explained, "Sometimes you have to sit back and re-live the moment to think about how to proceed".

Nadia's definition of reflective practice centred around thinking and re-evaluation. She felt that, "Reflection is constantly thinking about and re-evaluating, thinking about the actions that you need to see improvements". She further suggested, "It is thinking about what you do as the teacher, thinking about how the students are responding to you".

Salma focused solely on how to become a better teacher and impart knowledge, “Reflection is about finding ways to improve my teaching. I want my students to learn”.

The idea that reflecting is thinking about an action to initiate some change seems to influence the way these six teachers define reflection. This finding is corroborated by the literature on reflection that says it is a special form of thought (McNamara, 1990; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). The definitions given by the teachers fit perfectly with the literature on reflection on action, in which Schön (1983) suggests that teachers think back on what they have done in order to determine what improvements could be made in future. This, he reminds us, is the active consideration of professional practice. This thinking back on action is akin to Dewey’s (1933) notion of reflection as problem-solving, that it is the ability to look back critically and imaginatively, to do task analysis, and also to look forward and plan ahead.

The six teachers put forward fairly different definitions mirroring the literature on reflective practice that states that definitions and conceptions are many (Sparks-Langer, 1990; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Whereas two teachers defined reflection as simply looking back on action, the others thought about changes that could be made. This finding is very much in keeping with the literature that suggests that there is no one definition of reflective practice. Sparks-Langer (1990) asserts that reflection has no universal definition, it is in the eye of the beholder. This statement is true of many broad and complex concepts that we apply in education. The way the teachers described their perceptions of reflective practice demonstrated their personal perspectives of the concept of reflection and reflective practice. Many argue that when dealing with complex phenomena such as reflection, description may be preferable to definition. They

point out that efforts to make meanings more precise may result in loss of clarity (Smith, 1991). Furthermore, they assert that definitions can operationalise and reduce what are best understood as complex processes and abstract values into behaviour that is "generalizable, observable, and teachable" (Richardson, 1998: 14).

The findings also confirm that the six teachers have a broad understanding of the concept of reflection. They submit that reflection entails analysing their own practice and the context in which it occurs. There are different viewpoints on the way teachers perceive reflection. Cruickshank (1981) asserts that teachers merely reflect on the success of using specific instructional techniques to meet predetermined objectives, whereas Goodman (1984) and Tom (1984) suggest a broader view. They feel that teacher training/development should help teachers reflect on the origins, purposes and consequences of their actions, as well as on the materials, and ideological constraints and encouragement embedded in the classroom, school, and societal contexts in which they work (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Generally, the findings suggest that although the teachers varied in their definitions, they all leant towards reflection that considered actions, as well as consequences. This is in keeping with Schön's (1987) view that the reflective practitioner is one who is consciously thinking about the practical problems, and the decisions to be made.

As a researcher I feel bound to provide my personal definition of reflection. I have come to the conclusion that reflection is a process of deliberation of one's opinions and knowledge as a means to gain understanding and to initiate change. I believe in social reconstructionism that advocates that we ponder over all moral and ethical aspects of teaching that are embedded in our everyday thinking and inquiry (Dewey, 1933; Hunt, 1999). Thus, very early I changed my perspective

from a curriculum coordinator who assessed only technical teaching skills to a researcher whose role was to help the teachers to think about their convictions and their teaching experiences.

5.1.2 Questioning in reflection

Until quite recently, in teacher education in the UAE, the academic tradition tended to emphasise the teacher's role as a scholar and subject matter specialist. Therefore, the teacher's role was literally confined to shepherding students out of the educational system. The teacher never ventured off the beaten track and did not evolve as a decision-maker adept at considering alternative courses of action or consequences of teaching methods. This was a regular pattern across contexts and time. Today, novel teacher education trends are emerging that focus on student-centred pedagogy and open education, and transform the educator into an advanced reflective practitioner.

Also, the new Minister of Education, His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan has decreed that schools should be institutions that encourage teachers and students to innovate:

> We want students to think creatively and not just memorize to pass exams. We want to develop their skills and we want students to be active partners in the educational process. I am very keen on revolutionizing the educational system and teachers have a huge role in achieving this process. They have to encourage students to learn and make them love the subjects they are teaching. We want to test students differently based on a system that evaluates their skills and not what they have memorized.
>
> (Gulf News, 25 November 2004)

Questioning and problem-solving are two ways that teachers can become reflective. Therefore, the six teachers were encouraged to do some soul-searching as they mulled over a number of issues and to ask each other an abundance of questions as a means of mastering what was expected of them

within the classroom context. Most of their questions were student-related, although some hinged on their actions as teachers.

Jasmine asked herself questions that related to the students' needs and what could be done. She informed me, "It's like looking at a child and saying, why isn't this working for this person? What do I need to do?"

Sara asked questions about her work in the classroom. She reminisced, "I can look over a week and see what happened and reflect on my work. How do I feel about that now? How did I feel about it then? Have my feelings changed?"

Ameera questioned her own behaviour and her expectations of the students. She shared her thoughts, "If I'm not holding up my standards, how could I expect them to hold up their standards?"

Ayesha asked questions when she contemplated her actions in her teaching. "You may have an objective, but you are seeing that your objectives are not being met, so you think, well, what did I do wrong? How can I do this to make it better? So it is the snag in the road that I am seeking to remove".

Nadia reflected on how she perceived her students. She pondered on her place in their lives. "Where is my place in their life? Are they fed? Are they clothed? Do they feel like they belong? Do they feel like I'm caring for them or not? Do other people care for them?" Unlike the other teachers, Nadia's questions were more of a social nature than about her students' academic performance.

Salma worried about whether her standards were set high enough, "I always set high standards for myself and I expect my students to follow my example and see me as a role model. How can I become a better teacher if I don't set myself targets or if my students aren't stretched enough?"

The literature on reflective practice encourages teachers to question how and why they are doing what they are doing (Cruickshank, 1985). The questions posed by the teachers point to Dewey's (1933) proposition that when teachers participate in the classroom they are exposed to experiences that generate genuine questions to be answered and real problems to be solved. Dewey (1933) also identified the attribute of responsibility that implies the desire to search for truth and apply information gained in problem situations (Yost et al., 2000). He also referred to the engagement in objective and rigorous inquiry while exploring alternative possibilities such as open-mindedness (Dewey, 1933). The findings indicate that the teachers were demonstrating open-mindedness as they formulated many objective questions about their practice. By inquiring into alternative ways to improve their teaching practice, they were acting in a responsible manner as suggested by Dewey (1933). Similarly, based on a study conducted in the UAE, Clarke (2005: 7) concluded that, "…an approach which encourages student teachers to engage in, and develop such habits of inquiry and reflection and emphasizes qualities of deliberation, self-awareness and a problem solving orientation to the classroom – and which forms the underlying basis for both reflective practice and action research – is surely a fundamental ingredient for ongoing educational improvement in UAE schools".

Just as the teachers questioned themselves, I often questioned myself about my role in their learning. I often wondered about the ways I could get the teachers to cogitate on the broader implications of their practice. I wanted the teachers to think about the knowledge and skills they used in the classroom, and the consequences of their actions in the classroom. Also, I wanted them to consider the students in the class. Apart from just teaching, I was interested in how the teachers viewed the pupils. Consequently, I posed many questions,

however I could never say for certain if these questions impacted on their practice.

5.1.3 Having opportunities to reflect

In order for reflection to take place there should be opportunity**.** As such, the teachers were given ample chance to reflect at the Nursing Institute where they conducted their daily teaching practice. They reported many occasions for reflection and the nature of the reflective tasks they had accomplished. Throughout the study, I tried to foster a philosophical base of social constructivism. Therefore, one would expect that there would be many opportunities for meaningful integrated learning. During the study, the teachers were provided broad scope to reflect through activities such as journal writing, peer and collegial reflection as well as other reflective experiences directly related to the pedagogical components of the study. All these tasks helped them to question their own beliefs whilst integrating what they were learning in the study.

Jasmine acknowledged there was ample opportunity for reflection. She elaborated further, "There were many occasions for reflection during the study, although some colleagues may not have been comfortable with this." In her journal Jasmine reiterated, "I have enjoyed the varied experiences in which I reflected on this programme". Sara felt "The interviews were good, I think there were plenty of opportunities for reflections". Ameera shared that "There was a lot of opportunity for reflection, but a lot of it had to be written". Ayesha acknowledged that she reflected in her daily practise. She remembered, "… definitely … during this study I have been encouraged to reflect at all times". Nadia found many opportunities for reflection in her classroom, but chose to

connect to particular classes that appealed to her. She shared her views about the opportunities for reflection:

> *All the classes had plenty of opportunity for reflection, and what mattered was deciding which ones were meaningful because I have my own context and my own framework and I really connected with the ones that I wanted to.*

Salma felt that reflection is an ongoing process, "If you want to reflect, you can do it any time, any place. This is the beauty of it". Calderhead (1992) rightly points out that the opportunities for teachers to analyse their practice can differ from one institution to the next. In this instance, the teachers were provided many opportunities to practise reflection and they unreservedly acknowledged that this had been the case.

The many opportunities they were given to practise reflection and the questions they asked contributed to their understanding of the concept of reflective practice. These three themes exemplify how the teachers perceive the concept of reflection, and by appreciating how they view this concept we can comprehend their actions as beginning reflective practitioners.

5.2 ACHIEVING INDIVIDUALITY

The second research question deals with the teachers' explication of how they acquired the ability to reflect. This question explores the process of learning to reflect and it was classified under the social process of 'achieving individuality'. All six teachers attributed their ability to reflect to their interaction with significant others in the English programme. All six engaged in reflection on-action and for-action in their classrooms, basing their reflections on their personal beliefs and contemporary educational theory. The way teachers learned to reflect supports

Kagan's (2002) view that institutional and individual perspectives influence how teachers acquire their identities as reflective practitioners.

5.2.1 Reflection is learned from self / significant others

Jasmine attributed her ability to reflect to her personality and reflective nature; however, she acknowledged that her thinking about reflective practice as a special term only came about as a result of being in the study: "I know myself personally. I am the sort of a person who looks at whatever I am doing and ask myself afterwards what I should have done differently, what I could have changed. I just never gave it a name".

Similarly, Ayesha regarded reflection as something that was part of her life. She explained, "Reflection for me has been just a part of my life, it is a matter of seeing how things have panned out and I think that is necessary". Although both teachers emphasised that they had 'always been reflective', they considered that they had become more reflective during their participation in the study. Jasmine's reflection took "on a new perspective and a new dimension" while Ayesha "began to systematically document my reflection" because it had become "so important to me". The findings indicate that both Jasmine and Ayesha attributed reflection to their personalities. Harris (1997) argues that by focusing on the process of interpretation, it is possible to see how the concept of reflection is not pre-ordained. It may be true that the ability to reflect is innate in some individuals, but the meanings have been renewed and renegotiated by the individuals in the relationships.

Sara, Nadia and Salma acknowledge that they were first exposed to the concept of reflective practice by their university professors. The teachers especially remembered the professors, who first used the term reflective practice,

and those professors who encouraged them to experience different forms of reflection prior to their going into their teaching practice.

Sara said that she learned to reflect through the many activities in the courses she attended at university. She referred specifically to the graduate seminar which she said helped her to reflect on her classroom activities. "The graduate seminar that I took in my final teaching practice helped me to understand what reflection was because I had to write journals every day, and that helped me to reflect on what I was doing in the classroom".

Nadia spoke about the impact that one professor had on her understanding of reflection through an activity:

> *My first exposure to the term reflective practice was in Dr. Hassan's class. Every week she had us thread a bunch of articles that seemed really random. We had to try and do a reading response, and what she was doing was picking out articles, like she had an agenda, and she made it seem like we were coming to our own conclusions, but they were really her conclusions. That was the first time I actually ever got to see the value of building ideas as you write. I always thought you had your ideas ready, and then you wrote about them. She very indirectly taught me that I could teach myself through writing because I would write down what I was thinking about as I was pulling these articles together, and then I would arrive at a totally different place at the end from where I started.*

Likewise, Salma acknowledged the role of her teachers in her becoming a seasoned reflective practitioner. "I think the people who have taught me to reflect are definitely my teachers … They've unlocked the door of a whole new world … Can I say that I saw the light? Absolutely". Britzman (1991) claims that for beginning teachers, the most powerful self-image is one that captures self as the author of the teacher he/she is becoming. I am in agreement with Britzman (1991) that teaching is a time when one's past, present and future are set in dynamic tension for the process of becoming a reflective practitioner is heavily contextualised by the teachers' experiences as well as the traditional and

institutional context of the programme in question. The English programme in turn is affected by the wider socio-political and cultural context (Britzman, 1991).

The path leading Ameera to reflective enlightenment was slightly different from the other teachers for it was her attending a professional development workshop that encouraged her to reflect on her teaching strategies. She shared her experience: "I took this teaching composition class that helped me to learn how to reflect on my teaching skills and helped me to learn how to teach better, more professional".

The responses of the participants indicate that the process of reflection was socially determined, and it was a product of the utterances to which the participants responded in ongoing dialogues they held with others (Bakhtin, 1986). The six teachers interpreted the programme's activities as integral to their development as reflective practitioners. They clearly linked their understanding of reflection, and learning to reflect to what their university professors had taught them. Three of the teachers found that their undergraduate university seminars provided the forum for reflective practice, and that their professors encouraged reflection. Contrary to Goodman's (1984) suggestion that the content of many seminars perpetuates unsubstantial dialogue, in these seminars the teachers were indeed encouraged to reflect through dialogue. This dialogue was done verbally and in writing, and allowed them to share what they had in common with other teachers as well as their uniqueness as individuals (Harrington, 1994). The findings exemplify the literature that reflection is a social phenomenon that is interpreted by the teachers as they interact with others in the social context of the study (Blumer, 1969). Although two teachers saw themselves as reflective individuals, it can be argued that their ability to reflect was socially constructed, and that the teachers came to identify themselves as reflective individuals

because the concept is constantly renewed and renegotiated, and as such becomes "learned" behaviour. Vygotsky (1978) believed that social interaction is a major determinant of the way people in the environment can help guide the individual's thinking.

5.2.2 Reflection on-action and for-action

In the process of learning to become reflective practitioners, the six teachers reflected on-action, and for-action (Schön 1983, 1987) and they all recalled how they meditated on the actions they performed in the classroom. Four teachers viewed reflection as looking back on their action in the classroom. Jasmine explained, "After I teach a lesson, I would think, this went well, or this didn't go so well".

To Sara reflection was a process of thinking back about what she did, and she questioned herself in the process:

> *I reflect on my lesson plans; I look at those and see what I could have done differently. I go back and think about how I thought of a situation then, how I think about it now … Have my thoughts and feelings changed? Would I have handled anything differently? So I go back and reflect over my reflections, I just keep thinking about it.*

Ayesha discussed a unit on the first change she had introduced to demonstrate how she reflected on her actions:

> *I had to re-evaluate all of the lessons, and I would not do them in the same way again, if I had to. So it is the experience you have that makes you go back and think about how you can do it differently to make it more solid.*

Nadia gave an example of how she reflected on her lessons in a writing unit. She was able to go back and take action accordingly:

I taught a writing unit and after every lesson I wrote a reflection when it went wrong. I had the opportunity to teach it twice. So the first time it was bad and the second time it was better because I thought about how I was going to fix it. I also videotaped it so I could look at it. I thought about how I felt then and how the students felt and how I was reacting to them as someone else from the outside.

Schön (1987) stated that reflection begins with the recognition that an educational dilemma or emotional discomfort exists in response to a particular professional experience. The teachers recalled that they had thought about an action that did not go well in the classroom, and how they considered what could be done to remedy the situation. Schön (1983, 1987) coined the term "reflection-on-action" to name this type of reflection. These teachers reflected on their actions on their teaching practice but three also thought about how they would reshape their actions in future. Schön (1987) called this "reflection-for-action".

The six teachers acted in ways that reflected the traditions of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983, 1987) who focused on reflection as a method of thinking about experiences that lead to inquiry and problem-solving. The findings exemplify the literature that states that as professionals, teachers should frame and reframe the complex and ambiguous problems that they face, test out various interpretations, then modify their actions accordingly (Hatton & Smith, 1995).

5.2.3 Reflection is based on personal beliefs and educational theories

In learning to become reflective practitioners, the teachers integrated their personal beliefs and educational theories in order to ground their reflections about their students as well as their teaching. The findings indicate that the teachers reflected on their personal values as teachers. Their reflections indicated a student-centered philosophy. These findings are evidenced by the literature that

indicates that teachers construct their own personal knowledge of teaching. This knowledge is constructed using general beliefs and ideas held about teaching (Richert, 1992).

Four teachers incorporated their personal beliefs as they shared their reflections on their teaching practice. Sara talked about how she believed in reflecting on her practice, she shared: "I believe strongly in reflection and analysis, utilising my strengths and working on my weak areas, always keeping the student in mind". Sara appreciated that she was a learner and also that her students were important.

Ameera reflected on the ways she wanted to engage her students. She stated, "I always think about actively involving the students in the learning, then they are keenly paying attention, they have to keep their hands and their minds moving". Ameera appreciated the students as active learners.

Ayesha valued the social aspects of the students' development and wanted them to learn about caring. She reflected on her role with her students and shared her perspectives:

> *Some of my students are growing up in a world where they have issues … and how can I help them to become healthy balanced adults who care about one another, who are active citizens and who are socially active? That's what I often think about.*

Nadia internalised the concept that all students can learn. This is an important concept in inclusion practices in education. She based her reflection on what she regarded as important to do as a teacher:

> *You have to think about what you are doing as a teacher, thinking about how the students are responding to you. Look at all the ways that they do respond to you and in their actions, what they write, anything that you can notice, not just the things that were traditionally formally assessed or*

whatever. I think that one of the most important parts of teaching is that you really feel like your students can learn.

The teachers actively incorporated educational theories and personal beliefs into their reflections: constructivist methods in teaching, differentiated instructions in teaching methods, how to build student esteem, sound educational theory when reflecting on educational matters and the practical issues of teaching. These findings are in keeping with the literature that teachers develop theoretical perspectives through courses at the same time they develop practical experience through their fieldwork. Their reflections therefore will lie at the intersection of theory and practice (Putnam & Grant, 1992). Three of the teachers recalled that apart from hearing the term reflection for the first time from their professors, they also learnt many lessons on mastering the art to reflect through the study, and other individuals who they came into contact with, on a continuous basis in the English programme.

The teachers put their reflections into practice based on educational theory or personal experiences. I cite one example from each informant. Jasmine shared her childhood experience as a maths learner in a traditional school setting where "We sat quietly in rows, diligently filling out useless worksheets". Jasmine adopted the educational theory of constructivism in her practice as a teacher, she stated, "I have tried to develop units that illustrate the connection of language to real life through exploration in a fun, engaging, non-threatening manner".

Sara explained how she had adapted the curriculum for the students who were not keeping up with the rest of the class. Her main concern was to provide differentiated instruction and materials to suit the differing needs of her students:

I make adaptations for students who are not keeping up. In a measurement project I did with them, I saw that they were having difficulty analysing the work, so I slowed down, condensed the information so they

could actually see what each measurement represented. I knew some of the students needed visuals.

Ameera explored ideas about how to introduce multiculturalism into the classroom: "I think that bringing in materials on different races is important and using textbooks that have people of different races".

Ayesha reflected on opportunities for building self-esteem in her students:

I think students should be provided with opportunities to speak out and explore issues that are important to them, this is so vital for their self-esteem and for helping them to become responsible socially caring human beings.

Subsequently, she deemed appropriate to provide a forum for active learning to take place. She felt that students would grow in confidence when given the opportunity to clarify issues that are of consequence to them.

Nadia was concerned with teacher-student relationships, and felt strongly that teachers should be good listeners in order to learn more about their students. She believed that teachers should base their action solely on educational theory:

You really need to pay attention to all the little details of what the student is telling you, and you need to integrate those things with the sound theory that you know. You need to think about all these things so that you can respond in a good way.

On the other hand, Salma seemed to focus more on the practical aspects of teaching, "Educational theory is all very well, but it doesn't resolve problems that you have to deal with in the classroom. For example, how do I deal with a disruptive pupil?"

It is undeniable that the teachers' reflections were influenced by their personal beliefs and values. They also linked their reflections to educational theory, and wanted to adapt materials, build self-esteem, link language to real

life, and introduce multiculturalism into the classroom. These practices were recurrent themes in many of their journals. The teachers integrated advanced educational theory into their practice, and although some of them were probably unaware of it, their responses indicated that they did put to good use much of what they had learnt as reflective practitioners. "We think we know great teaching when we encounter it, yet we find it impossible to say precisely what has gone into making it great" (Banner & Cannon, 1997: 3).

5.3 EXPERIENCING RELATIONSHIPS

The social process "experiencing relationships" describes how the relationships of the teachers formed with all the various individuals connected to the programme directly affected the process of learning to reflect. The theme encountering peers was crucial in answering the second research question, "How did the teachers learn to reflect on their practice?"

5.3.1 Encountering peers

In learning to become reflective practitioners, the teachers interacted with individuals in different social contexts. However, the teachers had divergent views about who influenced them positively to develop their reflective capabilities. The teachers generally viewed their peers as sources of support in helping them to reflect. This finding is consistent with theorists, such as McBride & Skau (1995), who encourage the building of trust between colleagues in the profession. They feel that it is imperative that peers foster an internationally collegial relationship with each other. Only one teacher did not elaborate on the role of her peers in fostering reflective practice in the classroom.

Jasmine described her peers in a way that exemplified the other teachers' views of their peers. She was satisfied that one of her peer's was giving her help where it was needed, but she felt that written feedback was lacking. Although Jasmine desired written feedback from her peer, she accepted that this was not the teacher's style:

> *She has really helped. She has given me very honest feedback, which I think is extremely important. I don't think people should be sugar-coating things, and maybe sometimes it may be a little tough to take some criticism, but it is constructive criticism. It's the only way I can grow as a teacher, and the kind of person I want to become. So I am very glad that she has been so honest. I wished she could have written a few little notes for me that I could have kept and hold on to, and I understand. I mean we did talk about that, she is not one to do that, so there's many times I would go home and I would try to write up a little something of the conversation that we had. She was very open and that we were able to have so many conversations, and she was such a busy person that she took the time to do this, she thought it was important.*

Sara did not have very much to say about her peer(s) in the interview. She revealed that, "She hasn't really asked me to reflect on anything". I turned to her journal to get some idea about how the peer(s) had assisted her in reflecting in the classroom. In her journal she wrote:

> *I learned a lot of wonderful and useful things from Dianne, and I am grateful for that. I love her classroom and I love all the wonderful things that took place in the classroom. Her classroom is a wonderful place, but I do not know if I would place a Black student in her classroom. I am used to being treated differently because of growing up in this area. I have been treated like this for the majority of my lifetime. I can get over the fact that people treat me differently and that is why I never said anything about it.*

This teacher did not enjoy a good working relationship with her peer(s) and stated that the colleague(s) she was paired with completely ignored her in the classroom because of her ethnicity. The literature on critical race theory puts forward many arguments about racial tensions within the classroom. Hooks

(1994) suggest that racism, sexism, and class elitism shape the structure of classrooms, creating a lived reality of insider versus outsider that is predetermined, often in place before any discussion begins.

The research points to a number of reasons that colleagues may not enjoy a comfortable relationship with each other. Calderhead (1993) suggests that individuals bring their own conceptualization of what teaching is to their classrooms. He further suggests that teachers bring their own set of beliefs, values, and concerns to the shared enterprise of teaching. Daloz (1986) asserts that the amount of support and challenge peers can receive from a collegial relationship will affect learning within a peer relationship.

Ameera used her peer teacher as a sounding board for her reflections, and she was happy with the freedom the peer teacher gave her in the classroom. "She gives me the freedom to do what I need to do. We talk about ideas about how I want to teach the class". Ameera felt that collegial reflection was important. "I think it's important to reflect with others because you feed off each other. If one person thinks that something is working and the other person that it's not working, and then we could talk about it to make sure it is working". Ameera seemed to enjoy talking to her peer teacher. An amicable relationship between peers often sets the tone for good teaching practice.

Ayesha's peer teacher was a valuable resource. Ayesha could verbally reflect with her cooperating teacher just about any classroom issue:

> *She has provided me with different books to read. When I have discussed things that I am interested in, most lessons that I would be interested in, she has told me of the different situations that she has been in. I think the main thing though is we have a really good rapport and think alike in a lot of ways, so it has been easy to kind of sit and chat about stuff.*

It seemed important that her colleague provide resources that helped the teacher to successfully implement lessons. Just as in Ameera's case, Ayesha was able to have fruitful discussions with her peer teacher.

Nadia's peer teacher intervened in many instances in the classroom, to provide practical and impartial advice about teaching:

> *She tells me straight up what went wrong, like 'this was stupid, rethink that'. She gives me advice, like because I couldn't read until I was much older, so I have a very good memory for exactly what people said, and I can remember the things that she told me very bluntly that I have problems with….like when I am giving instructions, she said to me, 'Don't be so unsure of your instructions. Give them clearly and when they have questions, they'll ask you'. That is so important because as a teacher you could easily run off at the mouth and soak up all their time with your instructions and you blabber and they don't get a chance to do the work, to do the activity you want them to do.*

Nadia did not mind the comments made by her peer teacher because she viewed herself as a learner. She also appeared at her most reflective in situations which she perceived as supportive. By using peers, teachers "are able to distance themselves from their actions, ideas and beliefs, holding them up for scrutiny in the company of a peer with whom they are willing to take such risks. It creates an opportunity for giving voice to one's own thinking while at the same time being heard in a sympathetic but constructively critical way" (Hatton & Smith, 2006: 15).

5.3.2 Resolving issues

Schön (1987) described reflection-in-action as manifesting itself as an unexpected event, interpreting it as a problem, and devising methods to solve the problem. This can be done through trial and error. Such a pattern of inquiry gives rise to on-the-spot experimentation. Through reflection-in-action teachers always managed to find a way to problem-solve and re-assess the situation in a somewhat skilful manner. During her second interview, for example, Nadia reported frequently ''stepping back and asking: 'Now, what am I doing here? Is it right, or is it wrong?' All of these questions going on constantly….''. This

suggests that she engaged in considerable reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983; 1987). She noted:

Evaluating my teaching skills and myself as a teacher was important to me. I constantly asked myself questions! Am I doing the right thing? Is this what my students want of me? What am I portraying as a teacher? When I was reading a story, for example, one student was talking. I asked myself what I should do when a student wasn't participating. Should I say the student's name, or should I tap her on the head? I knew that I didn't want to ask the student to stand up in front of the class because I felt that was wrong. I wanted to make it as unobtrusive as possible. I didn't know what the effect of different strategies would be.

Salma was "very pleased to have peers willing to discuss issues and approve of my decisions. Even if we do not agree, it is a most valuable vehicle for learning and sorting out one's own stance". She was concerned, however, that "at present, I do not make full use of these interchanges. I tend to drink in the other person's ideas and justifications and deal with them internally instead of engaging in a friendly professional debate". She attributed this to being "acutely aware of my neophyte status".

The teachers reported that the peers who worked with them demonstrated different teaching and mentoring styles. Also, they recognised the strengths of their peer teachers and worked with them accordingly to resolve issues. This is in keeping with the literature that indicates that teachers value the support peers provide (Booth, 1993; Odell & Ferraro, 1992).

The teachers saw their peer teachers as advice givers and experienced educators who helped them perfect their practice in the classroom. Schön (1987) coined the term "reflective practicum" for the teaching practice that is aimed at helping students acquire the kind of artistry essential to competence in their various zones of practice. In Schön's (1987) eyes there is artistry in the craft of teaching, and so the senior practitioner is encouraged to pass down his/her artistry to the apprentice. Data suggested that these teachers went through many important learning experiences. They perceived their peer teachers as

motivators of students to become investigators of thinking and action (Boyd et al., 1998).

5.3.3 Collegiality

Collegiality in an educational environment is of considerable benefit. It is a concept that a lot of managers try to foster for it creates favourable conditions for reflection which results in better teaching. Indeed, some recent studies have examined collegial reflection that promotes reflective collaboration in the teaching community. Irvin (2002) investigated the discourse between colleagues and studied the factors that encouraged or obstructed collegial reflections among the participants. His findings indicate that the nature of collegial reflection consists of individuals rousing one another's thinking by posing questions, generating possible solutions and deliberating on the consequences of solutions offered in order to determine the best possible course of action for handling problematic situations. My findings show that conversations supported the teachers in developing professional dispositions that included experimenting, sharing and appropriating practices, embracing ambiguities and taking both an interrogatory and reflective stance towards teaching. The research supported the notion of encouraging teachers to be part of a community of learners. In addition, my findings exemplify the research that states that the relationship between peer teachers plays a crucial role in the quality of the teaching practice (Bennet & Carre, 1993; Feimen-Nemser et al., 1993). These teachers each had a different relationship with their colleagues. Elliott (1995) studied the relationship between teachers and their peers. He found that each teacher had a different relationship with their peers; however, all the participants acknowledged the importance of that relationship. His conclusion that the nature of the relationship between the teachers and their peer teachers varied from case to case, is particularly relevant to the present study's findings.

I honed my individuality as a reflective practitioner working alongside the teachers but achieving individuality to me meant that I had to learn to become a reflective practitioner myself before I could guide these teachers. In my role of researcher, I, too, was practising reflection with respect to my own teaching. I remember my lack of loquacity at the beginning of the study owing to my limitations with respect to my role in modelling reflective practice. However, I grew rapidly because I had absorbed countless articles and reference material on reflective practice in education. Both the formal and informal exchanges with the teachers were illuminating. As the study progressed, so did my reflective abilities and I was able to reflect effectively and inspire the teachers to do the same. As I was growing as a reflective practitioner, I was able to assist them in grasping the concept of reflection, by not only urging them to reflect on the lessons they taught, but also through my questions about their actions in the classrooms.

5.4 THE PROCESS OF REFLECTION

The social process of assigning the act of reflection points to the different contexts of reflection, in answer to the third research question, "In what context did the teachers reflect on their practice?" was a major accomplishment. The teachers were involved in many reflective activities in the Nursing Institute where they practised. They reflected in different contexts and engaged in self-reflections whilst actively thinking about issues and problems. They also engaged in verbal reflections and discussions with their peers and other significant individuals in the programme as well as in written reflections. They produced a variety of writing activities in the classroom and journals. They also voiced their preferences for the different contexts of reflection based on the philosophies and values they placed on these activities.

5.4.1 Self-reflections

That the teachers engaged in self-reflections was indicated by the way they dealt with thoughts about issues related to their practice as developing teachers. These educators explored many questions and problems through this mode of reflection.

Sara took her habit of reflection home where she reflected on what had happened in the classroom:

> *A lot of times, too, especially if something went really great I'd go home and I'd think to myself, 'I've got to write this down,' because I want to make sure that I do it again. But there are a lot of times when I go home now and I sit just thinking about school.*

Ayesha engaged in reflection about many aspects of her teaching. She said, "When I am alone, I think about how I can create lessons that take the pupils outside the classroom". Nadia's self-reflections represented her way of unravelling the confusion that she encountered in her practice. She thought, and wrote about things that perplexed her:

> *I run and I do a lot of deep thinking then from that I can write things or make time for myself at night before I go to bed to filter through what I have done in the day, and then maybe write something about that so I can look back on the event. I can look back on my feelings. At a later point, I can, when I have more experience, see it for what it was because it is very confusing when things happen.*

The findings prove that the teachers used self-reflections as they examined their thoughts. Introspection is a conscious awareness of one's cogitation. It is a social process of self-examination involving conversing with oneself. Ellis (1991) states that this is active thinking about one's thoughts and feelings and it emerges out of social interaction. This finding exemplifies Dewey's (1933) notion of active deliberation on their actions and the consequences of those actions.

5.4.2 Verbal reflections

Oral tradition is a characteristic of several human cultures including the Arabian one where it is very important for maintaining relationships and doing business. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the six Arab teachers primarily engaged in

verbal reflections with their peers. They explained that it was the easier way to communicate, and it suited their busy schedules.

Jasmine indicated that, "I talk with somebody on how things go, what they think went better, would go better or what they think they would have done if it didn't go well". In her journal Jasmine wrote about her peer teacher: "Rather than letters from her as a form of communication, we have several conversations throughout the day".

Sara confirmed that she reflected orally with her cooperating teacher. She said, "We talk, but I don't write anything down though". She reiterated, "We do more oral reflections about the students and my lessons". Ameera, too, was in favour of oral reflections. She shared some of her experiences with her peer teacher, "She lets me talk things through, and so I can go back and think about why some things did not work". In her journal Ameera wrote about two of her peer teachers, "Jenny and Ghadah gave me some positive comments about my teaching. This is very rewarding for me". She eschewed written reflection as inappropriate for her:

> *I think you have to reflect through talking about it with someone, but I don't see the need to go home and write three or four pages. To me, I feel I have reflected on it and that's the way I feel. I contribute to it because I am talking about it not because I am forced to talk about it but because I want to talk about it. If you are forcing me to do something that I feel I can communicate through talking, instead of writing, then you are not going to get the best of me.*

Ayesha spoke about her verbal reflections with her peer teacher: "Everyday I continuously talk with Claire about everything that came up. We were always talking about how to work situations". Nadia and her peer teacher seemed to have open communication on all aspects of the classroom: "We talk about everything, anything … from students' behaviour to more serious social

issues, such as family and personal beliefs". Salma engaged in continuous daily reflections with her peer teacher and as a result sometimes work suffered. She remembered, "We talked all the time in fact we barely got our work done. The planning periods were always used for talking about what's going on with the students". The continuous exchanges between the teacher and the peer teacher seemed to have adversely affected work, however the teacher got an insight into the student's problems and so benefited from these conversations. These findings lend support to Richert (1991), who suggests that teachers must be given numerous and varied chances to meet together and listen to one another think aloud. Oral presentation is one example of how this can be accomplished. The teachers felt that most exchanges provided the forum for verbal reflections. Many of them spoke about reflecting with others. This finding supports Yinger's (1986) idea that verbalising reflections through collaboration helps to create the disposition to reflect.

5.4.3 Written reflection and journals

The research literature suggests that reflective narratives help to prepare teachers to acquire the skills of doing and analysing what they do (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993; Zeichner, 1983). By setting the recording of weekly reflections on the teachers, I placed importance on written reflections as a way of building up their reflective abilities. The teachers reported that they engaged in writing reflective responses on diverse aspects of their practice. Five teachers wrote somewhat lengthy reflections, whereas one teacher recorded short entries.

Jasmine, Sara, and Nadia agreed that writing journals helped them in a number of ways with their teaching. Jasmine viewed the journals as "an excellent way of assessing my reflections". She felt that committing her reflections to

paper was a good way to keep up. She remembered, “I’m glad we were asked to keep a journal because it made me keep up with what we were doing, I don’t know if I would have kept up otherwise”.

Sara recalled: “In my classroom here, I have been keeping a journal along with what I am doing, it makes me think more, and I find the more you write the easier it becomes to write”.

Nadia had personal reasons for keeping journals, she felt writing helped her to unravel her own thoughts. Increasingly, she also found journal writing a valuable release from the pressures of practicum. She commented, “You get to explain to a piece of paper how you feel”. She also appreciated being able to write “whatever comes into my head … without the pressure of thinking about the right words”. As she explained, “Since I’ve started writing, I’ve been able to grow from my reflections” as writing “keeps you in touch with what you believe”. Consequently, “Often you can answer your own questions.” Frequently, too, writing led to a kind of intuitive understanding. In her words, “All of a sudden … it makes it more concrete”. She tried to explain this sensation “Sometimes I just suddenly get a wave. It’s like a light coming on, and I realise ‘Oh, that’s why I’ve reacted like that!’ ”. In addition, through writing she could “learn more about the teacher I am becoming”. Her comments suggest that she saw writing more as a means of illuminating previously tacit understanding (Elbow, 1994) rather than a medium for analytical argument. They also highlight the limitations of technical measures of reflective writing (e.g. Pultorack, 1996) in identifying non-analytical components. Nadia may be said to be an exemplar of writing reflections because of the emphasis she placed on writing journals for different purposes.

Ayesha kept the weekly reflection journal that she was required to write for the study. She shared what she wrote about:

> *I just wrote about my thoughts and feelings about how the week was going, occasionally. I wrote about some incidences and how I felt about those incidents, just how I felt from day to day, how I am fitting in, may be comments one of the students said to me that really brighten my day or things like that. I just wrote more about me and my thoughts and feelings not really about my teaching per se.*

Although Ayesha felt that she did not write about her teaching, there were many journal entries that expressed her thoughts on classroom matters. She acknowledged that writing helped her to reflect, she said, "especially with the journal I am doing, it is causing me to reflect a lot". Ayesha used the journal to the fullest extent to capture her thoughts about her practice, as well as her relationships in the classroom. This finding exemplifies the literature that suggests that journal writing helps to bridge the gap between knowledge and action (Calderhead, 1991; Surbeck et al., 1991).

Salma noted that the journal helped her to document things to reflect on what should be done in the classroom:

> *For me the journal helps in terms of writing it down and figuring out what I should do about things in the classrooms, but it has also been good practice because things happen and you don't quite realise what to do, and sometimes for me writing helps.*

Ameera, on the other hand, described herself as "not a great writer – I can talk about my thoughts, but I'm not a great one for writing them down." She gave the impression she did not like writing journals but did anyway. She said, "I am a person who doesn't need to write anything down, because I am not going back to look at it. If I write it down it is because it is a requirement … I have to do it. So I do it". For her, reflection mainly involved verbal communication. She explained, "It's so much easier when you can talk about it". Conversing exposed her to new ideas as "so many things come up in discussion that I'd never even thought of before" and revealed different perspectives, enabling her to "understand people more because you can see where they are coming from … people come from different backgrounds and have different beliefs". In turn, this helped Ameera "to understand where I am coming from" and "to develop my own ideas". As well, talking helped her to "value other people's opinions" which she considered fundamental in creating a community of empowered learners, a key element of her educational creed. She elaborated:

> *I think that it's really important to be able to understand other people's points of view. You <u>have</u> to be able to take in other points of view to be able to work well as a team. Because not everyone thinks the same as you do. I feel very strongly about that.*

Finally, exchanging views with others enabled her to "bounce ideas off each other" thus creating new connections and possibilities. These excerpts

indicate Ameera's preference for reflection as a communal rather than individual undertaking. They also highlight the need for a range of strategies for reflection in order to cater for individual preferences and styles.

The literature espouses writing as an important way to help teachers to see the connection between content and practical experience and thereby enhancing their reflective abilities (Yost et al., 2000). Writing journals is one way to promote reflective thinking in teachers. Smyth (1992) proposed that reflective thinking is stimulated by posing questions to be answered in journal writing projects. Hatton & Smith, (1995) encourage the teacher to write about reflection and problem-solving.

Research indicates that carefully guided mentoring of the writing process can and does enhance reflection. Hunter and Hatton's (1998) study of case story writing based on student's experiences revealed that peer and professor collaboration helped teachers move from initial writing that demonstrated low levels of reflection to higher levels of thinking. I firmly believe that writing helped these teachers to develop their thoughts as evidenced by their contemplative and reflective journal entries. My findings tally with Schell's (1998) when he examined the impact of electronic journaling as a means of sharing ideas. The outcome of this study suggested that electronic journaling can be a means to promote reflection, if there is immediate feedback and appropriate response to feedback. Generally, the more reflective teachers found both discussion and reflective writing beneficial, suggesting that in response to Calderhead & Gates (1993), reflection can be both a collaborative and individual pursuit. With the exception of Ameera, who strongly favoured discussion, and whose verbal reflection was noticeably more developed than her written reflection, there was no discernible difference in the depth of the teachers' reflection using either strategy.

Interestingly, as the teachers other than Ameera became more reflective, they tended to find written reflection increasingly more valuable. Salma, for example, commented:

> *I find writing down ideas hard, but definitely beneficial…Putting ideas down in words, rather than just having them as thoughts floating around, well, it's just one step further on. Writing makes your thoughts a lot clearer and you see concrete evidence of what your thoughts are.*

This surprising finding merits further investigation given the traditional preference of people of Arab culture for oral communication, hence oral reflection. Most emphasised, however, that they would not have engaged in reflective writing had it not been a requirement of this study and thus would not have discovered its potential benefits.

The context in which reflection takes place remains significant. I believe that teachers must be given ample opportunity to reflect regardless of mode of reflection. This can be done through the various contexts of self-reflection and verbal and written reflection. It was essential for me to always communicate with the teachers, whether after a lesson, or a prearranged meeting to discuss a specific issue. Open verbal communication often fostered written reflection.

Each time I interviewed or observed the teachers, I engaged them in conversations and asked many questions about their lessons and the students they taught. They always tried to give thoughtful responses about what they had done, and how they viewed their students. The teachers shared many verbal reflections with me. I was aware of the busy schedules that take up teachers' time in the Nursing Institute; however I encouraged them to write short notes to me if they were uncertain about a situation or teaching activity in the classroom. During the period I studied these teachers, they talked to me regularly about their

written reflective assignments and there was a general feeling that at times, they were overwhelmed by the amount of written reflections they had to produce.

5.5 THE ACT OF REFLECTION

The process of undertaking the act of reflection refers to the various contents of reflection, and addressed the fourth research question, "What do the teachers reflect upon in their practice?" The teachers reflected on many issues throughout the year-long study. During the interviews they shared their reflections to the best of their recollections and kept their weekly reflection journals about their teaching practice at the Nursing Institute.

After thorough examination of the interview and journal data, I established that the teachers' reflections ranged from technical aspects of teaching to more interpretive levels. There was clear evidence that the six teachers transferred what they had learnt at university to the classroom where they were now conducting their teaching. Selected vignettes of the teachers' reflections were extracted from the interviews and weekly reflections journals to illustrate the different kinds of reflections they had developed.

The teachers reflected on a wide range of subjects such as curriculum and classroom management matters, assessment, diversity of needs in the classroom, and multicultural issues. Table 6 presents the topics that each teacher reflected upon in their responses in the interviews and in their reflection journals.

Table 6 - Content of reflection by the teachers

Teachers	Curriculum & Classroom Management	Assessment	Diversity of needs	Multicultural issues
Jasmine	•	•	•	•
Sara	•	•	•	•

Ameera	•	•	•	•
Ayesha	•	•	•	•
Nadia	•	•	•	•
Salma	•	•	•	

5.5.1 Curriculum and classroom management matters

The six teachers reflected on various aspects of the curriculum. They looked at the course objectives and learning outcomes, lesson planning and specific content of the syllabi. Jasmine cogitated on the course objectives. She stated, "I had to look at what I wanted to cover, what of course would fit the objectives and outcomes, what my programme coordinator wanted me to cover, and also what would be engaging for the students". Jasmine was cognizant of the fact that she had to think not only about what the teacher wanted, but also about what her students needed.

Sara reflected on lesson planning: "In making lessons plans you can look at those and reflect, I mean even look at those and see what you do different, if they went well, you look at the lesson you could think of the whole lesson in your head". Reflecting on the lesson plan seemed to provide Sara with ideas on how to approach future lessons. In thinking about their lesson planning, Jasmine's and Sara's responses confirm Valli's (1992) view that teachers must reflect at the technical level to make practical decisions about their teaching.

In her journal, Ameera outlined how she taught numbers. She also assessed her confidence in the different subject areas:

> *Today we worked on a measurement project. The students began to measure the rooms within the institute. I went around and supervised them as they measured the rooms. It went very well. My confidence in teaching language arts is better because I am preparing for each part of*

the lesson. My comfort level is increasing daily. I feel I have more control over what the students learn and how they learn it.

Ameera was able to see her strengths and weaknesses as a beginning teacher, and find ways to improve her teaching skills. "I have realised that if I am able to pose a problem, I am able to find a solution … but sometimes it is not clear what the problem is". When students expressed reluctance to participate in some of the activities Ameera had planned, she debated with herself whether or not to insist as indicated in the following example of dialogical reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995). She commented:

I wasn't very happy with the activity. Their response wasn't totally positive. Some of them enjoyed it, but I wondered whether I was pushing them too much. After all, if they don't enjoy it, what are they going to learn from it? But then again, sometimes I think that it is important to push them. But how far do you push? It's a fine line, especially when you see them repeating the same mistakes.

It was important to her to facilitate rather than control the students' learning while remaining accountable for it. When she found it difficult to balance these roles, her perception of herself as a teacher was challenged. In turn, she began to challenge convictions which she had always taken for granted, asking for example, ''Why do teachers rely so heavily on timetables? Why do they break the day into different curriculum areas?'' This questioning of the educational status quo might have been a precursor to questioning the broader socio-political-cultural context in which these decisions were made. This tendency was also evident in the final interview with Ameera which took place only three weeks later. Given that this apparent trend towards critical reflection occurred at the end of the data collection period, however, it was difficult to predict whether it was likely to continue.

During one of my classroom observations of Ayesha, an unexpected incident ended her lesson prematurely and abruptly. She described how:

> *We were sitting in front of the computer. Five minutes into the lesson a man came in to fix the computer. The director came in too, and the students were a little confused of her presence. She decided to watch my lesson, but that wasn't the problem. Two students had been playing up. I had it all worked out in my head about how I was going to manage them. But then the director jumped in and started yelling at them. It kind of threw the whole thing. Then we all had to get up and move so the man could get to the computer. And at that stage it just all fell apart.*

For months after this incident, Ayesha ''had nightmares about being out of control'' prompting her to return to the experience time and time again, ''repeatedly going over the situation in my mind. Thinking about what I could have done; what I should have done; what I'd do next time''. She identified several reasons ''which contributed to the lesson falling apart'' and although she had reason to do so, did not blame external factors. She described how:

> *As soon as I got flustered, I started to forget names. I was thinking and thinking ... and then I slowed down. The lesson wasn't moving quickly enough which I think was partly because I was thrown off balance. And nerves, too, because of the director's unexpected visit. I was really beginning to lose it. I was stalling and skipping and, for the first time ever, I had to go back to my notes because I'd lost all track of where I was going. I'd been so focused and suddenly I had a big blank. When I glanced at my lesson plan, the students noticed right away. I could see that they were getting bored and frustrated.*

Ayesha's graphic account of this incident highlighted its emotional impact and the impetus it provided for reflection. Her response exemplifies Boud et al.'s (1985) notion of reflection as making sense of experience by returning to the experience, attending to emotions and dissecting the experience. It also highlights the power of emotions by illustrating how seemingly insignificant

experiences can resonate beyond their original context to have far-reaching effects (Conle, 1996).

Nadia reflected on academic assignments and found ways to 'negotiate' with students or ameliorate the assignments. For example, she reflected on adapting curriculum areas to suit the needs of her students:

> *Like in that lesson, I had one student that had multi learning problems and attention problems and all these problems. I said, well, what are her strengths? Her strengths were in short story writing and in using computers and I thought, well, okay for all my assessments, she will be allowed to bring her compositions so it will give her an important place in the class.*

Nadia was able to successfully work with a student with special needs, after reflecting on the needs of the pupil and working out the most suitable form of assessment for her. It is evident that reflection brings about a change in perspective (Schön, 1983; 1987).

Salma enjoyed studying and adapting the curriculum. On one occasion, she declared, "I just love curriculum work especially when you have to find ways to make it work for pupils with special needs … and it's such a thrill, it's quite an achievement". Almost all of Salma's reflective writing focused on the importance of 'fun learning' through play for both students and teacher. For example, she wrote:

> *When the students said that teachers aren't allowed to play games, I stopped and thought about what being a teacher means. It can be really confusing. I'd prefer to be called something other than a teacher. I just want to be someone who extends and challenges and develops students.*

A similar comment in her journal two months later, 'It's really challenging to think of new ways of making learning enjoyable and learning experiences more valuable'', also highlights the appropriateness of conceptualising reflection as a search for meaning.

The above excerpts illustrate how Salma's determination to make learning and teaching fun had become a passionate creed which permeated her thoughts about teaching and provided both the impetus for and content of her reflection (LaBoskey, 1994). This had a positive impact on her commitment to teaching as well as her reflection. Yet, it simultaneously seemed to limit her reflection. In particular, it appeared to distract her from consideration of other important issues. There was little sense of moving beyond issues directly connected with self to broader concerns. In addition, although her passionate creed undoubtedly contributed to her wholeheartedness about teaching and to her sense of responsibility as a teacher, it might have had an adverse effect on her open-mindedness. There was little evidence, for example, that she questioned the appropriateness of her ideas or was ''able to hear thinking that may be contrary to her own'' (Loughran, 1996: 5). As Dewey (1933) reminds us, all three qualities (i.e. wholeheartedness, responsibility and open-mindedness) are important.

5.5.2 Assessment

In the interviews, four of the teachers reflected on their assessment practices. However, one teacher wrote about a variety of assessments in her journal. Ameera engaged in conducting a number of informal assessments during her teaching practice, and recorded these assessments in her reflection journals, she wrote, "We made a puzzle out of a map," and "I had the students do a cultural day project". All these assessments were part of the units that Ameera had prepared for the students. They included games as well as academic components. Sara and Jasmine engaged in many alternative forms of assessment. They enjoyed involving the students in hands-on assessments. Sara

remembered a project she conducted in her class and was gratified to see the students successfully complete the tasks.

Ayesha did not engage in many formal assessments. She confided that she preferred informal ones. "I am not a standard test giver, but I really try to work on alternative forms of assessment and even standardised testing. How can I do that in such a way that it will not be so hard on the students?" Ayesha appeared to be an advocate of assessments that were not formal, and test-oriented. She shared the same sentiments as many other teachers about the nature of testing of beginner level students.

These findings are in keeping with the literature that teachers can reflect on issues, and have a thoughtful contextualised sense of teaching, and must ultimately make their own choices about preferred goals and practices (Kennedy, 1989). Although they were constrained by the formal assessments required by the institute, these teachers were, nevertheless, reflecting on alternative forms of assessment.

Nadia recalled how she assessed a particular student by negotiating with her about how to grade a paper:

> *The other day I had a situation with a student where she had to evaluate some work, and she gave herself a hundred. The work to my mind was not worth a hundred, it was late, and it was just the way she had done her work, and so I was trying to get her to re-evaluate it. I had engaged her with conversation and she became very defensive about what I had been saying and I realised that I shouldn't push it any further and then I had to think about that and how I should approach her. I ended up writing her a letter with her evaluation and talking about that, and basically she found that I was really trying to help her. So I have had to do a lot of thinking about how to negotiate about it.*

Nadia's reflection demonstrated how she struggled with a problem and the solution she arrived at (Schön, 1983;1987).

Salma related her assessment practices to working with all types of students. She shared her thoughts on school expectations and assessments:

> *Often the school values and tests a certain set of things that highlight students' weaknesses and they start to feel bad about themselves. So it's really unfair because some students aren't gifted. It's just that they do not possess the strengths that schools see.*

Salma's reflection focused on how schools concentrate on testing in order to demonstrate students' achievements. This teacher was aware of what is required by the educational system, yet she grappled with the difficulties that students with different needs may face in such a context.

5.5.3 Diversity of abilities

The six teachers reflected on their students with special needs. This theme was very evident throughout the discourse with the teachers. They talked about it in the interviews, and some of them wrote about students with special needs in their journals.

Jasmine's sensitivity and empathy for students with special needs were particularly apparent. They appeared the primary medium for her reflection, which, as the following excerpts show, included evidence of all of van Manen's (1977) levels of reflection in teaching (technical, practical and critical). During our first interview, for instance, she responded to a comment about students with learning difficulties by suggesting a technical solution. She elaborated:

> *I would prefer to put them in so-called 'normal' classes .. .a few in each class and give them special attention. They would be in a better environment. If they were all in the same class, they'd all be distracting each other.*

During Jasmine's second interview, she commented, ''Although Rima didn't appear to be concentrating or taking anything in, I think she actually learnt a great deal. She just expresses her learning in a different way, and I had to learn to accept and respect that''. By beginning to question what constitutes evidence of learning, she appeared, here, to be engaging in practical reflection. A few weeks after this, she focused on issues of equity arising from differential treatment of students with special needs, suggesting that she might have been beginning to reflect in a more critical manner. She wrote:

> *I see a lot of myself in Sahar...What affected me so deeply today was the realisation that although the students single her out so blatantly, it goes unnoticed by the staff. Even they always call her 'Sahar Mohammed Al Jaberi' even though there are no other students at the institute called Sahar, and all the other students are always called only by their first names.*

Jasmine displayed stronger evidence of some movement towards critical reflection towards the end of the study, when concerned about moral and ethical implications of inequitable practices. She noted:

> *Nada would always work with the students of a high academic ability. I found that students of lesser ability were very frustrated because of the lack of interaction with their teacher. I think that they were suffering emotionally and academically by being excluded.*

These comments exemplified the main focus of her reflections but highlighted the diversity of the nature of her reflection within the focus. They also suggested that she drew on her own childhood experiences (Bennett, 1999).

Sara talked about lesson planning to meet the needs of the different ability levels in her classroom. She said she had to shift her gaze from what she was doing in the curriculum to the needs of the students:

> *In teaching the lower ability students, there was a lot of behavioural, emotional [all kinds of problems] in that classroom with the different students... a lot of challenges. I had to sit back and say, okay, what do these students need? How can I address their needs? Instead of me, I had a look at what they needed. That helped me then and since then I am always looking at the students and what they need.*

Sara's explication suggests that she struggled with the problem of meeting different students' needs in the classroom, but was able to find ways to accommodate those needs. She was alert to the special needs of her students and recognised that students' learning rates differed. Sara was one of the few participants to engage frequently in critical reflection. In the following extract, she mentions three students from different backgrounds and with differing literacy skills with whom she taught during the second semester. She refers to: ''Muna who comes from Saudi Arabia and has only been in the UAE since the beginning of this year. She is a very good writer''; Sarah ''who is much older than Muna but can't write nearly as well'; and Alyazia, who was receiving 'special support' for her writing difficulties but was ''doing very well ... and developing at a much faster rate than Sarah''. Sara noted that Alyazia's parents, like Muna's, ''because of their beliefs about education [were] providing ... a lot of encouragement and support at home'' but that Sarah's parents ''don't seem to assist her to extend her learning''. She was concerned that ''even though Sarah really needs special support, testing has shown that she doesn't qualify for it''.

Because eligibility criteria took into account only current proficiency and not students' backgrounds, Sara predicted that ''a lot of students who need more support end up falling further and further behind''. She was one of the few teachers in the study who considered the implications of policy for perpetuating disadvantage and inequality. As such, she seemed more insightful about issues relating to social equity and justice than any of the other teachers (Bennett, 1999).

Ameera became increasingly aware of what she referred to as the many dilemmas faced by novice teachers, as shown by the following example of dialogic reflective writing (Hatton & Smith, 1995). She voiced:

> *There are dilemmas. What if a student comes through unnoticed? What if a student is wrongly labelled? What is the difference between 'slow progress' and 'being at-risk'? It is the fine line between these last questions that makes it so difficult. At what point should a student's development be a cause for concern? How long should you leave everything to try and resolve itself before you step in?*

Rather than acting as a springboard for wide ranging practical or critical reflection, though, her awareness of these dilemmas tended to lead to a rather narrow technical outlook. Towards the end of the academic year, she was confident that she had resolved them. She wrote in her journal:

> *Knowing the answers to all the early teaching questions, I have the feeling that the answers are the same for these questions, too. It would be up to the individual student and the individual situation – what the risk is, what the family wants, and what resources are available.*

Ameera recalled feelings of panic in her first year of teaching "because no one had given me a booklet which set out what I had to do. I remember thinking, 'When are you going to tell me what to do?' ''. Gradually, she realised that she needed to be a more proactive novice teacher. As she commented, ''After four

years of study, I am convinced that the knowledge is there somewhere. I just have to find it and put it together in a way that gives me maximum results''. She also reported moving away from the absolute position which characterises received knowing and towards a position of constructed knowing. ''I think I can see things more holistically. Things are not black and white. And I can see that there are different arguments''. Initially, there seemed to be a corresponding change in her reflection, which in her early journal entries, was mainly technical (van Manen, 1977) in nature. She referred, for example, to:

> *...thinking all the time about the right way to respond to the students. It wasn't that I didn't know how to respond – I'd been taught that at university – but I was trying to practice what I'd learnt.*

During our final interview, however, after Ameera had worked with a variety of student levels and diverse backgrounds, her reflection now extended beyond a narrow technical focus and included broader educational issues.

Ayesha explained her concern for students with concealed special needs. She felt that these students were often overlooked by the teachers:

> *I think a lot about how to reach those students who don't fit the public school model, there's lots of that, and I think there is a tendency to work with students who seem most troubled. Sometimes we forget to realise there are issues for other students who seem like everything is okay.*

Ayesha also wrote about students with special needs in her reflection journal. She looked at the ways in which her students had grown, and the trust one particular learner had placed in her as her teacher:

> *I feel honoured that Sabrina sees me as one of the adults in her life that she can trust. She asks for my advice and help on projects. She completes her assignments, and, while they are not completed like her other classmates, they are at the level that Sabrina is comfortable with. Small steps...for a child realising she can walk. I have learned two things*

from Sabrina, never underestimate the power of kindness and never judge a book by its cover.

This acknowledgement by Ayesha as she reflected on the diverse needs of her students is one that many teachers strive for, that the students come to trust them.

Nadia demonstrated a missionary zeal when she advocated for students with special needs throughout the interview. She was adamant in her views that reflection is important to determine the needs of students and felt that reflection is a pre-requisite to accommodating their needs. She was especially critical of teachers who are not reflective of their practice:

If you are not a reflective person, you would not see the needs of students. You will distribute your curriculum, and you would collect your assessment and that would be the end of it. You would assign grades on the relative accomplishments of everybody in that class. If you are a reflective person, you can look and see their needs, and you can try to meet those needs. The kids, if nothing else, start to feel like they can do it. If you take the area where they are comfortable, take their interest and take their strengths, you take what they do and you use these strengths to have them reach the things that they think they can't reach.

The issue of the diversity of students seemed to matter much to the teachers who constantly reflected on their concerns for students with special needs. The teachers demonstrated their knowledge of what was required by their students with diverse learning needs, when they spoke about meeting this challenge. The fact that they took this responsibility very seriously was much in evidence in their responses in the interviews and the journals.

5.5.4 Multicultural issues

Five teachers identified multicultural issues as important and linked this to their learning theories and their personal feelings only. One teacher did not consider multicultural issues, and she stated that this was a "race" matter. Sara pondered on the differences in the students' racial backgrounds, and felt that she had to consider the growing diversity of races that was found in the classrooms in the Nursing Institute today. She reflected, "How can I bring in a lot of our children that do come from other countries or have relatives in other countries? I have to try and draw them into the conversations". She then deliberated on the activities that she could have done to address multiculturalism in the classroom:

Another thing I should have been more aware of, and I should have done more of was to use some of the text books and literature we have here in the library. They need to be more reflective of the faces in the classroom,

so I should really do more of that. When I was growing up everything had a white face on it, we don't all have white faces today.

Jasmine expressed regret that multicultural issues were not incorporated into her teaching:

> *I regret that I did not do more multicultural teaching while I was here, [like] different books that I could have brought in to read. It is just something that I wish I could have done differently, because I think these books really should have been used in this class, things on multiculturalism.*

Both Sara and Jasmine were concerned by the absence of including multicultural topics in their daily instruction. According to Bennett (1999: 249):

> Effective multicultural lessons contain the same ingredients as any effective lesson. Plans for instruction are based on decisions about the nature of the learner, the nature of the subject matter, societal needs, and what is known about effective pedagogy. In addition, however, multicultural and global lessons are based upon a special rationale that clarifies the instructor's values and goals.

Data from the interviews illustrate that they were considering building multicultural perspectives into their ongoing curriculum. This consciousness reflects a rationale based upon these teachers' conceptions of their students, community, their subject matter and the value of multicultural education.

Ayesha and Nadia documented their concerns in their journals about ethnic minority students and the unique perspectives that their race engendered. Ayesha wrote about the only Somali girl in one of her classes. She reflected on her status as a minority in the Nursing Institute's community:

> *Amina is loud, purposefully obnoxious, disrespectful, antagonistic and prides herself on disrupting the class….She is the only Somali girl on this team. While there have been attempts to set up conferences with her parents, they have not shown up. They probably never will. They probably view the Nursing Institute the same way their daughter does, as a hostile environment. I wonder what would happen if we went to visit the parents. Might this make a difference instead of having the parents come here? I don't know. What I do know is that Amina is a minority in this environment. This environment does not support her needs or learning.*

Ayesha expressed concern that this student was not achieving because she did not live up to the institute's expectation. This reflection is one of many that the teachers put forward on multicultural issues. Indeed, I witnessed this particular student's negative behaviour during one of my classroom observations, and was able to validate Ayesha's worries.

Ameera emphasised the importance of multiculturalism and was very concerned about the lack of racial diversity of students in the Nursing Institute's population:

> *I think that diversity is very broad, but especially in this area. I think racial diversity is very important. There are not many different races in this area, so I think bringing in materials on different races is important.*

Nowadays, because of the diversity of students, multicultural issues are a fact of life. Rogovin, (1998) reminds teachers that the classroom can be a model for the world we would like to create with inquiry-based multicultural education as grounding for curriculum planning. The five teachers, who reflected on multicultural issues, demonstrated that they were aware of the issues related to teaching in a culturally diverse setting, and the importance of being prepared. Ameera stated that for her, diversity meant students with special needs: "When I think of diversity, I do not think race".

There were attempts on the part of the teachers to move beyond strictly technical levels of reflection on instructional matters and engage in critical reflection that incorporated ethical and moral criteria to judge their performance. This behaviour is characteristic of the social re-constructionist tradition of reflection (Zeichner, 1992). The teachers in this study were exposed to social re-constructionist principles that advocate social justice, where schooling and

teacher education are seen as crucial elements in the movement towards a more just society (MOH Folio, 1998). These kinds of reflections are in keeping with van Manen's (1977) technical and interpretive levels of reflections. The reflections shared are also in keeping with what Dewey (1933: 12) deemed "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".

This study tends to agree with Calderhead (1989) that teachers learn differently and interpret experiences differently. They were enlisted in the study with their own knowledge and perspectives. They spoke of how they defined reflection and how they learned to reflect. They engaged in collegial reflections with their peers and colleagues, in addition to me. The six teachers forwarded the different ways they approached reflection. They also reflected on important classroom issues, and demonstrated different levels of reflection. The reflective activities of these teachers gave a clear picture of how they were learning to reflect on their teaching, and ensured a continuation of the English programme.

I practised the act of reflecting as I followed the teachers during the course of a whole academic year. However, my reflections continued as I was conducting this research and working through the data to the analysis and writing up of this interpretive study. The reflections of the teachers mirror what transpired in the Nursing Institute. I was an active recipient of their reflections as they were of mine. The teachers caused me to reflect on my own practice, and the way I went about encouraging them to reflect. I learned to be more critical in my approach to reflection during the course of my study of these teachers and I am still learning for they made me reflect on many critical issues. I am now conscious that race is one determinant of how relationships are viewed in a multicultural setting. The

issue of race is one which I must constantly deal with because of my place as a teacher educator who has to facilitate for teachers of all races. As a teacher educator, I continue to reflect on the technical, as well as the moral and ethical criteria of education.

Chapter Six

Conclusions And Recommendations

6.0 OPENING REMARKS

Reflective practice has been touted as a reform effort (Tom, 1992; Valli, 1992; Zeichner, 1993) and a conceptual orientation in many contemporary teacher education programs (Valli 1992; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). However, very few studies have been conducted about how teachers perceive the process of reflection and how they come to understand themselves as beginning reflective practitioners (Kabilan, 2007; Sax, 1999; Richert, 1990). Instead, research on reflective practice has primarily focused on conditions that promote reflective practice (Dinkleman, 1997; Golubich, 1997; Richert, 1990), growth in reflective thinking (Caillouet, 1998; Cates-Draper, 1998) and the context of reflection (Gonzales, 1998; Meyer, 1999). My desire to understand reflection as a conceptual orientation and a reform effort in teacher education motivated me to conduct this study which presents the views of six Arab EFL teachers as they interpret their understanding of reflection and their experiences in a longitudinal study over one academic year. I hope that this research which was designed to offer an in-depth view of teachers' perceptions of reflection, and the process, context and content of their reflections (Calderhead, 1989), has succeeded.

6.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

As an educator interested in reform, I undertook this study to better understand reflection in teacher education. My study was also born out of a personal interest in professional development. I wanted to gain further insights into the teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, and in particular, to explore their teaching by

systematically reflecting on their daily activities for it is my belief that teachers can gain professional growth in pedagogy. I chose an interpretive orientation because I wished to focus on the meanings these teachers attribute to reflection.

The focus of this study was to discover how six Arab EFL teachers practising at the Institutes of Nursing (ION) understood and interpreted reflective practice. Also, my goal was to share the perceptions and experiences of these participants through presentation of their verbal comments and their journal writings. As a participant observer in this study, I journeyed with the teachers in their professional development over one year, and faithfully recorded my observations of their teaching practice and other events. The study was guided by five main research questions:

i. How do the teachers perceive and understand the concept of reflection?
ii. What methods do these teachers use to describe how they learn to reflect on their practice?
iii. In what contexts do they engage in reflective practice?
iv. What do the teachers reflect upon in their practice?
v. Does my subjectivity evolve throughout the study?

The use of qualitative research was the perfect tool to uncover the processes and meanings of the participants in this study. The role of the qualitative researcher is to find out how the people being studied understand their world (Delamont, 1992). In using an exploratory design, I examined the perception and experiences of teachers to determine how the elements of reflective practice work in their experience. By selecting a symbolic interaction

theoretical and methodological approach to present, analyse and interpret the data, I wished to bring out the essence and details of the topic being studied. A symbolic interaction analytical framework allows rich and vivid descriptions of the events relevant to the subjects being studied. It blends the description of events with the analysis of them as it focuses on a group of six teachers, and seeks to comprehend their perceptions of events, and to highlight specific experiences that are relevant to reflective practice.

This qualitative research shows how theory and practice can be synthesised and demonstrates that the acquisition of reflective skills is a complex and lengthy process which takes time and perseverance. It establishes that teachers learn differently and interpret new experiences differently in addition to displaying distinct levels of reflection. The correlation between the social and professional aspects is undeniable and is evidenced by the study. Also, owing to the diversity of students, multicultural issues are now a fact of life. Furthermore, this research has shown the significance of collegiality and the teachers' preference for oral reflection. Evidence from my study suggests all six participants highly valued reflection on teaching as a vehicle for professional development. Thus, a pedagogy aimed at encouraging, promoting and developing reflection in all educational establishments in the Arab world, needs to be devised.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study throws light on several issues of the teaching profession in the UAE which have direct or indirect correlation to professional development/self-reflection for expatriate EFL teachers. The results of this study and the related literature call for a number of recommendations for future research:

i. The findings in the study indicate that it is a worthwhile endeavour that teacher educators continue with their efforts to develop reflection in the education system. The teachers used reflection as a conceptual device to help them think about their knowledge, and better their teaching skills. Another important piece of research will be to hear the views of faculty in the English programme to understand their perspective on how to encourage teachers to become reflective practitioners. The teachers themselves, when asked in the interviews, made some suggestions to introduce and/or improve reflective practice. Some of them are realistic but others are totally impractical.

ii. Further studies in the UAE are required to investigate the long-term changes in teachers' knowledge and practice as related to reflection. The teachers in this study all questioned their teaching practices whilst engaging in reflective practice. The findings showed that teachers found reflection helped them to critically assess their daily teaching. Therefore, a longitudinal study that investigates the long-term influences of reflection on teaching practices would be beneficial to education. Such a study would track a group of novice teachers until they are more experienced and examine how their attitudes and ability to engage in reflective practices changes, in addition to a consideration of how their teaching practice is shaped by the institution in which they work. A series of reflective practice case studies would be valuable to chart the ways that the use of reflective practice impacts upon various practitioners.

iii. Regular workshops/seminars to encourage reflective practices should be an integral part of academic life. In addition, establishments should introduce

a scheme of a quarterly compulsory training day with a main focus on pedagogy. These forums would provide the opportunity for teachers to stage mock lessons, demonstrate various teaching techniques and exchange views. I am convinced that this would assist all educators in adopting writing reflective practices that would no longer be perceived as burdensome but rather as gratifying and most rewarding. Also, leaning towards writing activities to develop teachers' ways of instilling critical reflection should be actively encouraged as an ongoing process. In addition, diverse ways of writing to develop critical reflection should be implemented, and research into the various ways of writing reflections should be carried out.

iv. I am adamant in my belief that teachers who participate in professional development that includes reflective practice as a conceptual orientation should be exposed to the seminal works of Dewey (1933), Schön (1983, 1987), and van Manen (1977). Many contemporary writers such as Calderhead (1989, 1991), Tom (1992), Valli (1990, 1991, 1992), Zeichner & Liston (1987), and Zeichner (1992) have all conducted research, and written many position papers on reflective practice. One way of facilitating this (knowing people's aversion to complex theoretical pieces), might be to encourage teachers to attend lectures/presentations where speakers, with a view to appealing to a wider audience, would present seminal works on reflection in a 'digestible' format.

v. Although the issue of race is not an easy one to deal with since it is such a sensitive subject, it is a very real and insidious problem that should be tackled as a matter of urgency. Perhaps all educational institutions should draw up a code of practice discouraging improper conduct.

vi. Last but not least, in view of the high number of expatriate EFL teachers and in order to standardise school curriculum and teaching techniques, pertinent measures should be considered and implemented by the Ministry of Higher Education. Perhaps there is need for a teacher qualification similar to the England and Wales Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) where everyone aspiring to teach in the state system regardless of experience needs to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

6.3 CONCLUSIONS

Through this research, I wanted to determine to what extent teachers had become reflective practitioners. What I found was that they had been introduced to reflection via the programme providers, their peers/colleagues, their university professors, workshops and this study, and that they had individually received it and incorporated it into their own personal philosophies, perspectives and views of things.

The teachers were extremely positive about their teaching practice experiences whenever they were encouraged to engage in reflection and inquire about their own practice (McLean, 1999). Canning (1991) believes that reflection during teaching experiences allows for discovery and synthesis of understanding into a personal and world-view. We must be mindful that reflection in teaching is a process, and becoming a truly reflective teacher involves time, experience, and inevitably, a bit of wear around the edges (Brubacher et al., 1999).

Relationships were significant in the teachers' engagement in reflection, and although at times they felt that there were too many written reflective tasks, they all related how they reflected by themselves or in collaboration with others. They shared the reflective experiences that they particularly enjoyed in their

classes. The teachers generally viewed their peers as role models, and engaged in mostly verbal reflection with them. They used their peers as support and listened to their advice and reflected on it.

As I look back on the year that I spent with the teachers, I am astonished by the knowledge I have gained from my interactions with them. I have learnt some valuable lessons that I share with those of us who are teacher educators committed to the advancement of reflective practice as a valuable conceptual orientation in which to ground professional development. I have learned that it is possible to encourage teachers to reflect, not only on the technical aspects, but also on the social and moral issues they face in the classroom. I have discovered that teachers are introduced to reflection by their university professors, and/or cooperating teachers. This facilitates their growth as beginning reflective practitioners.

As a researcher, I have at times struggled with the large data and consulted on numerous occasions with my fellow research associates and another colleague to review the themes. Occasionally I was overwhelmed by the abundance of data. However, I persevered, and with time was able to slowly piece together the data to exemplify the themes that have emanated out of it. The themes evolved as the data became clearer. In many instances, I had to modify them to reflect deeper meanings of the data. I was always conscious of my desire to do it 'the right way', knowing full well there is no right way in qualitative research.

There were numerous inter-relationships among themes. For example, the theme "reflection is based on self and significant others" definitely interacted with the themes "self reflections," and "encountering peers". This interaction is an indication that the social processes are not discrete. Rather, they operate in

conjunction with each other, shaping the understandings and experiences of the teachers, whilst their meanings remain socially derived. However, some themes exemplified the reflections of the teachers as an individual process.

My years of leaning towards the positivist way of conducting research made it difficult to write in the narrative form. The 'I' in the dissertation slowly replaced 'the researcher' as I continued to write and revise this study. I also realised that as an ordinary instructor it was relatively simple to reach complete objectivity and guide colleagues through their own research programmes. Similarly, this study has been an exercise in self-reflectivity, as I struggled to understand my 'self' in this journey. The participants who ranged from their twenties to older individuals, all imparted different levels of wisdom and grew in confidence on their journeys. They showered me with words ranging from positive encouragement for the English programme to personal accolades. I am not unduly concerned that their words may be superficial because this was also my journey. As Pinar (1988: 150) argues, "understanding the self is not narcissism, it is a pre-condition and concomitant condition to the understanding of others".

I gained insights from the participants who willingly shared their perspectives and learning with me. As a result of doing this study, I was able to strengthen my knowledge of reflective practice in teacher education. My personal philosophy has also been fortified, and I am able to reflect on my experiences in education. It is now possible to further base my practice on other educational theories that I have come across in completing this study.

I have sought to put on center stage the teachers who are often not heard. In doing so, I feel that they have been empowered by sharing their experiences with others. Empowerment is one goal that we strive for as teachers. In the same way the feminist literature affords women power through voice, so too

beginning reflective practitioners can share their views in the hope that they will be heard, and teacher educators will continue to provide teachers with the experience that would empower them as reflective practitioners.

6.4 FINAL THOUGHTS

As a teacher educator who set out to understand how teachers learned to practise reflection, I felt privileged to have observed the many facets of the journeys of the six participants. I rediscovered that teaching and learning are collaborative ventures where the learner must want to learn and be comfortable with learning. I acknowledge that teachers join the profession at different levels of development and from different backgrounds. I have learned that different teaching styles match different learning styles. In the end I am richer for having completed this study because I have listened closely to these six individuals and I have grown tremendously. It is hoped that the stories of these teachers encourage other teachers to pursue or embark on their own journey toward reflective practice. It is also hoped that in turn they will inspire professors, peers and colleagues to examine how they work with newcomers to the profession.

Appendix A

Information and Consent Form

Investigator: Helen Constantinou

Title of Study: Reflection in Education: An Exploration of EFL Teachers' Conceptions of Reflective Practice in the UAE

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to identify ways in which Arab EFL teachers understand and experience reflective practice. I would like to identify and describe the opportunities provided for in the institute you are working in for reflective practice.

2. PROCEDURES

If you choose to participate in this research project, I would like to conduct an interview with you, at least one, but there may be another, to clarify issues that come up in the first interview. The interview(s) will be held at a time convenient to you. These interviews will be approximately one hour in length but can be longer if you wish to continue. In these interviews, I want to ask you about your perception regarding reflective practice and the ways you go about using reflective practice in your daily teaching. I would also like to ask you about the opportunities you have to reflect on your practice with the students. In addition, an area that interests me is the support given to you by the different people you work with which assist you in building reflective skills. The interviews will be opened ended, that is although I will have written questions, I will be able to ask any follow up question(s) which will allow you to address issues that are not covered in the written questions. You are free to stop the interview at any time, or you do not have to answer a question if you do not wish to. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed; the transcript will be available to you on request. I am aiming at visiting you in your classrooms at least twice during each semester at pre-arranged times convenient to you. I would also like to request copies of your weekly reflection journals which you have been writing this semester. These journals will help me to look closely at the ways in which you reflect on your practice.

3. BENEFITS

I believe the benefits of this study will be the usefulness of the results to us involved in teacher education. By studying the process of reflective practice of Arab EFL teachers, it can lead to increased awareness of the strengths of reflective inquiry and its place in teacher education in the United Arab Emirates. There will be no payment for your involvement.

4. ANONYMITY & CONFIDENTIALITY

Information gathered in this research project will be treated as confidential. It will be used only for the project by the investigator as stated above. All information collected in the forms of interviews and transcripts, and journals will be destroyed after completion of the research project. I will ascribe to you a pseudonym to allow the greatest degree of anonymity.

5. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. You can also refuse to answer any question posed to you in the interview. If you wish to withdraw from the project, or if you have any questions, you can do so simply by informing me personally or by contacting me at 050 4439870 or 02-6423444 ext. 25. Your signature below means that you have read this form and agree to its conditions. You will be offered a copy of this form.

I wish to participate: _____
(Name)

_____
(Signature) (Date)

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Thank you for taking part in my study. As you are aware, I am working on my dissertation and the topic is on reflective practice. I would like to get your perspective of reflection and your experiences in this Nursing Institute. I have some questions that I want to ask you, but please feel free to elaborate on your answers; the more you can remember, the more I will be able to represent your views in the dissertation.

1. What degree do you hold?
2. What do you understand by the term 'reflection'?
3. What do you understand by the term 'reflective practice'?
4. When was the first time you heard the term 'reflection'?
5. Do you consider yourself a reflective person? Why?
6. How do you reflect on your practice?
7. What do you reflect on?
8. How did you learn to reflect?
9. Can you give me an example of a time when you engaged in reflection?
10. Where else do you get the opportunity to reflect?
11. How do you use these reflections?
12. Does anyone else help you to reflect on your practice?
13. How does your institution help you to reflect on your practice?
14. What are some of the activities you reflect on in the classroom?

Appendix C

Follow-Up Interview Guide

Thank you for allowing me to ask you some more questions. This time I would like you to elaborate some more on your reflections, and to give me a clearer picture of some of the events you talked about the last time we met. I want to find out a little more about you and your background so as I talk about you in my dissertation, I will present a more accurate picture of you.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself and what level(s) you teach.
2. Can you share with me some other examples of activities that you have participated in that incorporated reflection?
3. Last time you mentioned that your colleague(s) helped you to reflect. How did s/he help you to be reflective?
4. Are there other things that you reflected about in your classes or in the institute?
    - Can you give me some examples?
5. Do you think that reflection is important to teachers? Why?
6. Can you remember any particular thing about your teaching that you continually think about?

Appendix D

Follow-Up Interview Guide During Analysis of Data

Thank you for allowing me to ask you some more questions. This time I would like you to elaborate some more on your reflections, and to give me a clearer picture of some of the events you talked about the last time we met.

1. Do you think that reflection is important to teachers? Why?
2. Can you tell me if you benefited from reflecting on your practice over the current academic year?
3. Can you share with me some more examples of activities that you have participated in that incorporated reflection?
4. Are there other things that you reflected about in your classes or in the institute?
    - Can you give me some examples?

Appendix E

Participant's (Jasmine) Journal Entry

I had a very frustrating experience in class today. Although I did everything I could while preparing the lesson to make the lesson interesting, the students barely participated at all. They each sat in their chairs, staring at me throughout the lesson. They never asked any questions, had any comments or even nodded their heads occasionally. I truly felt like I was talking to myself the whole time. I tried to relate the subject of the lesson to their own lives. I tried to center the lesson on them as much as possible. Nothing worked! They remained still in their chairs and as quiet as stones no matter how badly I tried to get them interested and motivated to participate. It's days like these that make me question my ability to stay in the teaching profession much longer.

Appendix F

A Selection Of Participants' Quotes Documenting Daily Teaching Experiences

Ameera
I took this teaching composition class that helped me to learn how to reflect on my teaching skills and helped me to learn how to teach better, more professional.

Looking back on an experience one has encountered to see what one could change to make it better next time, or to improve one's skills.

I think that it's really important to be able to understand other people's points of view. You have to be able to take in other points of view to be able to work well as a team. Because not everyone thinks the same as you do. I feel very strongly about that.

Ayesha
You may have an objective, but you are seeing that your objectives are not being met, so you think, well, what did I do wrong? How can I do this to make it better? So it is the snag in the road that I am seeking to remove.

I had to re-evaluate all of the lessons, and I would not do them in the same way again, if I had to. So it is the experience you have that makes you go back and think about how you can do it differently to make it more solid.

Some of my students are growing up in a world where they have issues … and how can I help them to become healthy balanced adults who care about one another, who are active citizens and who are socially active? That's what I often think about.

Jasmine
I am the sort of a person who looks at whatever I am doing and ask myself afterwards what I should have done differently, what I could have changed. I just never gave it a name.

I just keep thinking about things, I write about them, think about them, I just think about things that I'm doing and reflect on that.

I had to look at what I wanted to cover, what of course would fit the objectives and outcomes, what my programme coordinator wanted me to cover, and also what would be engaging for the students.

Nadia
Reflection is constantly thinking about and re-evaluating, thinking about the actions that you need to see improvements. It is thinking about what you do as the teacher, thinking about how the students are responding to you. Look at all the ways that they do respond to you and in their actions, what they write, anything that you can notice, not just the things that were traditionally formally assessed or whatever. I think that one of the most important parts of teaching is that you really feel like your students can learn.

You really need to pay attention to all the little details of what the student is telling you, and you need to integrate those things with the sound theory that you know. You need to think about all these things so that you can respond in a good way.

I taught a writing unit and after every lesson I wrote a reflection when it went wrong. I had the opportunity to teach it twice. So the first time it was bad and the second time it was better because I thought about how I was going to fix it.

Salma
Reflection is about finding ways to improve my teaching. I want my students to learn.

If you want to reflect, you can do it any time, any place. This is the beauty of it.

For me the journal helps in terms of writing it down and figuring out what I should do about things in the classrooms, but it has also been good practice because things happen and you don't quite realise what to do, and sometimes for me writing helps.

Sara
The graduate seminar that I took in my final teaching practice helped me to understand what reflection was because I had to write journals every day, and that helped me to reflect on what I was doing in the classroom.

I reflect on my lesson plans; I look at those and see what I could have done differently. I go back and think about how I thought of a situation then, how I think about it now … Have my thoughts and feelings changed? Would I have handled anything differently? So I go back and reflect over my reflections, I just keep thinking about it.

I make adaptations for students who are not keeping up. In a measurement project I did with them, I saw that they were having difficulty analysing the work, so I slowed down, condensed the information so they could actually see what each measurement represented. I knew some of the students needed visuals.

I believe strongly in reflection and analysis, utilising my strengths and working on my weak areas, always keeping the student in mind.

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