

## Teacher Reflection Templates: Tools For Whole-Hearted, Open-Minded And Responsible Teachers

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### Abstract

*This research paper aims to present four reflection templates in-service and pre-service teachers may use to reflection any subject. The templates were designed by the researcher and are a product of a study conducted on three in-service teachers who are successful in their teaching practice. The study found that the three teachers do reflect critically before the lesson, during the lesson and after the lesson. Critical reflection on the three teachers was found to promote teaching and learning in a classroom environment. The empirical study was informed by the interpretive paradigm that used a qualitative research method. Data was collected through individual interviews conducted face-to-face by the researcher and through document analysis. The reflection templates presented in this paper are outlines of aspects teachers need to reflect on that are imperative in the teaching and learning process. The reflection templates may be used by practicing teachers and prospect teachers to think about their teaching to identify strength and weaknesses for improved teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:** *teacher reflection, critical reflective teaching practice and reflection template.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Many aspects affect the extent to which learners engage in effective learning in a classroom. One of the key factors on which this paper focuses is a teacher. The education policy by the Ministry of Education and Culture (1993, P.81) emphasise that “teachers are key to the development of the country...”. A teacher is critical in the classroom in terms of subject content, learning resource material and teaching approaches used to achieve all learning objectives stipulated in a subject syllabus. Currently, a number of learners do not achieve the learning objectives as set out in the syllabus due to the degree of teacher input in considering aspects critical to effective teaching and learning (University of Namibia, UNUNEFT, 2014). To ensure progress among all learners the Education policy for Namibia advocates for a “... reflective attitude...” in teachers (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993, p.81). The argument is that learning could be successful if teachers are to reflect holistically on many aspects of their teaching. Through critical reflection on lessons teachers are able to conduct critical observations on their lessons and reflect on them to identify problems encountered. Evidence from research findings indicates that successful teachers do reflect critically on their teaching and their learners do perform well academically (Luwango & Schafer, 2013). Critical reflective teachers do think critically about their lessons and take action to resolve problems encountered in the classroom. As a result, learner academic performance may improve due to effective instructional strategies emerging from reflective teaching. However, many teachers have been found lacking the ability to reflect properly on their lessons and no template exists to support their reflection process.

This paper is an effort to respond to the lack of a critical reflective ability found in teachers as reported in a study conducted by the University of Namibia, UNUNEF, (2014). The reflection template is a guide, in form of a table that directs teachers on lesson aspects they should reflect on before the lesson, during the lesson and after the lesson. The instrument is important because teachers ought to understand critical reflective pedagogy as a conscious attempt to think before, during, and after the instruction to enhance the learners' academic achievement. For teachers to reflect critically they need to be "whole-hearted" teachers need to be mindful of learners' performance, "open-minded" teachers need to embrace change, "responsible" teachers need to have a sense of accountability to learners' progress (Dewey as cited in Arthur et al., 2007, p. 44). I argue further as a researcher and teacher educator that teachers need to strive for improved learner performance in school not with intentions to secure employment but should do so out of love for the learners, out of passion to teach in innovative ways and out of being mindful of own teaching approaches and attitudes. A teacher need not to teach well because somebody is watching them but because of high expectations they have for their learners, the passion to see all learners succeed academically and the responsibility entrusted upon them to deliver quality education.

## **PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

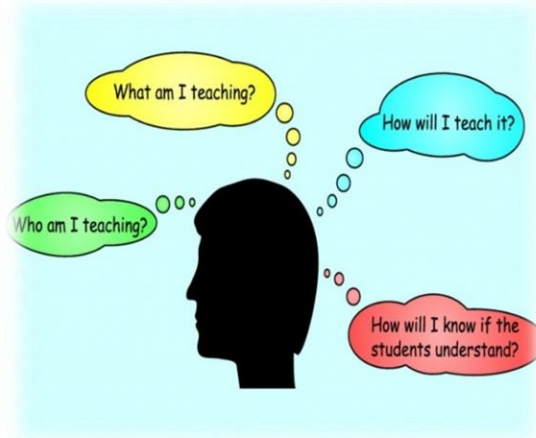
The report by Ellis & Steukers (2015, p. 2) outline that "quality education is a public good and a fundamental human right, the key to achieving full employment and poverty eradication". For poverty to be eradicated in Namibia and internationally improved teaching and learning is necessary. Besides quality

education being a fundamental human right with which to fight poverty many learners are in school without being able to read; as outlined in the statement that “in Sub-Saharan Africa, many learners spend two or three years in school without learning to read a single word” (Ellis & Steukers, 2015, p.10). Being in school as a learner and unable to read raises a concern pertaining to teachers. Meanwhile, more issues pertaining to numeracy and literacy are pointed out in a major study by the University of Namibia, UNUNEFT, (2014). Teachers need to reflect on what they teach and how they teach. Teachers’ responsibility in the classroom is broad as in the view indicated in the report that “teachers are not only a means to implementing education goals; they are key to sustainability and national capacity in achieving learning and creating societies based on knowledge, values and ethics” (Ellis & Steukers, 2015, p. 11). In response to calls made in the report by Ellis & Steukers (2015, p. 11) for commitment towards addressing national and international challenges pertaining to education and contributing to National and international effort to ensure progress in schools, this paper aims to present a guide for reflective teaching practice in schools.

The study that informed the design of the reflection template presented in this paper was conducted to identify aspects of reflective teachers who were involved in the study reflect on and understand the impact reflection has on their teaching (Luwango & Schafer, 2013). Findings of the study indicate that the teachers involved in the study reflect before, during and after the lesson. They pointed out that reflection helps them to analyse their beliefs and knowledge of the subject they teach, of learners and of teaching practice. As a result of reflection, the teachers were able to detect their strength and weakness in their teaching approach to find alternative teaching approaches (Luwango & Schafer, 2013).A study by the University of

Namibia, UNUNEFT, (2014) identified a challenge in-service teachers experience in reflecting meaningfully on their teaching practice. To address this challenge, details of key aspects teachers need to reflect upon are presented in three templates to improve their teaching through reflection. The reflection templates are an invention of the author of this paper in response to a lack of a reflection template for in-service and pre-service teachers. The templates are dynamic in the sense that they can be improved on as they are meant to present the basics in form of a guide for teachers teaching any subject both nationally and internationally. The templates may be used both by in-service and pre-service teachers to reflect on their teaching practice.

As illustrated in the figure 1.1 below, the reflection templates serve to draw teacher attention to the learners they teach, to the content they teach, to the teaching approach they use and to ways how teachers determine the effectiveness of their lesson.



*Fig. 1.1 The reflective mind*

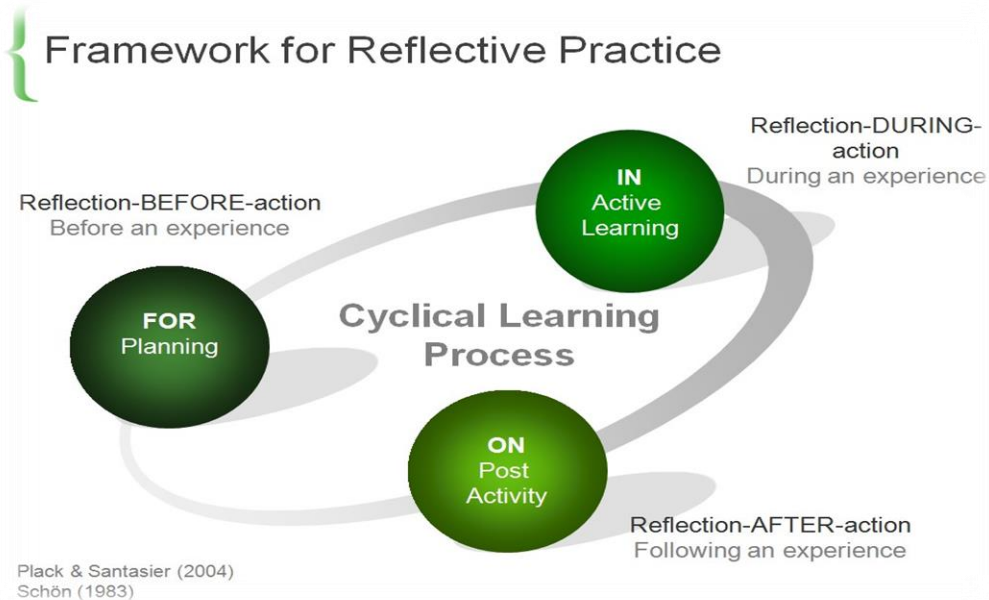
Source: <http://chiasuanchong.files.wordpress.com>

The reflection templates are short and detailed to allow teachers to think accurately. This is reinforced by, Kincheloe (1991, p.18) who argues that "...in the good work place of the democratic school [,] educational improvement occurs when the practitioner learns to think more precisely and conceptually". In most cases it is highly likely for a teacher not to think precisely as they could concentrate on one aspect of the lesson and neglect the other. Therefore, the reflection template encapsulates the crucial aspects reminding teachers not to neglect any important part of the lesson. Brook Field, in Van Harmelen (2006), emphasises four processes central to developing as a critical reflective practitioner.

One of the four processes is that teachers ought to challenge the current ways of knowing and act by thinking of alternatives. For example, when reflecting before, during and after the lesson; teachers should think of innovative ways of teaching to facilitate learning with understanding. The reflection template is vital as critical reflective teaching is essential to the understanding of what professionals do as they deliberately think of how effective their teaching is while being conscious of what experience has taught them. The reflection template aims to create room for self-evaluation, enabling teachers to gain confidence to pursue new and creative ideas. Therefore, the reflection template will help teachers to operate as critical reflective practitioners by thinking critically of their teaching practice to improve it.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY ON CRITICAL REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

The reflection templates designed by the researcher are primarily grounded in two theories that were used in the study, constructivism and meta-cognition, and on the idea of critical thinking. The design of the lesson reflection templates (see appendix 1, 2, 3 & 4) is informed by the model below, Fig. 3.1 which is a framework for reflective practice by Plack & Santasier (2004) and Schon (1983). Reflection is split into three parts as illustrated in the model above (fig. 3.1), reflection before the lesson, reflection during the lesson and reflection after the lesson.



*Fig. 3.1 Framework for reflective practice*

Source: [www.thecaptureproject.ca](http://www.thecaptureproject.ca)

The design of the lesson reflection templates is informed further by Piaget who believed that knowledge is acquired as a result of a life-long constructive process in which we try to organize, structure, and restructure our experiences in light of existing schemes of thought, and thereby gradually modify and expand these schemes (Bodner, 1986, P.874). This calls for teachers to think and reflect critically on their teaching practice to evaluate their instructional approaches, structuring and restructuring it. In addition, Parson, et al. (2001) stresses that, for individuals to be in control of their thinking process they need to engage themselves in self-planning (planning and organizing own time, and work), self-monitoring (monitoring own progress as a teacher), self-regulating (adjusting own plan to learners' needs and potential), self-questioning (interrogating own work and thinking process), self-reflecting (analysing own teaching practice), and self-reviewing (re-looking at own teaching and thinking), because this is necessary for critical thinking and learning.

The design of the template is also informed by Higgs (1995) who terms the thinking instances (before, during and after the lesson as anticipatory reflection (before), contemporaneous reflection (during) and retrospective reflection (after the lesson). Anticipatory reflection is the first and most common form of reflection and embraces the question 'how might I approach teaching' and offers opportunities to make purposeful pedagogical decisions about a course of action to be embarked upon. Contemporaneous reflection, is reflection that is immediately responsive to the learning environment and may be seen as shifts in pedagogical approaches and behaviours which may be either anticipated or unexpected...therefore, contemporaneous reflection is a most demanding and highly context, which is dependent on action and leads to learning from testing during a teaching episode and requires a personal



acceptance of the risks involved. Retrospective reflection is initiated by questioning what happened and why, in the teaching episode and this occurs after the teaching episode. It is initiated in response to the actions embarked upon as a result of testing hypotheses and teaching approaches devised through anticipatory reflection, Higgs (1995). Retrospective reflection is what most teachers refer to as lesson evaluation in their attempt to reflect on the lesson delivered.

Socrates established the importance of asking deep questions that probe profoundly into thinking before accepting ideas as worthy of belief (Paul, Elder & Bartell: retrieved 7/10/2012). Socrates' argument directly links to the need for teachers to reflect critically on teaching approaches in terms of their relevance to their own classroom situation before adopting any teaching approach. In addition, when reflecting before the lesson, the teacher should also think of how s/he is preparing learners to take charge of their own lives as adults, to be equipped with appropriate skills to make sound and independent judgements, as stressed by Siegel in Splitter (1991).

The template also includes Elba's ideas as cited in Liston et al (1996) of five knowledge bases; Knowledge of self, Knowledge of content, Knowledge of teaching and learning, knowledge of pupils and Knowledge of context within schools and society. The five knowledge bases could help teachers to analyse all these areas when reflecting on their lessons. Knowledge of self helps the teacher to reflect on own strength and weaknesses. Knowledge of content helps the teacher to reflect on how well they understand mathematics. Knowledge of teaching and learning helps them to reflect on the teaching skills (didactics) they possess and knowledge about how effective learning prevails. Knowledge of pupils helps the teacher to think of how

well a teacher knows his/her learners not only by name but their potential and social background as well. Knowledge of context within schools and society guides the teacher to think of what s/he knows about the classroom/school as a learning environment and what s/he knows about the society that could help him/her to link classroom mathematics to real life. Even though critical lesson reflection is crucial for education development not all teachers embrace and adopt this notion. This calls for both schools and teacher training institutions to encourage teachers to be whole-hearted, responsible and open-minded (Dewey as cited by Arthur et al., 2007). Teachers need to have interest in assisting all learners to progress in school, assume the responsibility entrusted upon them with commitment and be willing to execute new teaching approaches that may be more effective in the classroom.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The case study that triggered the design of the reflection templates presented in this paper was informed by the interpretive paradigm that used a qualitative research method to collect data. The study collected data through interviews and document analysis. The three teachers that were involved in the study were interviewed individually to discuss ways they reflect on their teaching and the impact reflection has on their teaching. The participating teachers' lesson plans and reflective notes were analysed by the researcher to gain insight into the key aspects these teachers reflected on and how they reflected on their lessons.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Findings of the study outline many aspects the participating teachers reflected upon. Data from the interviews and document analysis indicate that the main aspects the three teachers reflected upon before the lesson are teaching method, content knowledge, past experience, learner activities, teaching and learning time, learners' ability, teacher's role in the classroom, ways to conclude the lesson, ways to manage the learners and resources that may enhance learning in the classroom. Aspects reflected upon during the lesson are learners' understanding to redirect teaching according to learners' learning needs. Whereas after the lesson, the participating teachers indicated that they looked back to their lesson presentation by thinking of the degree to which lesson objectives were met, learner understanding of concepts, teaching pace and teacher explanation, effective usage of time, teaching method used, the teaching scope, test and exam performance of learners and the provision of corrective feedback to improve learning. Considering the important aspects that emerged from the study, the researcher decided to design three reflection templates teachers may use to improve their lessons as presented in the appendices. The lesson reflection templates in the appendix are not research instruments but tools teachers may use to reflect on their lesson. The templates are a product of the research conducted on the three teachers. The lesson reflection templates focus on lesson aspects to reflect on before the lesson, during the lesson and after the lesson as discussed by the teachers who participated in the study.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The empirical study that informed the design of the reflection templates presented in this paper was successful in identifying major aspects three specific teachers reflect on, how they reflect on their lesson and the impact of critical reflection on their teaching. Though the study by Luwango and Schafer (2013) found critical reflective teaching practice convenient in shaping teaching practice recent studies have found that many teachers are unable to reflect critically on their lessons (University of Namibia, UNUNEFT, 2014). The reflection templates presented in this paper serve to bridge the gap of teacher inability to reflect critically on their teaching. The templates need to be used both in schools and teacher training institutions to cultivate a reflective attitude in both in-service and pre-service teachers.

In addition, teachers need to be motivated to be whole-hearted, open-minded and responsible towards their teaching in order to engage in 'deliberate and systematic reflection' (Hall cited in Van Harmelen, 2006). Without these quality traits, teachers are unable to reflect before the lesson (when planning), during the lesson (when teaching) and after the lesson (when teaching is over). Until teachers analyse their teaching in line with the reform ideals, under achievement in schools will persist. This may impede the success of the implementation of the Namibian education reform effort.

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## APPENDIX 1: ANTICIPATORY REFLECTION TEMPLATE

The anticipatory reflection template is meant for a teacher to use before the lesson in preparation to teach effectively. A teacher needs to answer the questions in the template to ensure that they have attended to all necessary aspects that may contribute to the success of their lesson.

Type of reflection
<b>Anticipatory reflection</b> (Before the lesson)
<b>Aspects to reflect on</b>
What am I going to teach (Mathematical knowledge/concepts, values & skills learners should acquire)?
How will I assist struggling learners to learn the content proficiently?
How am I going to assist fast learners?
How am I going to teach (Teaching method: project in pairs/groups or individually, problem solving, cooperative learning, conveying meaning directly, drill & practice, discovery learning, peer teaching, drama/role play,...?)
How am I going to explain, illustrate, demonstrate and give examples of the concepts under discussion (How will I incorporate all learning styles: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic?)
How will my lesson flow (What will begin my lesson – Introduction, exploratory task, discussion, feedback, explanation, reinforcement task, conclusion).
Who am I going to teach (Learners' current level/grade, potential, prior knowledge/existing knowledge, experience, personality/attitude, socio-economic background?)
Why should I teach what I have to teach (Lesson objective, relevance to daily life and global situation)?
What context will I provide (What relevant subject related scenario will I provide?)
How am I going to capture learners' interest (Enhancing a positive disposition in learners, readiness to listen and learn)?
How will I connect the previous lesson with the new lesson?
What activity will I engage them in (class work)?
What feedback will I provide based on the class work (correction)?
How will I reinforce discipline?
How will I measure the success of my lesson (Lesson evaluation: were the day's objectives met or not)
What homework will I give them?
How will I measure individual learner's understanding?
How will I communicate each child's progress to relevant stakeholders (Parents, teachers, principal, head of department, director, inspector, etc.)?
How will I conclude my lesson?
What learning resource materials do I intend to use?
How will I maintain discipline in the classroom?
How will I relate to my learners (My attitude towards my learners)?
Is the amount of work adequate for the lesson duration?

## APPENDIX 2: CONTEMPORANEOUS REFLECTION TEMPLATE

During the lesson, teachers have to regulate their own teaching by responding quietly to the questions in the template below. Teachers need to familiarise themselves with the questions in the contemporaneous reflection template prior to the lesson to facilitate the process of automatic reflection during the lesson. Reflection during the lesson is useful in informing the teacher to either stick to lesson as planned or to make minor adjustments to suit learners’ needs.

Type of reflection
<b>Contemporaneous reflection</b> (During the lesson)
<b>Aspect to reflect on</b> (Observe and record outcomes after the lesson)
<b>Contemporaneous reflection</b> (During the lesson)
Is the introduction serving its purpose (Are learners ready for the lesson: attention, stationary, etc.?)
Is the classroom conducive for learning (ventilation, cleanliness, and lighting)?
Is the lesson progressing well?
Are all learners on task?
Are learners working according to their potential?
Am I inviting questions (any misconceptions)?
Any learners lagging behind?
Are all learners following instructions for the activity?
Voice modulation (Am I speaking on the same level – too high/too low throughout the lesson)
Eye contact (Am I looking at all learners or not)?
Am I inviting and allowing all learners to participate in class discussion.
Any stereotyping emerging from my explanation, examples, illustrations and demonstration.
Am I explaining well (do the learners understand what I am teaching) or should I explain concepts differently?
Any destructive noise?
Any unnecessary movement?



Am I concluding my lesson effectively?

### Appendix 3: Retrospective Reflection Template A

The template below should be used after lesson to look back at what prevailed in the classroom for further improvement. The template below needs to be used in conjunction with fig. 4.4 where the teacher has to briefly summarise critical aspects of the lesson and suggest the way forward.

Type of reflection		
<b>Retrospective reflection (After the lesson)</b>		
<b>Aspect to reflect on</b>	√ ×	Justification of a tick or a cross.
What was effective (tick) not effective (cross)		
<b>1. Introduction</b>		
Discovering learners' prior knowledge (when topic is new).	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Recap of previous lesson - knowledge, values and skills acquired.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Introduction of new lesson - knowledge, values and skills to be learned.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Connection of previous lesson to new lesson – how the previous lesson is related to the new lesson.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Capturing learners' interest.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>2. Presentation (Lesson development)</b>		
Explanation given	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrations made	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Examples used	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Illustrations used (pictures/diagrams)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learning styles used	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Resources used (models, charts, books, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Clarity of task/class work given	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quality of task/class work given	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quality of learners' work	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reinforcement of learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reinforcement of learners' good conduct	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Misconceptions emerging from learners' work	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Maintenance of discipline in the classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Teachers' talking pace	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patience with the learners	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paying learners individual attention	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Promotion of social interaction in the classroom ( fast learners to assist slow learners)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Communication with class (Clarity of expression, language fluency, responding to learners' questions...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Blackboard skills (Handwriting and organisation of written work on the chalkboard...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quality of feedback on class work	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Homework given	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>3. Conclusion</b>		
Summarised the key aspects of the lesson ( the learners/teacher)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Feed forward	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Remind and motivate learners to do homework and study	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## APPENDIX 4: RETROSPECTIVE REFLECTION TEMPLATE

### B:

#### Recording main lesson aspects after the lesson

<b>Retrospective reflection – After the lesson</b> (Recording own strength, weaknesses and recommendations for improvement).
Strength
Weakness
Recommendations (for improvement)

All the templates presented above are tools designed by the researcher to guide teachers when reflecting critically on their lessons. Contents included in the template emerged from the data provided by the teachers who participated in the study.