“Reflection commences when one inquires into his or her experiences and relevant knowledge to find meaning in his or her beliefs. It has the potential to enable teachers to direct their activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view.”

John Dewey, 1933
It is vitally important that teachers reflect on their teaching processes and procedures on an ongoing basis. Monitoring successes and challenges before, during, and after teaching provides timely input for adapting instruction that results in robust learning experiences for students.

Questions for Reflection as You Read the Chapter

1. What does it mean to be a reflective teacher?
2. What is the difference between reflection and reflective action?
3. Why is it important to reflect on our teaching as it relates to the students’ learning?

A View into the Classroom

Susan McCloskey is a first-grade teacher in an inner-city school where most of her students are learning English as a second language. Susan has been teaching for 8 years, and during that time her school district has adopted a number of different programs in reading and language arts. For the past 2 years, the primary-grade teachers in her district have been trained in a phonics program that relates each of the sounds of the alphabet to an animal. The students are taught the sounds by singing a song and making motions to help them remember the sound represented by the letter and the animal whose name begins with the sound. Susan is concerned about this new phonics program and its appropriateness for her students who have limited knowledge of the English language and the animal names.

One morning during writing workshop, one of her students, Thao, asks her how to spell the word house. As she always does, Susan asks, “What do you hear at the beginning?” Thao immediately begins to make the sound he hears. “Huh-huh-huh,” he says. Susan then asks, “Which letter do you use to spell that sound?” Thao just shakes his head.

Maria, who is standing next to Thao, starts to make the motion for the horse, which is the animal used to connect the sound and letter H in the phonics program. Thao still shakes his head. Susan takes both Thao and Maria over to the alphabet strip that she has displayed at the students’ eye level in the classroom. Next to the letter H is a picture of a horse, the animal that represents the sound in the phonics program. Susan asks, “What is the letter we use to spell the sound “Huh”? Although the letter is clearly displayed next to the picture of the horse, neither child is able to identify the letter. Susan has each child trace the letter H on the alphabet strip and say “H” as they trace the letter, and Thao returns to his seat to continue work on his story.

Susan reflects on this interaction at the end of the day. She is concerned that this new phonics program seems to assume that her students are familiar with the English labels for the animals. The program requires about 45 minutes a day in which the students are singing the song that connects the animals, the animal motions, and the letters. Susan knows that the first-grade language arts standards require that her students be able to represent sounds with letters in writing but do not require that those sounds be taught in any specific way, so she makes an appointment with her principal to discuss this problem.

Susan describes the scene that occurred in her classroom and explains to Mrs. Calmes, her principal, that these incidents seem to occur frequently. Mrs. Calmes asks Susan what she believes would work better than this prescribed phonics strategy.
“I think my students need a much more direct connection between the letters and the sounds,” responds Susan. “I want to try an approach one of my professors explained in my master’s class the other evening.”

“What does this other approach entail?” asks Mrs. Calmes.

“My professor demonstrated the use of drawing the letters in the air while singing a song that connects the name of the letter and the sound it makes,” explains Susan. “I think that will make a more direct connection for my students since they are not familiar with the names of the animals. The animals seem to be introducing another layer of information that confuses them,” she adds.

“I think you have a good solution,” replies Mrs. Calmes. “Give it a try and let me know how it works. Maybe we need to take another look at the new phonics program and see if it is serving our students well.”

“Thank you for listening,” replies Susan with a smile. “I’ll document how this works and keep you informed.”

“If it works well, I’ll want you to share your results with the rest of the primary teachers,” Mrs. Calmes reminds Susan.

**REFLECTING ON THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE**

As Susan’s story demonstrates, teachers are called upon to make many difficult decisions every day. In fact, it is quite possible that teachers make literally thousands of decisions every day. While it is not possible to reflect thoroughly on every decision, there are many occasions in which reflective teachers search their hearts and minds to find good solutions to problems that confront them and their students on a daily basis.

**The Reflective Action Model**

Our first chapter describes a method teachers can use to reflect on the many thorny issues that arise in their classrooms each day. We call our concept reflective action in teaching.

Our opening reflective action classroom example shows Susan McCloskey pondering over a phonics program that doesn’t seem to meet her students’ needs. After considering the problem, Susan talks to her principal and discusses another program that she feels might be more appropriate. Her principal, Mrs. Calmes, encourages Susan to try the new program and document the results, leaving the door open for further adaptations, if needed. This example shows Susan’s willingness and ability to reflect on changes that can be made to better meet the needs of her students.

In a recent study funded by the National Institutes of Health, researchers found that children have only a 1 in 14 chance of having a rich, supportive elementary school experience. The findings suggest that not enough time is focused on teachers being engaging and supportive. The overwhelming majority of classroom time, based on the observations of this study, is spent in passive teacher-directed activity. They also noted that classrooms can be dull, bleak places where students don’t get much teacher feedback or personal attention. These teachers consistently scored low on measures such as having “richness of instructional methods” and providing “evaluative feedback.” Such studies point out the importance of teachers’ constantly recognizing the need to evaluate their own teaching, especially as it relates to student needs and interests. The “whole child” is such an important part of our educational pursuits.

This model is a way of clarifying just how teachers think systematically about their practices and learn from their experiences. We wholeheartedly agree: Accomplished teachers are inventive in their teaching. They recognize the need to explore new findings and continue learning while incorporating ideas and methods developed by others. It is
important for teachers to seek the advice of others and draw on education research and scholarship to improve their practices. We illustrate this concept by showing a teacher investigating new methods that may help students learn better and by discussing the problem with trusted colleagues. Our teacher uses reflective action to take new actions that will better fit students’ needs. We cannot overemphasize the importance of teachers thinking systematically about their practices and learning from experience.

Definitions of Reflective Thinking and Action

In *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*, Dewey (1993) defined reflective thinking as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it” (p. 9). An analysis of this carefully worded statement creates a powerful verbal image of the reflective thinker and correlates with the concept presented here of a person consciously choosing to use reflective action in teaching:

- **Active** — Voluntarily and willingly taking responsibility for personal actions.
- **Reflective** — Searching for information and solutions to problems that arise in the classroom; identifying the strengths and needs of individual students.
- **Persistent** — Being committed to thinking through difficult issues in depth; consistently and continually fine-tuning teaching approaches.
- **Relational** — Striving for quality interactions in the classroom to set the tone for learning.
- **Evidence seeking** — Trying new approaches while documenting their effectiveness and making adaptations based on evidence in the form of student learning.

Although persistent and careful thinking is important to the reflective teacher, such thinking does not automatically lead to change and improvement. Dewey (1937) also acknowledged the importance of translating thought into action and specified that attributes of open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness are needed for teachers to translate their thoughts into reflective actions.

The Reflective Practitioner

Schon (1990) concurs with Dewey and others’ (1937) emphasis on action as an essential aspect of the reflective process. He defines the reflective practitioner as one who engages in “reflection-in-action.” This kind of thinking includes observing and critiquing our own actions and then changing our behaviors based on what we see. Reflection in action gives rise to an on-the-spot experiment. We define a problem, consider how we have addressed it in the past, and then think up and try out new actions to test our tentative understandings of them. This process helps us determine whether our moves change things for the better. An on-the-spot experiment may work, or it may produce surprises that call for further reflection and experiment.

Schon (1990) also notes that reflectivity in teaching leads to “professional artistry,” a special type of competence displayed by some teachers when they find themselves in situations full of surprise, ambiguity, or conflict. Just as physicians respond to each patient’s unique array of symptoms by questioning, inventing, testing, and creating a new diagnosis, Schon believes that reflective teachers also respond to the unexpected by asking questions such as, “What are my students experiencing?” “What can I do to improve this situation?” “How does my students’ performance relate to the way I am teaching this material?”

Reflective thinking involves personal consideration of your own learning. It considers achievements and failures—what worked and what didn’t—and strives to find ways to improve (Given, 2002). It involves active metacognition: thinking about your own thinking.

Often, during the process of reflection, teachers find that a new, surprising event contradicts something they thought they already “knew.” When this happens, reflective individuals
are able to cope with paradoxes and dilemmas by reexamining what they already know, by restructuring their strategies, or by reframing the problem. They often invent on-the-spot experiments to put their new understandings to the test or to answer the puzzling questions that have arisen from the event.

Reflective action is made up of many elements and is related to an individual’s willingness to be curious and assertive in order to increase self-awareness, self-knowledge, and new understandings of the world in which we live and work. It is not something that occurs easily for most of us, and it takes time to develop. Writing of this idea, Brubacher, Case, and Reagan (1994) cite the children’s story *The Velveteen Rabbit* to suggest that becoming a reflective practitioner has much in common with the process of becoming “real.” As the Skin Horse explained to the Rabbit, becoming “real” takes time and happens after a toy has been loved so much that it loses its hair and becomes shabby. In the same way, becoming a truly reflective teacher involves time, experience, and inevitably a bit of wear around the edges!

Developing reflective practitioners has become a goal of many institutions educating future teachers. In a recent survey of websites of colleges and universities engaged in teacher education, we found one of the most common visions stated to be “to develop reflective practitioners.” Research in the role of reflection in developing effective teachers (Bracken & Bryan, 2010) shows reflection as an important part of self-evaluation and growth in new teachers and teachers-in-training.

**Developing as a Reflective Practitioner**

Reflective thinking is a learned behavior that requires time and practice to develop and improve. Starting this process during the teacher education process is vital if it is to become a part of your daily routine. Some ways to ensure that you, as a teacher-in-training, develop the habits and skills needed to become a reflective practitioner include:

1. Take the time to reflect on all lessons that you plan and teach. Keeping a reflective journal where you write your thoughts after each lesson is one way to monitor your own development and the effectiveness of your teaching. Reflect on your organization, presentation, and interaction with students while also focusing on the reactions, successes, and any obvious confusions that the students exhibit. Make a practice of identifying areas in which you want to improve and documenting your progress in your journal.

2. Video- or audiotape yourself teaching. Review the recordings, focusing on your instruction and the responses of the students. Reflect on the clarity of your explanations and interactions with the students. Do you have to repeat directions? How can you clarify your instruction in order to avoid unnecessary repetitions? Do your interactions with the students sound like you are interested in them? Are you actively listening to their input? How often do you give encouragement? Reflecting on the lesson requires thought and focus. Your goal is to improve your teaching in future lessons.

3. Identify students who seem to need more assistance from you. Document the times you need to work individually with particular students and the results of those interactions. Keep track of the approaches you try, and reflect on their effectiveness. Be sure you allow time for students to become comfortable with new approaches before changing them. Be sure you are alert to indications from them that they are not benefiting from any of the interactions. Don’t be afraid to talk to the students and get their verbal reactions to new approaches.

**Reflective Action Builds on Withitness**

This book describes classroom strategies and methods that you can use to become a caring and reflective teacher so that you will thrive in the classroom, not just “get by.” We believe that two major traits help teachers achieve the kind of caring relationships that encourage students to relate to ideas, to their peers, and to others in their world. The first trait is withitness, which refers
to a combination of caring and perceptiveness that allows teachers to focus on the needs of their students. The second trait, reflective action, is rooted in withitness. It is the ability to monitor your own behaviors, feelings, and needs and to learn from your mistakes. One of the most important things you can do to develop both withitness and reflective action is to get to know yourself and understand your own needs and desires for approval and acceptance from your prospective students. We will return to this theme repeatedly because your need to receive respect and affection from your students is something you must come to recognize and deal with effectively before you can care for others.

We will begin by examining the concept of withitness and then describe reflective action as it relates to withitness.

**Defining Withitness**

When you go into classrooms and observe teachers at work, you probably are curious to discover the differences between classrooms that are well managed and those that are disorderly and chaotic. Kounin (1977) hypothesized that smoothly functioning classrooms were governed by a clear set of rules and that chaotic classrooms had vague rules and discipline strategies. When he took his video camera into classrooms, however, he found that his hypothesis was wrong. What he observed was that the most smoothly functioning classrooms were those that were led by a teacher whose management style was characterized by a high degree of alertness and the ability to pay attention to more than one thing at the same time.

Kounin (1977) labeled the teacher characteristic that distinguished good classroom managers from poor ones as **withitness**. Good classroom managers, he observed, knew what was going on in their classrooms at all times. They were aware of who was working and who was not. They were also able to carry out their instruction while at the same time monitoring student behavior. In the midst of a sentence, they were willing and able to alter their lessons at the first sign of student restlessness or boredom. If a minor disruption occurred between students, the teacher perceived it immediately and was likely to walk toward a student, using eye contact that said, “I am watching you. You can’t get away with that behavior in here.”

Withitness is expressed more through teacher perceptiveness and behavior than through rules or harsh words. Eye contact, facial expressions, proximity, gestures, and actions such as stopping an activity demonstrate teacher withitness to students. These teachers are able to continue teaching a lesson while gesturing to a group or standing next to an overactive student who needs to refocus on the lesson. More importantly, the withit teacher can acknowledge students who are working well with a thumbs up, a smile, or a pat on the back, all while not interrupting the flow of the lesson. These are examples of the concept of **overlapping**, in which the teacher is able to deal with both student behavior and the lesson at the same time.

Kounin (1977) also studied what he called the **ripple effect**, a preventive discipline strategy that he found to be particularly useful in elementary classrooms. Kounin observed a student in his own college class reading a newspaper during the lecture. When Kounin reprimanded the student, he observed that his remarks caused changes in behavior among the other members of the class as well. Side glances to others ceased, whispers stopped, eyes went from windows or the instructor to notebooks on the desk. In subsequent observations in kindergarten classrooms, Kounin found that when teachers spoke firmly but kindly to a student, asking that student to desist from misbehavior, the other students in the class were also likely to desist from that behavior as well. When teachers spoke with roughness, however, the ripple effect was not as strong. Children who witnessed a teacher reprimand another child with anger or punitiveness did not conform more or misbehave less than those witnessing a teacher correcting another without anger or punitive actions.

Herrell and Jordan (2011) add another dimension to withitness, that of cultural sensitivity. They found that a culturally sensitive teacher not only evoked positive responses from students of other cultures but also started a ripple effect of cultural sensitivity among the students who spoke only English. This cultural sensitivity involved the recognition of word meanings and nuances in the students’ first languages and the recognition of special aspects
of the second culture. It also involved expressing general admiration of a student's ability to function in more than one language.

Recent research in teaching effectiveness adds to our understanding of the importance of withitness. It also indicates ways that teachers can work toward making themselves more aware of their own responses to interactions with students.

Malcolm Gladwell (2008) identifies “the gift of noticing,” or withitness, as a vital attribute of a great teacher. Snoeyink's research (2008), using videos of student teachers, examined ways to improve withitness and reflectiveness to increase both teacher and student success.

**Reflective Action as It Relates to Withitness**

We all hear that it is good to be reflective and that teachers who are reflective are likely to grow and mature into excellent teachers. But what does it mean to be reflective, and how do you get that way? As educators, we want to create a word picture in our readers' minds that describes positive, caring, reflective teachers in action. We believe that reflectiveness starts with withitness, because it is first and foremost a type of perceptiveness. Perceptive, withit teachers constantly observe conditions and gather information to make good judgments about what is happening in a classroom and what can or should be done to address it. Withitness continually raises the quality and level of reflective thinking because it helps teachers observe more accurately and collect more complete information about classroom conditions. Reflective teachers plan for variations in student responses, constantly monitor students' reactions to classroom events, and are ready to respond when students show confusion or boredom. Reflective teachers actively monitor students during group activities and independent seat work, looking for signs that students need clarification of either the task or the teacher's expectations. They also consider the quality of developing student relationships, not how students interact with ideas, peers, and others in various settings.

Can withitness and reflective action be learned? We believe so. If you are willing to examine the cause-and-effect relationships in your classroom honestly and search for reasons for students' behaviors, then you are likely to develop withitness in the process. If you are willing to ask other adults to observe your interactions with students and give you feedback on how you respond to various situations, then you will be able to make changes and improve the quality of your withitness radar and responses. If you are willing to discuss classroom problems openly and honestly with your students in a problem-solving manner, then you are likely to learn from them what their signals mean.

When Michael Jordan (this book's co-author, not the basketball player) supervises student teachers, he always videotapes their lessons, focusing the camera on the children in the classroom. As he views the video with the student teachers, they always notice behaviors that they hadn’t seen while they were teaching. They begin to reflect on their own withitness and ways that they respond to various students. Some of their comments include:

- “I never noticed that puzzled look on Jeremy's face. He obviously was not understanding.”
- “My instructions must not be clear; look at how they're all asking each other what to do.”
- “I can’t believe that I never noticed how often I call on the same students.”

Principal and supervising teachers often note that withitness and reflective thinking grow with experience. They grow in a symbiotic way. The more withitness teachers develop, the more reflective they are likely to become. Similarly, the more reflective teachers are about how their own needs may conflict with the needs of their students, the more withitness they display. Withitness is gradually developed by teachers as they actively reflect on the effects of their actions and decisions on their students' behavior.

For example, a beginning teacher may gradually become aware that her lessons are too long for students' attention spans. From that time on, she will be sensitive to whether a
particular lesson is moving too slowly or lasting too long. On another day, the teacher may notice that whenever eye contact is made with a certain student, the student ceases to misbehave; the teacher reflects on this and actively begins to use eye contact as a way to connect not only with this student but also with others. Then, after further observation and discussion with a colleague, the teacher may also become aware that in some cultures children avoid eye contact with adults as a sign of respect. In response to a serious disruption, the teacher may notice that using a strong, confident voice causes the students to pay attention, whereas using a tentative, meek voice causes their attention to wander. Through reflecting on these experiences, the teacher develops two effective strategies for redirecting student behavior and begins to learn which is more effective in a given situation. Her active self-reflection is the first step toward developing greater withitness, and her increasing withitness contributes to greater self-reflection.

**Improving Your Withitness**

Set up a video camera to focus on your students while you teach a lesson. After the lesson, view the video and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Which student behaviors did I notice and correct or commend?
2. Did I call on a variety of students?
3. Are there students whose expressions or actions indicate that they are not understanding the lesson?
4. What did I do to make the lesson appropriate for students who did not appear to be understanding it?
5. Did I move around the room so that all students were in my close proximity at times?
6. What do I need to do differently or more consistently next time?

Do this exercise periodically to note your improvements and consistency. To see characteristics of teachers who exhibit withitness, see Figure 1.1.

### Figure 1.1 Characteristics of a teacher who demonstrates withitness.

<table>
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<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| Teacher is alert and monitors multiple actions and behaviors at the same time. | • Teacher continues to teach and move into close proximity to students who are not listening.  
• Teacher points to correct part of textbook page for a student who looks confused. |
| Teacher provides timely correction/commendation for students as appropriate. | • Teacher monitors seat work and provides support and encouragement based on observation.  
• Teacher uses hand signals to let students know she is aware of student behaviors, both positive and negative, while continuing to teach. |
| Teacher adjusts lessons based on student restlessness, boredom, or confusion. | • Teacher plans several approaches to use in the event that the lesson is too hard or too easy for some students.  
• Teacher plans lessons that require all students to respond using a variety of methods such as individual whiteboards, show-me cards, or hand signals. |
A Graphic Model of Reflective Action in Teaching

Consider that, as writers, it is our responsibility to connect with you in the same way teachers must connect with their students. We reflect on our memories as beginning teachers and think about what we wanted to learn and needed to know to be successful. In this sixth edition, we use feedback from readers of previous editions, as well as our own continuing research, to fine-tune the material we present.

We know that sometimes students learn better by seeing a picture or a graphic model of a complicated idea. The model of reflective action we present in this edition has changed from earlier editions because we are continually reflecting on how to make it more understandable and usable. Still, we recognize that any model is oversimplified and relies on the readers to fill in details and examples with their own imagination. With feedback from you, we will continue to refine our thinking in future editions. This is exactly how your own teaching can improve over the years if you are willing to seek critical feedback, reflect, and grow as a result of your experiences. In addition, changes in education policies and current research often influence what is expected of teachers. Standards-based teaching requires that you focus on a set of predetermined goals established by your local and state boards of education. This may present challenges for teachers who strive to design programs to meet the diverse needs of their students. When all students must meet the same standards, teachers have an enormous task to create lessons that also allow each student to experience success.

The Spiral Curriculum

Jerome Bruner (1960) describes children as active problem solvers who are ready and eager to take on difficult learning tasks in a supportive learning environment. His now-classic text The Process of Education describes the concept of the spiral curriculum, which “revisits basic ideas repeatedly, building upon them until the student has grasped the full formal apparatus that goes with them” (p. 13).

When you think of your school years, perhaps you recall subjects that were taught year after year, each time reviewing past learning and then revisiting it with increased complexity. The concept of the spiral curriculum allows teachers to adapt lessons to ensure that all students succeed. Maybe you had a favorite teacher who made a recurring subject such as U.S. history or geometry come “alive” to you in a way that made you feel stimulated and motivated to learn very difficult material. Perhaps one of the reasons you are reading this book is because your interactions with a caring teacher helped instill the desire to awaken a love of learning in others in the same way you were influenced.

The Art of Teaching

You have probably heard the term art of teaching. One aspect of the art of teaching is that each of us enters the teaching profession with a unique set of experiences with people and with institutions. From these individual experiences, we as teachers develop a unique perspective, or set of expectations, through which we view the world and from which we determine what we think life in a classroom should be like.

In the field of education, our perspectives or expectations are a little bit like the visual artist’s perspective. For example, imagine that three different artists have been asked to paint the same landscape. Figure 1.2 shows the artist on the left painting the scene as she views it. Notice how she has chosen to depict the boat in relation to the sunset and the lake.

In contrast, note how the middle artist’s view differs. He focuses on a close-up of the pine tree, with the boat farther in the distance. If you compared the two paintings, you might not realize from the first that there were pine trees in the original scene. Finally, look at the third artist’s canvas. How does her view compare to the first two views? There is no lake at all in her painting.
Over time, artists develop particular perspectives that become associated with their style of art. In the same way, your unique teaching and learning perspective will lead you to notice some things and overlook others—during your teacher preparation courses, and throughout your teaching career. There is nothing wrong with having a perspective or set of expectations about teaching—in fact, you can’t help having one. However, it is important to remember that your personal perspective is not the only view or interpretation of events. As a teacher, you need to look at events and planning as if you were using a three-way mirror. In fact, there are at least as many different perspectives for an event as there are participants in it!

**The Planning Process**

The process of planning any type of classroom event is also unique for each teacher. The particular steps you take in planning a lesson or other types of classroom activities will be unique and may vary from day to day or lesson to lesson. As a teacher, you will consider aspects such as what your students’ prior knowledge is, what the standards call for the students to learn, and what your expectations are for the outcome of the lesson. In this vein, we are proposing a general set of steps or guidelines here that we call a model of reflective action in teaching.

Reflective action, as the term implies, is a series of steps or processes in which you reflect on what you want to occur in your classroom and then take some type of action. While you are taking the action, you are also likely to be evaluating how well it is working. That evaluation may cause you to adapt or modify your course of action or plan an entirely new and different action.

Teachers establish learning goals in response to state standards, district requirements, students’ needs, availability of resources, time commitments, and personal limits of energy and creativity. The process that teachers use is most likely to be reflective in nature. At the beginning, teachers sketch out in their minds a teaching action in the simplest terms. For example, a teacher may have a simple vision of teaching a math lesson on fractions using pizza to motivate the students. The teacher sees students cutting pizzas into halves, quarters, sixths, and so on. Upon further reflection, however, the teacher sees the possibility of a huge clean-up to follow and modifies the plan from cutting pizzas to cutting up cardboard “pizzas.” The teacher may even prepare cardboard circles and pass them out to the students. But as the lesson develops, the teacher reflects on how difficult it is for students to cut accurate fractional sections of the cardboard circles. Seeing the ragged “fourths” and sixths” cut by the students, the teacher reevaluates the lesson to improve it. Each time the teacher modifies this lesson and plans a new set of actions, more details are added to ensure success. In this way,
the reflective actions resemble looking in a three-way mirror in order to see a reflection from multiple perspectives.

In Figure 1.3 we represent the multiple perspectives involved in reflective action, showing some of the many adaptations teachers make from their first vision of a teaching event to the first attempt to teach the event and then subsequent modifications that are made over time.

**Figure 1.3** Graphic model of reflective action in teaching.

The reflective actions resemble looking in a three-way mirror in order to see a reflection from multiple perspectives.

In Figure 1.3 we represent the multiple perspectives involved in reflective action, showing some of the many adaptations teachers make from their first vision of a teaching event to the first attempt to teach the event and then subsequent modifications that are made over time.

**Teacher Begins to Plan**

In the left-hand mirror, the teacher begins to plan a lesson based on state content standards for the grade level and subject matter and to meet school district requirements and goals. Many teachers form a picture in their heads of what is about to occur. This mental image may even be in the form of a moving picture, with a script that the teacher intends to follow. The teacher has expectations that by following the script, the goal for this lesson will be achieved.

Next, the teacher considers students' prior knowledge and what they need to learn next. Reflective teachers think about the general needs or readiness of their class as a whole, and they also consider the individual needs of students. Some students will need more scaffolding in order to be successful, while others may have already mastered the material and need a more challenging assignment.
Teacher Teaches the Lesson

During the teaching of the lesson, unforeseen problems may occur, and students’ responses may not match what was expected. Reflective teachers immediately begin to rethink their lesson plans. This can occur for a number of reasons. Perhaps the students’ experiences with school differ greatly from those of the teacher, or perhaps a physical need (e.g., hunger, fatigue) prevents a student from paying full attention to the teacher’s input. For any number of reasons, an unforeseen problem or challenge may (and often does!) arise during even the best-prepared lessons.

Reflective Teachers Use Withitness

Withit teachers monitor students’ responses and adapt their lessons based on the individual needs of their students. Withit teachers immediately attend to these students while continuing their lessons. They use a variety of approaches such as eye contact, a closer proximity, a touch on a shoulder, or a predetermined nonverbal signal. Withit teachers also recognize exemplary work and behavior with positive responses. They notice the behavior of all students and respond quickly to unexpected events. Caring, reflective teachers monitor the ever-changing climate of the classroom by paying close attention to students’ nonverbal and verbal responses.

When events deviate from expectations, a teacher who uses reflective action responds by changing pace in a lesson, moving about the room, and interacting with students in an effort to redirect and refocus attention and learning.

Withitness is a form of reflection in action (Schon, 1990). This means that the teacher is perceiving cues from students, pondering what they mean, and talking out loud or continuing with a demonstration—all at the same time! This is an amazingly difficult feat to accomplish, and most beginning teachers do not achieve this easily. It takes practice and more practice. It also takes commitment and more commitment to teach and reflect at the same time. You will find that your withitness grows as you become more practiced at looking at events from multiple perspectives.

After Teacher Teaches the Lesson

After a lesson is taught, the teacher reflects again and tries to understand the reasons problems may have occurred. This is also known as reflection on action (Schon, 1990). Reflective teachers do not stop thinking about a problem when the bell rings. They try to understand what happened and why. They want to know how the problem might have been prevented. While nonreflective teachers may blame it all on the students, reflective teachers will not be satisfied with such a hasty conclusion. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of this step. Without reflection on practice, there is unlikely to be any growth of withitness. Without reflection, there is little or no opportunity to be creative, identify and solve problems, or devise and take a new approach.

Teacher Invites Feedback

A teacher’s honest self-reflection leads to the next important action step on the reflective action model, inviting the feedback of respected colleagues or looking for other resources to help explain the unexpected classroom event. A concerned teacher might share a discouraging classroom experience with a colleague, who is likely to have a different perspective to offer.
We hope that you can adapt this reflective action model to situations that arise in your classrooms. We hope that you will recognize the importance of reflecting before, during, and after a lesson. By reflecting before the lesson, you may be able to imagine or picture what is likely to occur. Then you can take preventive action by changing your lesson plan to better fit the needs of your students.

In the midst of the lesson, we hope that you will use your withitness and reflect on the actions you are taking in real time. What is happening? How are the students responding? Who is paying attention and who isn't? Why do some students seem overwhelmed or bored by this lesson? What can I do to improve the learning experience for them right now? These are questions that reflective teachers ask themselves while they are in front of their class.

After the lesson is over, it is time to reflect on what went well and what didn't. Beginning teachers may tend to get discouraged when lessons don't go as planned, but experienced teachers know that unforeseen circumstances are not only possible but likely. They reflect on what happened without assigning blame to themselves or to their students. They recognize that by reflecting and adapting this lesson, they are learning from their own experience.

The reflective action model never really ends. Instead, caring, reflective teachers begin the whole process again—planning, teaching, using withitness, getting feedback, researching, and creating. We believe that reflective action is an integral part of creativity. In addition, the self-awareness that grows from reflection on practice enhances teachers’ self-confidence and makes them thrive and grow in their chosen career.

**Standards That Apply to Reflective Action in Teaching**

Certain guidelines assist teachers in making good decisions about their curricula and other classroom management issues. Each state has a board of education that publishes a set of standards for teachers to use when planning school programs. A standard is a goal or expectation...
intended to ensure high-quality educational experiences for all students. In the past, school districts made most curriculum decisions independently, but now each state has adopted standards that apply to all schools, so it is important for you to become familiar with those published by your state. Content standards describe what the state wants students to learn for each subject in the elementary curriculum: reading and language arts, mathematics, science, history and social science, physical education, and visual and performing arts. These content standards identify grade-level goals that you as teacher will be responsible to teach. It is the standards, not the textbooks, that determine what must be taught. The textbooks adopted by your state are simply classroom resources you can use to help your students gain the knowledge and skills defined in the content standards.

As a teacher, you will be planning a sequence of lessons designed to help your students learn and grow toward the grade-level expectations defined in each of the content standards. You will be responsible for monitoring their performance and progress throughout the year, and you must be ready to plan and adapt your lessons to support their achievement of the state standards. State assessments will be used to determine whether students in your school are mastering the content standards.

The curriculum consists of three elements: content, process, and product (Tomlinson, 1999).

1. **Content** defines what the student will know and understand.
2. **Process** involves giving students the opportunity to use and own the content.
3. **Product** involves providing students ways to demonstrate and expand their knowledge.

Two additional elements of curriculum, **learning environment** and **affect**, are closely related to the reflective action model and require that teachers know their students’ individual needs and interests. In summary, planning curriculum includes the consideration of a number of elements:

- State and national content standards
- Students’ past experiences
- Students’ present levels of functioning
- Opportunities for students to process and use information and knowledge
- State-adopted textbooks
- Children’s literature (trade books)
- Skills instruction (how to read, write, and conduct research)

**National Teaching Standards**

State boards of education also have responsibility for awarding teachers with teaching credentials or licenses. When you complete your teacher education program, you will be awarded a license or credential to teach in your state. However, if you move to another state, you must satisfy the requirements for that state’s teaching credential as well. A new national organization has been formed that awards nationally recognized teaching credentials. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has a mission to advance the quality of teaching and learning by providing rigorous standards for teachers. While state boards of education provide certificates for beginning teachers who demonstrate competence in teaching, the NBPTS provides the voluntary opportunity to experienced teachers to earn an additional certificate that demonstrates their high levels of proficiency in their chosen profession. This organization synthesized the research on teaching excellence and has produced a document describing five core propositions that define standards of excellence that teachers may attain during their careers (NBPTS, 2002–2003). The NBPTS seeks to identify and recognize
Reflective action is a time-consuming practice that requires a willingness to examine why you choose to do something, how you can do something better, and how your actions affect other people. When you engage in reflective thinking about actions you have just taken or are about to take, you may become critical of your own behavior or your motives. Peters (1991) observes that reflective practice involves a personal risk because it requires that practitioners be open to an examination of beliefs, values, and feelings about which there may be great sensitivity.

When teachers are engaged in reflection about their decisions, actions, and behaviors, they are likely to begin asking themselves questions such as, “Why do I have this rule?” “Why do I care so much about what happens in my classroom?” “How did I come to believe so strongly about this element of my teaching?”

As teachers ask themselves this type of searching question, they are likely to reexamine their core beliefs and values. For example, if a teacher has grown up and gone to school in a traditional setting where children were “seen but not heard” unless they were responding to a direct question by an adult, then the teacher may expect the same type of behavior from students. But imagine that this teacher observes a classroom where students are allowed to interact, discuss their ideas with other students, and take part in spirited discussions with the teacher. Based on past assumptions, the beginning teacher may feel uncomfortable in a classroom with this noise level and consider the behavior of the students to be rude. This teacher should then ask the following questions: “Why am I uncomfortable with this noise level? Is it because I was never allowed to speak up when I was a child? How did I feel about the rules when I was a child? How do I feel about them now? What are the differences in the way these children are learning and the way I learned? What do I want my future students to learn—how to be quiet and orderly or how to be curious and assertive?”

When you confront confusing and ambiguous questions like these with honesty, your self-reflection can lead to new understandings of how your beliefs influence your present choices and actions. Continued reflective thinking can lead you to begin to clarify your philosophy of life and teaching, ethical standards, and moral code.

Do you think that it is necessary for you as a teacher to know what you stand for, what you believe and value? Is it important that you be able to state clearly the ethical and moral basis for your decisions? Strike (1993) notes two important reasons for teachers to have a well-articulated philosophy of teaching and code of ethics: (1) They work with a particularly vulnerable clientele, and (2) the teaching profession has no clear set of ethical principles or standards. Strike believes that, in the matter of discipline and grading, the most important ethical concepts are honesty, respect for diversity, fairness, and due process. He also believes that teachers must be willing to consider the ethical implications of equity in the way teachers distribute their time and attention to students, avoiding playing favorites. Are these part of your personal code of ethics?

It is likely that you believe your students ought to have the attributes of honesty, respect for diversity, and fairness. If so, it is vital that you demonstrate these behaviors for them, for it is well known that teachers are important models of moral and ethical behavior for the students they teach. When you begin teaching, we want you to accept the responsibility for beliefs and ethics. Teachers are important role models for behavior and character (see Figure 1.4). In classrooms that we observe, the teacher’s character and moral code set the standards and the tone or climate for the classroom. If the teacher is fair, students are influenced to treat others fairly. If the teacher is impulsive and selfish, students are likely to behave in the same way. When teachers demonstrate a willingness to listen openly and honestly to others’ points of view, students begin to respect the opinions of others as well. When teachers are closed and rigid in their approach to teaching and learning, students mold their behavior into a search for right answers and rote learning.
ChAPter 1

Professional Organizations and Ethical Standards

The National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recognizes that many daily decisions required of those who work with young children are of a moral and ethical nature. The association has produced a code of ethical conduct that offers guidelines for responsible behavior and sets forth a common basis for resolving the principal ethical dilemmas encountered in early childhood care and education. The following core values of their document offer a basis for ethical and moral decision making (NAEYC, 1997):

- Appreciating childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle
- Basing our work with children on knowledge of child development
- Appreciating and supporting the close ties between the child and family
- Recognizing that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society
- Respecting the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague)
- Helping children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust, respect, and positive regard

Because as an elementary school teacher you will be responsible for teaching multiple subjects, you should become familiar with the professional organizations that set the standards and ethical considerations for these different subjects. The following organizational websites will provide you with the most current information on standards and support available to their membership:

International Reading Association (IRA)
www.reading.org

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of beliefs</th>
<th>Ways the beliefs become evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students learn best in a supportive environment.</td>
<td>• Teacher consistently recognizes student achievement in classroom displays and verbal encouragement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn best in a collaborative environment.</td>
<td>• Teacher provides lessons that meet student needs and allow them to succeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn best in a collaborative environment.</td>
<td>• Students are seated in groups so that they can work together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn best in a collaborative environment.</td>
<td>• Areas of the classroom are available for group projects, and materials are available nearby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn at different rates and with different methods.</td>
<td>• Teacher knows her students and plans lessons based on student needs, encouraging the use of different approaches and responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn best when they are actively involved.</td>
<td>• Teacher plans lessons that require students to use manipulatives and ways for all students to respond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn best when they are actively involved.</td>
<td>• Teacher involves students in planning units of study based on curriculum standards and the students’ interests and strengths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.4 Implementing teacher beliefs.
Ethical Caring

Noddings (2005) expresses the need for ethical caring in schools because schools are places where human beings learn how to interact. She proposes that caring is the basis of the Golden Rule. Caring as a moral attribute is no doubt high on the list of most aspiring teachers. Many people choose the career of teaching because they care deeply about the needs of children in our society. They are also likely to feel responsible for meeting the needs of their students. Occasionally, you may observe teachers who seem to have lost the ability to care for others because they are overwhelmed with meeting their own needs. They tend to blame others when their students fail to behave or achieve. Reflective, caring teachers, however, willingly accept that it is their responsibility to design a program that allows their students to succeed. They take responsibility for problems that occur during the school day rather than blaming others. They work every day to balance their own needs with the needs of their students. They are committed to growing as professional educators. To achieve these goals, they are willing to learn systematic ways of reflecting on their own practice so that they can enhance their students’ likelihood to succeed. Other moral attributes that teachers cite as important in their personal lives and in their work with children are honesty, courage, and friendliness (Noddings, 2005).

Involving the Larger Educational Community

This reflective model extends beyond planning for individual lessons or units of teaching. It also involves considering the multiple perspectives of the broader community responsible for educating our children. Involving the larger educational community is a crucial part of this model. Sharing your philosophy of education with parents, peers, and administrators is an important aspect of enlisting them as members of the learning team. Use back-to-school night, parent meetings, and parent conferences to help parents understand your beliefs about education and the ways in which they are implemented in your classroom. For example, if you believe that children should develop intrinsic motivation and do not believe in giving rewards and prizes in the classroom, you need to share this with the parents. You need to become familiar with research that supports your beliefs and be prepared to defend them and the related practices. You can then enlist parents in helping to develop students’ intrinsic motivation by using encouraging words or special time to work together on projects as incentives rather than buying them presents or giving them material rewards.
Developing your philosophy of education will be an ongoing project. As you study educational psychology and teaching methods, your ideas and beliefs will change. For this reason, revisiting your ideas and the related philosophy should become a part of your reflection on teaching. Every time you observe in a classroom or plan a lesson, you should get into the habit of reflecting on the practices you’ve seen or planned. In this text, we will include regular activities that will support your reflection and help you develop a clear and concise philosophy of education.

**Group Focus Activity**

After the teaching event, the teacher should reflect again and try to understand the reasons for any problems that might have occurred or ways in which the lesson might be strengthened. They try to understand what happened and why. While nonreflective teachers may blame it all on the students, reflective teachers will not be satisfied with such a hasty conclusion. Without reflection on practice, there is unlikely to be any professional growth. Your professor might choose to involve you in the following small-group activity:

1. Have each group examine one of the following teaching scenarios.
2. Use blank transparencies and nonpermanent markers to record group responses to the following tasks:
   - Read the scenario your group is given.
   - Discuss what happened and why.
   - Discuss resources that might be accessed for deciding what action you could take.
   - Decide on appropriate actions.
   - Write responses (actions) on the transparency provided.
   - Share your group’s suggestions on the overhead.

**Teaching Scenario 1**

While teaching a math lesson on multiplication, I realize that several of my students haven’t mastered their addition facts. They have to count each item to figure out the arrays that I am using to demonstrate that multiplication is repeated addition. They are not able to complete the repeated additions because of their lack of basic skills.

**Teaching Scenario 2**

While teaching a social studies lesson about the Civil War, I realize that my students are obviously disinterested: passing notes, having to be redirected to the text, and talking to one another. We are reading a chapter in the social studies book and answering the questions at the end of the chapter.

**Teaching Scenario 3**

My second-grade class and I read a descriptive paragraph and discuss the words that make it “descriptive.” I ask my students to write a paragraph about their favorite place using as many descriptive words as possible. About half of my students seem to have no idea how to begin.

**Teaching Scenario 4**

Several of my third graders have great difficulty reading the third-grade textbooks. I have them placed in appropriate books for their reading instruction, but they can’t read the social studies and science textbooks. I’m at a loss as to how to help them.
Teaching Scenario 5
I have several students in my class who are just learning English. They all speak Spanish at home. I need to do something to help them understand the instruction in my class. What can I do?

Teaching Scenario 6
I have a child included in my classroom from a learning disabilities resource class. He has great difficulty keeping up with any writing tasks in my class due to his poor fine-motor skills. He tries to keep up, but it takes him twice as long as any of my other students to do any written work.

Teaching Scenario 7
I have several students who don’t seem to be able to pass their spelling tests. They go through the weekly routine of looking up the words in the dictionary, writing sentences using the words, and filling in blanks in sentences using the words, yet they continue to fail their tests each week.

Teaching Scenario 8
There is a child in my class who is being left out of everything by the others. He is overweight and prefers to read a book on the playground instead of joining in the games. The other students won’t pick him for teams anyway. He is becoming increasingly isolated.

This activity provides an opportunity to explore a variety of resources available for reflecting on and implementing modifications to instruction.

Preparing for Your Licensure Exam
In this chapter, you read about reflective action in teaching. Reread “A View into the Classroom” at the beginning of the chapter, and think about it as a case study you might encounter on your licensure exam. Answer the following questions to demonstrate your understanding of the role of standards in today’s classroom, the steps in reflective action, and the teacher’s responsibility for adapting curriculum and teaching approaches to students’ needs:

1. What evidence is there that Susan is familiar with the state standards relative to the teaching of phonics in the first grade?
2. How does Susan demonstrate that she recognizes a need for continuing her education and growth as a teacher?
3. Cite some examples of Susan’s withitness.
4. Are there examples of Susan’s awareness of her students’ abilities and background?
5. In implementing the reflective action model, how could you document the results of using a different teaching approach?

Portfolio of Professional Practices Activity

Developing an electronic portfolio as a model for working with student electronic portfolios

To help you develop your philosophy of education, a personal statement of your values and beliefs relating to the education of children, it is important for you to explore position statements and codes of ethics adopted by professional organizations in the field. This begins the process
of developing and clarifying your personal philosophy of education. Visit the following websites to select statements that reflect your personal beliefs relating to teaching at this stage in your professional development, and list those statements, paraphrasing them in a format that best suits your personal philosophy:

National Association for the Education of Young Children
www.naeyc.org/about/position/PSETH05.asp

National Education Association
www.nea.org/aboutnea/code.html

References


