

TWO STATEMENTS ON REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

ONE

The English philosopher Simon Blackburn states in his book on the mind, *Think* (1999):

'Reflection matters because it is continuous with practice. How you think about what you are doing affects how you do it, or whether you do it at all'

My comment:

- A. Reflection needs to be grounded in practice. Reflection also allows you to stand back and view what you are doing from a different perspective. You become more self-critical in that you reassess the learning situation, but it also opens up new possibilities. This does not only apply to the teacher. One other implication is that students become more aware of their own learning style. And in so doing students also learn more about their own learning strategies. For example, student preference for a structured or open-ended task depends on their own learning style, and what they feel comfortable with.

This has didactical implications for any course as students will also need to learn in tasks that may not suit their learning style. Also consider the fact that we will be teaching groups which have students with divergent learning styles. How do we deal with that?

- B. Blackburn's definition is similar to the ideas that Donald Schon developed on reflective practice in the 1980s, when Schon introduced the concept of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. To state it simply, reflection-in-action is thinking what one is doing while one is doing it. It is a complex process: think for example of the teacher reflecting on her actions and responding to that and adjusting accordingly in her interaction with the students. But this reflective process can of course apply to students in their interventions or response to the teacher. Reflection-on-action is 'after the event' in that the practitioner can review her actions and if necessary adapt and adjust for future action. Once again, this can apply to teacher and students.

Other models have been developed but Schon's dual concept is revealing in that there are clear parallels with key aspects of classroom dynamics. The call-and-response style of interaction between teacher and students can be seen as an example of reflection-in-action, and both kinds of reflection are used in the various forms of informal and formal feedback that are used in classroom practice. So, this in my view indicates the key role that active reflection plays in the learning environment.

TWO

The American psychologist Ellen Langer has written extensively on mindful learning. Reflection plays a key role in her work. This statement is from her 1997 book, *The Power of Mindful Learning*:

'Sideways learning makes us receptive to changes in an ongoing situation'

My comment:

Langer is talking here about learning a subject or a skill and being open to novelty. She also writes that it's very important that students actively notice differences, other contexts and perspectives when they learn. This is a strand of thought that goes back to the early 20th century and the influential American educator John Dewey, who wrote about the need for open-mindedness and active learning, although Dewey also stresses that the state of perplexity that learners can undergo when they are challenged can be an uncomfortable

experience, albeit in his view a necessary one. And teachers would have to consider this when adopting approaches which stimulate novelty.

The main point here is that the curiosity of our students is key to their learning. What happens to our students when we stimulate their curiosity and make them actively think about other perspectives or approaches to the way they are learning? This will affect how they behave and perform in the classroom, but will also in turn affect us as we are challenged as educators to respond. How will we steer this and what does this for example mean for the further development of a course? How do we then deal with that as teachers?