



You, the Professional Development Framework and Reflective Practice

This **National Forum Insight** is for all staff with a teaching role in Higher Education in Ireland who are engaging with the **National Professional Development (PD) Framework**. This Insight is designed to be used to support staff in using the PD Framework to reflect on their professional development and gather evidence for their PD portfolio. We advise the reader to ensure they are familiar with the PD Framework and its domains of professional development in order to use this Insight most effectively.

Introduction

Whether you are early or more established in your career, reflecting on teaching and wider work is essential. Reflection, as part of engagement with the PD Framework, can help all those who teach to respond to the shifting demands of their role(s) and, through professional development, to improve their practice.

Reflecting on teaching and learning includes consideration of:

- The scope and form of teaching activities identified to build evidence of elements of the PD Framework domains;
- The extent and nature of teaching and learning scholarship;
- The range and type of professional development goals identified;
- The way in which evidence is gathered and stored.

What is Reflective Practice?

Reflective practice is closely linked to the concept of learning from experience, in that you think about what you did, and what happened, and decide from that what you would do differently next time. Moving from simply thinking about an event to effective reflective practice requires a conscious effort to fully consider events/approaches/experiences and to develop insights from them. Reflective practice helps you to explore theories and to apply them to your own experiences in a more structured way. These can either be formal theories from academic research or your own personal ideas. Reflective practice also encourages you to explore your own beliefs and assumptions and to find solutions to problems. Reflection can take different forms:

- Reflection-in-action: this is usually an internal process; as we realise that learners have not engaged with a topic or seem confused, we may make changes on the spot; “we may in the process restructure strategies of action, understandings of phenomena, or ways of framing problems” (Schön, 1987, p.28).
- Reflection-on-action: this is a different form of reflection after the event, and important in developing critical reflection; we describe the action or practice, the knowledge involved and the affective dimensions of thoughts and feelings experienced in order to make sense of it. This leads

us to identifying actions through resolving problems and seeing the issue from a different perspective.

- Critical reflection: when we reflect critically, we attempt to explore and explain our experiences from different perspectives, stepping outside our own point of view. As such, this is more likely to be achieved through dialogue with peers and others. Critical reflection broadens the context and may be usefully undertaken in a peer triad or with a mentor, where we think about our individual voice in a critical fashion and tease out differences between our espoused theories and actual practice (critical questioning). Actions identified may be farther-reaching, for example the redesign of a curriculum. Critical reflection may be informed by the scholarship of teaching and learning and may lead to writing scholarship in this field, some of which will be within our disciplines.

What is needed for effective Reflective Practice?

Reflective practice is a skill which can be learned and honed by developing critical, constructive and creative thinking; developing an understanding of theory; sharing and discussing ideas and approaches with others.

Why is Reflective Practice important for those with a teaching role?

Reflective practice has huge benefits in increasing self-awareness (a key component of emotional intelligence) and in developing a better understanding of others, both of which are vital for our teaching and learning practice. Reflective practice can also encourage active engagement in academic work processes.

How is Reflective Practice central to the PD Framework?

In academic work situations, having an opportunity to regularly use reflective practice will support more meaningful discussions about your personal and professional development and career development.

Making time for reflection

It can be difficult to find opportunities for shared reflective practice in a busy academic environment – yet it is one of the things that we can least afford to stop, especially in challenging circumstances. Time spent on reflective practice can ensure that you are focusing on the things that really matter for your career development. The key is to find ways of putting insights into words/imagery. From our experience working with staff from across the sector, bursts of short reflections work very well for engagement with the PD Framework.



Developing Reflective Practice

Sometimes, just five minutes can be enough to start your reflection. Short triggers can help to begin the process of reflective practice. A good start is to make use of achievable 5-minute time slots. A 'Power of 5' activity has been built into the PACT PD Open Course and is applicable in a wider sense for all reflective practice:

In a format of your choice (written, video, audio), complete a short reflective post entitled "The Power of 5" on time management to consider putting aside some protected time during each week to reflect and take stock of some PD opportunities; it is important to think about where you can set aside this time (examples of this could be five minutes after teaching a class or your train/bus journey home in the evening, or you may have longer at the weekend to consolidate your thinking on this).

There is much to be gained from asking yourself simple reflective questions such as: *How did the class/group receive this work? Were they sufficiently challenged and engaged? Did they achieve what I wanted them to achieve? How effective was my assessment? Would I do this again? How would I adapt?*

Keeping a reflective journal/diary/blog to help work through difficulties, challenges and concerns can be a useful first step towards forming your PD Portfolio. Putting your concerns in writing can not only be cathartic but also lead to helpful insights. If you are thinking of starting off a journal as part of your PD Portfolio, or you are just wondering what to write about in a reflective journal, prompts can be beneficial. Some examples are provided here:

- Challenges that I have overcome are...
- The best advice I've been given about dealing with this issue was...
- I can best organise my time by...
- I am really motivated to/by...
- I have learnt since starting my teaching role that...
- Things that I have in common with colleagues in my dept/school are...
- The key thing I have to remember is...
- Dealing with things I can't immediately change means... I need to...
- People who support me are usually ...
- Teachers I admire generally...
- I am really looking forward to...
- The book/article/resource that has most stuck with me is...
- My favourite part of teaching is...
- Ethical issues I need to keep in mind are...

While simple and brief reflections can be fruitful, it is also worth going deeper by thinking in terms of the layers of one's work, perhaps not simultaneously but on a rotational basis. For example, you could reflect at different times on your discipline, your pedagogical approaches, curriculum, and change, thinking about how you stay up to date with subject knowledge, how

you maintain and share your enthusiasm for your subject, how curriculum is designed and implemented, how your teaching environment might be improved, where and how other changes might be implemented.

It is important to find a way of **reflecting sustainably** so that you can repeat the process easily at regular intervals. A reflective diary, blog, bullet list, video/audio recording – all are formats to consider. In turn, engaging with student feedback can inform your reflections. It is also helpful to think about what can happen next: does it involve a conversation with a mentor, creating space for some thinking time, or making changes to practice? A focus on action arising from reflection is important. Change does not have to be big; it can consist of small incremental steps. There are times when you will have more space to reflect, and it might be worth building this into your planning over the next three, six, twelve or 24 months. Think about what is happening and when, and how you might plan time for reflection to ensure you have the most impact on your practice. With whom can you collaborate? What will you learn to take forward with you?

Depending on where you are on your career pathway, it can be useful to consider and reflect on how best to align teaching and learning activities to your school and institutional strategies or to practice or policy issues. Equally, you may wish to think about your leadership role in teaching and consider how you influence the teaching of others (Seery, 2019).

What is the role of a PD Portfolio?

Recognising the importance of building evidence of your activity and its impact is key to action planning in reflective practice. A PD Portfolio will help you gather, collate and store evidence on key areas of your teaching and learning practice, and align them with the five domains of the PD Framework to help you evidence achievements and identify actions for future practice. It is important to think about how you can gather and keep evidence easily and effectively, and then filter and store strong examples. These prompts may be of help:

- What you are currently working on?
- What influences your work?
- What is your current recommended reading?
- What are your PD goals this year? What was the motivation for these?
- What would you change in your T&L practice? Why?
- Which learning technology makes the biggest difference to your work (and why)?
- Who are your T&L heroes? How have they influenced your work?
- What are you most proud of in your own practice?
- What professional development has helped support your teaching?
- Have you changed any teaching practice as a result of this PD?
- What other strategies have supported your career goal?

What are the best ways of generating different types of evidence for your PD Portfolio?

- Gather materials and evidence from all accredited and non-accredited structured and unstructured PD that you have engaged in over a defined period of time
- Note how this PD has affected your teaching and learning practice
- Write/Include your Teaching Philosophy Statement and you may find it helpful to complete reflective activities such as Professional Values Applied to Practice and Reflecting on the Self Domain
- Select examples of teaching, learning and assessment strategies you have used
- Gather materials relating to modules, programmes you have taught and/or designed
- Include student evaluative data and feedback evidencing the quality of teaching and learning
- Select exemplars of practice to show how practice evolves and develops, particularly innovative practice
- Store details of awards and distinctions you have achieved
- List your publications, including scholarship in teaching and learning within and outside your discipline
- Sustain your reflections on your PD journey
- Document your current role and work context, membership of professional bodies and any relevant professional organisations
- Plaudits: nuggets of evidence from other sources – students, colleagues, management, stakeholders.

The recording of plans, activities, outcomes and impact in your portfolio is essential. It will reinforce learning by directing your attention to outcomes and to the need to maintain and enhance what you have learned. It is also evidence of your development and commitment to PD and to keeping up to date with rapidly changing knowledge and skills. This will give you something you can use to support your professional journey as well as telling you if you have achieved what you set out to do. Evidence of your PD is recorded continuously, giving you a historical record on which to reflect.

Planning Ahead

A PD plan is something you can develop using your PD portfolio and the PD Framework. Continue to think ahead, as the long term becomes the medium term, and the medium term the short. Ask yourself: What are my objectives for the forthcoming year/ five years? What development is needed to support them? What opportunities are available? What help or resources do I need? Approaches, using tools like S.W.A.I.N. (Strengths, Weaknesses, Aspirations, Interests and Needs) might be useful in helping you identify your existing experience, skills and knowledge.

Key Message

Ultimately becoming a reflective practitioner will enable you to enhance your teaching practice, supporting both personal and professional growth. Now is a good time to start by making use of the many excellent resources on reflective practice which have been identified or developed from the initial implementation of the PD Framework and PD Open Courses with colleagues from across the sector.

Further Resources

PD Open Courses offer multiple entry points for engagement with the PD Framework. The National Forum recommends the following Open Courses for their strong emphasis on reflective practice:

- **PACT** Open Course: <https://opencourses.ie/opencourse/getting-started-with-professional-development-pact/>
- **Reflective Practice in Teaching** Open Course: <https://opencourses.ie/opencourse/reflective-practice-in-teaching/>
- **Mentoring in Teaching and Learning** Open Course : <https://opencourses.ie/opencourse/mentoring-in-teaching-and-learning/>

Additional National Forum resources on reflective practice can be explored at:

- [National Seminar Series on the PD Framework](#)
- [T&L Projects on reflective practice](#)
- [PD OERs on the Resource Hub](#)

References

Schön, D.A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Seery, M. (2019). *Building evidence for teaching-focussed promotions*. Blog post, <http://michaelseery.com/building-evidence-for-teaching-focussed-promotions>