



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**THE NATURE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN GRADE R**

by

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**in the Faculty of Education**

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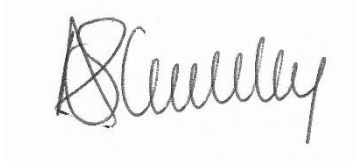
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## Abstract

The quality of education in South Africa has drawn critical attention as children continue to perform poorly as they progress through school. Reflective practice is promoted and implemented internationally as a method to improve quality teaching and learning. Nationally a growing interest in the implementation of reflective practice is reflected in the Department of Basic Education's suggestion that teachers make use of reflective practice to inform their classroom planning.

The objective of this study was to investigate the knowledge and understanding Grade R teachers have of reflective practice. As Grade R is the first year and the foundation of a child's school career, it was of interest to explore whether teachers reflect on their practice.

This study was located in an interpretivist paradigm using a case study design. Two Grade R teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Their annual, termly and weekly planning was analysed alongside the transcripts of the interviews, using thematic analysis to identify common themes of reflective practice in Grade R.

Five themes emerged from the analysis, which enabled the exploration of the benefits and challenges of using reflective practice in Grade R. These five themes allowed for the development of the idea of using reflective practice as a means *for* improving teaching and learning in Grade R. The teachers interviewed value the idea of reflective practice as a way to meet the needs of the children. They describe it as an innate aspect of their teaching. However, they have a tacit understanding and knowledge of reflective practice and it was not evident in the documents they use to inform their teaching.

For reflective practice to be encouraged teachers need support from within their schools and from the Department of Basic Education.

Keywords: Grade R, Reflective practice, Foundation Phase, Teaching and learning, knowledge.

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## **Dedication**

To every teacher working to make a difference in the life of children.

“We reflect in order that we may get hold of the full and adequate significance of what happens.”

Dewey (1910:119)

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## **Glossary of Terms**

ANA – Annual National Assessment

CAPS – Curriculum and Assessment Programme

CPTD – Continuous Professional Training and Development

DBE – Department of Basic Education

DOE – Department of Education

DHET – Department of Higher Education and Training

ECD – Early Childhood Development

ECE – Early Childhood Education

FP – Foundation Phase

Gr R – Grade R

MRTEQ – Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications

NCS – National Curriculum Statement

SACE – South African Council of Educators

TIMMS – Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Motivation

As a former Foundation Phase teacher, and currently a lecturer in Early Childhood Development, I focus on how to best support and develop each child in the classroom. I value reflecting on my practice as a way to make change and improve what is happening in the classroom. I am interested in how a teacher can help children succeed by looking at their own interactions with the children. I believe that the way in which the teacher approaches her classroom and how she adapts that classroom to support each child plays a critical role in the child's confidence and academic success throughout their school career. As a teacher I have made use of reflective practice as a tool to develop my teaching style and interactions with children, and currently student teachers.

As Grade R is the first-year children experience formal schooling in South Africa, I wondered how in-service Grade R teachers approach and reflect on the experiences children have in their classrooms. This idea inspired me to complete my Masters in Education.

Despite significant advances, the South African education system faces numerous challenges to quality education. Many of these become apparent within the first four years of teaching and learning. Atmore (2012: 129) refers to progress that has been made within Early Childhood Development (ECD), especially related to infrastructure in Grade R, even though there are still many challenges including lack of adequately qualified teachers and under resourced learning environments. He describes ECD as the "foundation for success in future learning." (Atmore 2012:122). Brown, Wilmot and Ash (2015:192) acknowledge educational improvements with respect to access to education, but also point to inefficiencies within the system that result in low levels of teaching and learning. Biersteker and Dawes (2008:187) emphasise the need for high quality teachers and learning programmes as an investment in ECD. This facilitates an easy transition for children from Grade R into formal schooling. Excell and Linington state: "the pedagogical decisions a teacher or practitioner makes will determine how the 'doors of learning' are opened (2011:3). Reflecting on practice creates the opportunity for teachers to develop a clear understanding of how they are supporting quality teaching and learning.

The South African Council of Educators (SACE) require that teachers accumulate 150 Continuous Professional Training and Development (CPTD) points in the course of three years (2019:2) and the Department of Education (DOE) encourages quality teaching by requiring

teachers to attend CPTD workshops. The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education (2007:11) discusses the value of CPTD points, and notes that these are most constructive when the knowledge gained in workshops is integrated into the learning space and teachers are able to reflect on their practice.

Reflective practice has been identified by a number of authors as a mechanism that can support and enable quality teaching and learning within South African education (Brown, Cheddie, Horry & Monk 2017; Shaik 2016; Killen 2015; Rousseau 2015; Excell and Linington 2010). Reflective practice can be extremely beneficial in the Grade R year of schooling as this is when children first encounter formal education.

The DOE (1997:9) acknowledges the essential nature of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in creating a foundation for later learning. They emphasize that education in Early Childhood needs to be holistic, taking the family, community and school life of the child into consideration (1997:10). The Foundation Phase (FP) period in education, begins with an introductory year of schooling for 5 to 6-year olds known as Grade R (DOE, 1997:16). This year is formulated to provide enriched play-based learning using the child's own knowledge and experience within a broad-based curriculum (DOE, 1997:18).

White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (1995:37) places emphasis on the role of the teacher in young children's experience of school. Teachers are tasked with encouraging quality learning, that promotes independent thought from children. This is done by having an integrated approach to the curriculum using age appropriate learning. To do this teachers, and the curriculum should be flexible to the needs of the children. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of quality teacher education for Grade R teachers to avoid inappropriate teaching methods.

## **1.2 Introduction**

Quality teaching and learning is a fundamental aspect of the Grade R classroom. In 2017 the DOE revised and Gazetted (40750) the Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) (DHET 2017). This gazette describes Grade R as "an institutionalised year of learning for children in the year before Grade 1" (2017:8). This year is a child's first exposure to formal education and creates the building blocks for future academic and social experiences in the school setting. The role of the teacher at this stage is vital. The teacher is the person who manages and develops the classroom environment based on her

knowledge of teaching, her knowledge of children and her knowledge of her own classroom management. Reflecting on what works well and what needs to change can be challenging as the demands of the curriculum and the needs of the children must be accommodated. Reflecting on classroom practice can also be time consuming, especially if teachers' assessments and record keeping are under scrutiny.

This chapter considers the background and motivation to studying reflective practice in Grade R. It also discusses the importance, context, approach, purpose and goals of the case study. The chapter introduces the problem statement and discusses the aims and objectives of the research study. Terms used are clarified and the limitations, assumptions and significance of the research study are set out. This interpretivist case study was conducted in 2018 to develop an insight into Grade R teachers' knowledge, use, and understanding of reflective practice. If teachers are aware of reflective practice, it is valuable to consider how they make use of it in their daily classroom practice. Do these teachers use reflective practice to inform their teaching strategies as a way of creating quality teaching and learning? Finally, do they believe they are supported in the use of reflective practice by the school and the DOE?

Two Grade R teachers were interviewed to determine their knowledge and understanding of reflective practice and how they used it as a way of supporting quality teaching and learning. They were also asked to share any documentation they had as a way of determining how they make use of the tools of reflective practice. In the interviews the teachers were encouraged to consider their personal opinion on reflective practice and give their understanding of the benefits and challenges of using it in the classroom and school setting.

### **1.3 Background**

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in South Africa is described by the DOE as needing to be; "planned in a continuous developmental sequence from birth to the end of the Foundation Phase" (1997:13). Grade R is the entry point to the Foundation Phase (FP) and forms a pivotal foundation for children's future learning. Excell and Linington (2015:1) direct attention to the nature of teaching and learning that occurs in Grade R and argue for "a year of quality learning" in Grade R in order to make a difference in the lives and learning capabilities of children.

If a child's experience of school in Grade R, the first year of the Foundation Phase, is positive, the foundations for effective teaching and learning are laid. To achieve this Rousseau (2014:168) advocates for Grade R teachers to acquire skills that allow them to bridge gaps between theory and practice. This positions them to apply their knowledge to the reality of the teaching environment.

### **1.3.1 Reflective practice in the South African context**

The National Policy Framework (29832) gazetted by the Department of Basic Education, supports the development of effective teaching by means of "a teacher's ability to reflect on practice and learn from the learner's own experience of being taught" (2007:24).

Internationally the concept of reflective practice is widely accepted, and it is being developed as an approach to teaching within South Africa (Gravett, 2012; SAIDE, 2011; Rousseau, 2014; Lewis, 2013). There is limited research focused on reflective practice in the FP within the South African context. This small-scale study will make a contribution to fill that gap.

There are a number of authors that highlight the many challenges the South African education system faces (Van der Berg, S. 2015; Lewis, 2013; Shaik, 2014; Spaul, 2013; Atmore 2012; Jansen 1998). The results of Annual National Assessments (ANA) administered in schools throughout South Africa attest to poor performance by learners as the results they generate are evidence of a low quality of teaching and learning happening in the Foundation phase. Van Broekhuizen, in Spaul (2013:53), suggests that the ANAs are a "primary means of identifying schools and children that need support" while Spaul (2013:3) asserts that the South African education system is inefficient. The outcome of such inefficiency results in low levels of achievement and success for pupils. This is further demonstrated by Biersteker and Dawes (2008:186) who cite the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) which describes literacy and numeracy levels in South Africa as "appalling". In an environment in which ECD lays the foundation for successful schooling (Biersteker and Dawes, 2008:186), Spaul (2013:11) identifies that teachers constitute the most important element within the education system. Teacher quality is directly related to the quality of education children receive.

Personal experience of learning informs the beliefs and knowledge Grade R teachers hold about education, and shapes the way they design and carry out classroom practice. Some of these experiences, beliefs and knowledge will support successful classroom practice whilst

others may hinder good classroom practice. Shaik (2016:3) draws attention to the relationship between beliefs and classroom practice and emphasises the value of reflective practice throughout Grade R teachers' careers. The use of reflective practice as a tool to inform effective classroom practice can help FP teachers, and Grade R teachers in particular, realize their critical role preparing children for academic achievement. Reed and Canning (2010:15) argues that teachers need to be 'intellectually curious' and that teachers should value reflective practice as a way of deepening and understanding the experience of teaching and learning (Reed & Canning 2010:15). Such intellectual curiosity supports the teachers' ability to improve on their practice.

The DOE Gazetted (40750) the Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) (DHET 2017). MRTEQ acknowledges teaching as a complex profession and recommends that teachers use different types of knowledge coupled with reflective practice to ensure successful learning. The policy presents practical learning, or work integrated learning (WIL) (DHET, 2017:21) as one way of building teacher knowledge and encouraging teachers to investigate their classroom practice. The aim is to increase awareness and improve on teaching and learning, especially if it involves learning from and in practice (DHET, 2017:22). Learning from practice includes the study of practice by means of observing and reflecting on lessons taught by others. Learning in practice involves preparing, teaching and reflecting on lessons actually presented in real and simulated environments (DHET, 2017:19) developing innate knowledge to support quality teaching and learning.

The DOEs White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (1995:80) recommends that teachers should be enabled to develop expertise and skills to stimulate learning. The White Paper encourages teachers to continuously improve performance in the classroom as they are responsible for good classroom practice. The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education in the Government Gazette (37230) encourages continuous performance improvement in order to build a community of competent teachers. The result will be a better quality of education. Excell and Linington (2011:9), further endorse the need for Grade R teachers to be able to implement teaching strategies meaningfully by reflecting on their practice. Reflective practice, as a process and tool for analysing and improving performance, provides teachers with internal scripts and methodology to make changes and build a successful learning environment.



### **1.3.2 Reflective practice defined**

Reflection is defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1984:871) as going back in thought, to consider, and to consult with oneself. It is thinking about past performance. Practice is defined as repeating an action in order to learn a skill or behaviour, or to improve one's skill (1984:805). Pollard (2009:5) describes reflective teaching practice as "the development and maintenance of professional expertise" in order to improve teaching practice with experience. Reflective practice requires a teacher to analyse her performance in the classroom environment. Evaluating the results of reflective practice enables her to develop her performance and implement changes, improving classroom practice and developing professional expertise.

Reflective practice calls for teachers to consider how they teach and the impact they have on learners (Pollard 2009:5). It enables teachers to act on problems they are facing to best support children in the classroom. Zeichner and Liston (2014) view reflective practice as an opportunity for teachers to be their own problem solvers. These outcomes suggest that reflective practice is an important tool for successful teaching and learning in the foundation phase classroom. This research addresses the knowledge Grade R teachers have of reflective practice and investigates which reflective tools they use to support classroom practice.

### **1.4 Clarification of Terms**

- Grade R – Reception year of the Foundation Phase.
- FP – Foundation Phase
- ECD – Early Childhood Development
- ECE – Early Childhood Education
- CPTD – Continuous Professional Teacher Development

### **1.5 Problem Statement**

The main research questions of the study are:

Main question

- What is the nature of reflective practice in Grade R classrooms?

Sub questions

- What knowledge do Grade R teachers have of reflective practice?
- What reflective tools do Grade R teachers use for reflection?

- How does reflective practice support Grade R teachers' decision making?
- How is reflective practice in Grade R supported?

## **1.6 Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this research is to establish the knowledge Grade R teachers have regarding reflective practice. It will also explore the tools teachers use for reflection as well as how they believe it supports classroom practice.

The research objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the knowledge Grade R teachers, have regarding reflective practice.
2. To understand the benefits and challenges of reflective practice in the Grade R classroom.
3. To explore the tools Grade R teachers, use for reflective practice.

## **1.7 Context of the study**

The public school used for this study is set in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. This former Model C school is a community school drawing children and families from a wide variety of social settings within Cape Town. It is a quintile 1 school and receives limited financial support by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), relying on parents to pay school fees. The school is multicultural and draws children from a variety of socio-economic environments. As a school they embrace this unique character as they provide quality education for all the children.

The school strives to focus on the individual child and considers itself a 'Thinking School'. The teachers teach thinking skills and use reflection as part of the learning process. They encourage thinking routines as a way to build a strong learning environment that encourages children to develop a broad range of academic and social skills with support from excellent teachers.

The Grade R classrooms are located on the school property but are physically separate from the rest of the school. The focus in the Grade R classrooms is on holistic child development. This is achieved by providing both teacher-guided activities and child-initiated activities (Excell & Linington 2015:107) with a focus on learning through play.

## **1.8 Significance of the study**

Although reflective practice is suggested in the MRTEQ (2017) as a useful tool to support and enhance teaching and learning, Rousseau (2015:4) highlights the concern that debates concerning reflective practice in teacher education in South Africa are rare with limited research into its use and effectiveness in South African schools.

Current trends in education support the concept of reflective practice, however the challenges of implementing reflective practice in South African schools has received little attention (Rousseau, 2015:6). Despite this situation reflective practice can be used as a tool to bridge the gap between teaching theory and teacher practice (Rousseau 2015:4).

Reflective practice is a tool teachers use to connect the theory of education with classroom practice. To do this effectively, teachers need to be exposed to reflective practice skills as part of CTPD and required to document reflections as a tool for teacher development. Lewis (2013:23) states; “teacher quality is the most critical predictor of learner achievement.” Teachers who use tools for reflective practice take the time to consider their role in the quality of teaching and learning. If this can be encouraged in Grade R teachers, they will support children academically and socially. Spaul (2013:6) believes that self-aware teachers will ensure children don’t acquire learning deficits, fall behind and develop learning gaps that cannot be remediated.

## **1.9 Scope and limitations**

Two Grade R teachers were interviewed, and information was drawn from one former Model C school in the southern suburbs of the Western Cape, which classifies this as a small scale research project. The results of the research may not be transferable to other Grade R settings in the broader Cape Town schooling community, or South Africa generally.

## **1.10 Assumptions of the study**

As the school in the study is a former Model C school where parents pay for their children’s education the assumption is made that quality education occurs. The school is well resourced and promotes teacher development through attendance at both departmental workshops for Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) points as well as school funded workshops.

A reasonable assumption is made that the teachers within the school make use of reflective practice as the principal of the school strongly advocates its use. Alongside reflective practice the school describes itself as a 'Thinking School' with a strong emphasis on reflection as part of the process of learning.

### **1.11 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter where the research problem is presented. It considers the origin, importance and background to the problem. The key concepts are clarified, and the significance, assumptions and limitations are raised.

Chapter 2 considers the theoretical perspectives that the literature focuses on with regard to reflective practice. It also presents the theoretical framework of socio-constructivism to support reflective practice. This theoretical framework is based on the work of Dewey (1910), Schön (1983), Pollard (2009) and Vygotsky (1978). It will provide an overview of the literature which supports this study.

Chapter 3 will explain the research design and methodology used for the study on reflective practice. The units of analysis will be profiled. It will also provide an overview of the case study approach taken to the research. Data collection instruments and techniques for data analysis will be described, along with ethical procedures to add to the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study into reflective practice in Grade R. This is done by analysing the semi-structured interviews of two Grade R teachers and analysis of their documents. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data on Grade R teachers' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice. This analysis looked for common themes the Grade R teachers expressed with regard to reflective practice and considered how these reflections are documented as a way to support classroom practice.

Chapter 5 provides the implications and recommendations for the use of reflective practice in a Grade R setting. The opportunity for further research regarding the implementation and practice is suggested to gain further insight into the use of reflective practice in Grade R classrooms.

## **1.12 Conclusion**

Chapter 1 outlines the motivation for the study into reflective practice in Grade R. It gives an overview of the context of Grade R in the South African education system and how the DBE encourages teachers to improve on their practice. The context for this study is described. I have defined reflective practice and clarified the terms used in the study. The problem statement aims and objectives of this study are listed. The significance of the study is highlighted as a way to encourage dialogue around reflective practice to develop teaching and learning skills in Grade R. The limitations and assumptions of the study are discussed.

This research will serve to expand the limited body of empirical research on reflective practice in the South African context. Despite its limited scale this Masters research serves to enhance awareness of the knowledge teachers have of reflective practice and the tools they use for reflection. The findings may contribute to further recommendations for enhancing and supporting the reflective practice of Grade R teachers.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN GRADE R**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide insight into the body of literature that addresses reflective practice. I based the literature review on the work of Dewey (1910, 1915, 1916, 1933, 1938) who is considered the Father of reflective practice. Schön (1983, 1985) expanded the ideas presented by Dewey and is a strong advocate for the use of reflective practice in a variety of settings. Pollard (2009) uses the school setting as his focus for reflective practice as he develops the work done by both Dewey and Schön. Reflective practice is considered alongside socio-constructivism as a theoretical framework that supports teachers creating meaning from classroom experience.

I have considered national and international perspectives on reflective practice as a means to improve and develop teaching practice. Strategies and tools that are endorsed for the implementation of reflective practice are explored to gain insight into the ways teachers can implement reflective practice within their classrooms and schools.

Reflective practice is considered to be one of the tools teachers employ to make significant positive changes to teaching and learning that occurs in classrooms. The value of reflective practice and the influence it has on teachers and their classroom practice has received significant international attention in recent years. Many researchers, including Dewey (1910), Schön (1983), Larrivee (2000), Rodgers (2002), Pollard (2009), and Colwell (2015) have examined and presented the positive contributions of reflective practice within the teaching environment.

The earliest definition of reflective practice was offered by Dewey (1910:5) who described reflection as looking at thoughts, beliefs and behaviours to understand their importance. Reflection enables the practitioner to find solutions or make changes to practice and situations. Reflective thought is defined as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends.” (Dewey, 1910:6). Reflective practice is a way teachers become aware of their classroom practice, and the beliefs they have about the children they teach. Effective use of reflective practice encourages teachers to be cognisant of their strengths and

challenges as practitioners, and to use this knowledge in classroom decision making. Successful reflection may confirm beliefs, or can help one discover new facts about the area being reflected on. Reflective practice enables a solution-focused approach, and the ability to make decisive changes to practice or situations.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

Reflective practice supports the theory that teachers construct their approach to teaching and learning based on their beliefs, values and understandings. Reflective practice motivates teachers to find solutions, make adjustments, and be flexible in order to provide learning environments that support the needs of each child. The practice of reflection is aligned with socio-constructivism which explains how people construct their worldview based on their experiences. Teaching and learning is constructed on the experiences and values individuals bring to the classroom.

### **2.2.1 Dewey and reflective practice**

The simplest definition of reflective practice is presented by Dewey (1910:57) as the opportunity to deliberate, consider and inspect an event, or learning. He further postulates that if we accept the way things are done, and the meaning behind it, and don't see the need to make changes, we are no longer practicing reflectively (Dewey 1910:108).

Reflecting on practice creates an awareness of our values and belief systems and how we function in the classroom, based on those beliefs. We are consciously making a choice to look at what we believe, or don't believe, and then make changes appropriate to that reflection. Reflecting is looking at what has been done and then taking those experiences and meanings and using it in the creation of new experiences (Dewey 1938:38).

Dewey (1910:72) describes five steps that support reflective practice. This starts with recognising that there is a difficulty or obstacle to overcome. Secondly the difficulty, or obstacle, is defined. The third step is to consider possible solutions to the difficulty. During the fourth step, the possible solutions require action to be taken to see if any change occurs. The fifth step is to consider, through the use of observation whether the solution is successful. If it is successful, the change can be accepted. If it isn't accepted, then an alternative solution needs to be considered.

## **2.2.2 Reflective practice as change**

Reflective practice enables us to look at situations to consider how we can make a change to ourselves or the environment based on Dewey's (1910:11) notion that we reflect to find solutions to problems. In addition, Dewey (1910:13) defines reflection as being able to overcome inertia and status quo, not accepting things at face value. When we reflect on our practice we are compelled to make changes unless we believe that the practice being reflected on is valuable and beneficial for all involved. Reflective practice gives the teacher the ability to judge and reason deliberately, enabling change and looking for relevance (Dewey 1932:151).

Teachers who use reflective practice in their classrooms can adjust the aims and outcomes of learning to suit the needs of each child in the environment. Dewey (2001:107) determines that the value of scrutinising learning environments is to consider alternatives thereby improving teaching and learning. He encourages teachers to look at as many options as possible. This will improve the quality of teaching and learning in the environment. Being a reflective practitioner gives teachers the opportunity to observe the children and the environment to support meaningful experiences. It allows the teacher to observe and effectively plan to meet the needs of each individual in the classroom. This process motivates the teacher to be flexible and open to new possibilities in the classroom. Dewey (2001:112) places value on the ability of a teacher to be adaptable and make changes as needed.

The teacher in a classroom benefits from the process of reflection if they have time to think about what they have observed. The choice to reflect is more beneficial if it is voluntary, and not forced, or made compulsory. Reflective practice is most valuable when it is not rushed. Dewey (1910:13) advocates for the use of observation within reflective practice and suggests that time allows the reflective practitioner the opportunity to suspend their judgement and to become curious when reflecting (Dewey 1910:13). Adopting a position of curiosity motivates a thorough consideration of the events being observed.

In his observations Dewey (1910:141) noted how children also make use of reflective practice. He noted that children reflect and test their findings based on what is interesting and valuable to their experiences. This information is used to determine what is being done successfully. Making use of reflective practice to determine success reduces a fear of failure (Dewey 1910:186) and provides the teacher, and the child, with an opportunity to develop further opportunities for learning. Dewey (1910:156) defines this as being the point of education.



### **2.2.3 Reflective practice and the classroom**

Dewey (1932:149) states; “A person who has the power of reflective attention, to hold problems and questions is intellectually speaking, educated.” A successful teacher uses the process of reflective practice to address the gap between curriculum expectations and how to teach it to the children, who have individual needs. Addressing the separation that exists between the administrative needs of education and the individual needs of the children Dewey (1932:66) argues that it is essential to connect theory with practice. Furthermore, Dewey (1932:99) considers it valuable for children to connect their experiences outside school with those in school. Teaching and learning require reflective practices to ensure children make connections with the real world rather than learning information that is irrelevant to their lived experiences, and abilities. Teachers who make use of reflective practice take time to consider the impact of lessons and how each child responds.

Research by Spaul (2019), Taylor, S., Cilliers, J., Prinsloo, C., Fleisch, B., and Reddy, V. (2017), Atmore, E. (2012), Biersteker, L. and Dawes, (2008) Excell, L. and Linington, V. (2010) amongst others, describe the numerous challenges teachers in South Africa face. Although teachers may not have the skills or knowledge to support themselves and colleagues (Spaul 2019:8) reflective practice may provide a valuable process to acknowledge and remedy the challenges teachers face in the classroom. Effective teaching and learning is supported by teachers who are confident and motivated to invite suggestions from their colleagues and the children.

### **2.2.4 Reflective practice and adaptation**

Dewey (1938:19) interprets the traditional approach to education as one that does not engage children in what they are learning. The traditional approach presents quantitative facts on which children are assessed and children may not connect with the learning as it is presented. This approach to education represents a challenge to reflective practice as the demand on teachers to teach and complete prescribed work means that little change and adaptation can take place in the classroom. Dewey challenges teachers to look past the ‘prescribed’ information children need to learn, and rather reflect on the skills that would be appropriate to the individual. Approaching learning in this way encourages children to use all their experiences and build on their individual knowledge. This may be a challenge when Grade R is attached to a primary school where the boundary between Grade R and Grade One merge and Grade R teachers instruct the children as if they were in a formal school setting (Excell, Linington & Sethusha 2015:6).

A teacher who makes use of reflective practice is better placed to support the individual needs of the children instead of focussing on academic outcomes that may be of little value. Dewey further suggests that teachers are better able to support and engage with children if they acknowledge the learning children have already done (1938:9).

Dewey (1938:9) expressed concern that education did not take individual experiences into account and he described schools as environments that impose ideas from outside, without any real thought for the educational needs of the children. He defines this system of imposition as happening to the children by the teachers, who themselves are imposed upon by bureaucracy. Dewey (1938:6) believes that what is taught is often static as it is knowledge children have already assimilated. Dewey (1938:20) regards the school curriculum as not considering children's knowledge acquisition before they enter school. If teachers are able to take this prior knowledge into account through the use of reflective practice, they can then adapt their teaching to the needs of the children.

### **2.2.5 Reflective practice and the teacher**

Reflective practice allows the teacher to be in touch with the needs of each child in the class. Teaching involves personal relationships and teachers who practice reflectively are aware of the influence they have on each child they teach, and how the classroom is run. They are able to provide children with the tools they need to develop academically and socially. The teacher who reflects on the impact they have on children can build close and strong relationships which offer valuable guidance to each child in the environment (Dewey 1938:7).

Dewey (1932:125) places value in the teacher being sympathetic towards the needs of each child. This involves getting to know each child well enough in order to give the child what he needs to develop, and to follow his instincts when he is learning.

If a teacher reflects on how they practice and how they represent themselves to the children, they will become aware of how they can influence the way a child feels about what they are learning (Dewey 1910:48). It is important for a teacher to be able to watch the child, reflect on what the child is doing and how they are reacting to the work in order to know what to give the child to meet individual needs.

Teachers who make use of reflective practice become aware of the influence they have on each child they teach, and on how the classroom is run. In addition, Dewey (1910:48) stresses the influence the teacher's personality has on the subject they teach. Children do not distinguish between the subject and the teacher. They see the two as being the same thing. This has profound meaning for teachers. They are the most prominent influence on the child's experience of school.

Reflective practice encourages the teacher to become sympathetic towards the needs of the child. In order to achieve this, it is important for the reflective teacher to develop skills of observation.

### **2.2.6 Reflective practice and observation**

To support each child's individual growth, the reflective teacher needs to develop the ability to observe. This involves the teacher understanding what she is observing and acting on what she sees. Dewey (1938:29) explains that merely observing is not enough. Reflecting on observations requires the teacher to make time to think about the observations and then take considered action and make well-considered judgements. The process of reflection provides the teacher the space to consider changes that could be implemented and encourages the teacher to develop a level of flexibility in her teaching style. Being flexible allows the teacher to adapt the learning environment to benefit the child.

Dewey (1932:131) refers to the need for the teacher to observe not only the materials the child works with but also how the child manipulates the materials and interacts with those around him. Dewey (1930:75) states: "The teacher must be absolutely free to get suggestions from any and every source." In a play-based Grade R classroom, observing how the children interact with the materials offers the teacher the opportunity to make decisions about what each child in the environment needs. Time constraints present a challenge to effective observation as teachers focus on meeting the demands of the curriculum. Grade R teachers are expected to deliver the prescribed curriculum, and this leaves very little time for creativity or meeting the needs of the children (Shaik 2015:83).

Using observations as the basis for reflective practice frees the teacher to see what appeals to each child. This knowledge provides the teacher with an opportunity to plan and decide on the support that is needed for the child to master a task or achieve success (Dewey 1932:134). Observation can be used as part of the process of evaluating what is working well, and which

elements need further consideration. If observation is combined with reflective practice the teacher can use the observation to stimulate thought, and reflect on the observation. In order to position observation as a scientific approach Dewey (1910:196) proposes that observation should be an objective activity. Objective observation supports the building of intellectual ability and the objective observer can make changes and further reflect on the changes made. When teachers are able to observe and reflect objectively they are better equipped to respond to the intellectual needs of children, and then teach to those needs.

Dewey believes that the way we think and reflect on what is happening needs to be considered from observations of practice. He (1910:71) advocated for the use of observation at the beginning and conclusion of the reflective process as observation is not an isolated event. Rather, Dewey (1910:191) describes observation as part of an active process of problem-solving, giving teachers the opportunity to explore and discover the best way for teaching and learning to occur (Dewey 1910:193). Reflecting on what has been observed enables the teacher to make changes and then observe the changes that have been implemented. Reflecting on child and classroom observations gives the teacher time to consider a variety of options to improve how the children respond to what is being presented. Dewey (1910:210) describes reflection on observations as “leisurely mental digestion.”

Dewey values reflective practice as a means for teachers to make changes to the learning environment. These changes include developing a clearer understanding of the way in which lessons are taught affects the children. Teachers use reflective practice to be flexible and adaptable with the curriculum meeting the needs of the children. This is done through observations and discussions when teachers reflect on their individual practice to improve teaching and learning for each child in the environment.

### **2.2.7 Schön and reflective practice**

Schön (1983:7) builds on Dewey’s model of reflective practice by considering the relationship between academic knowledge and the value of practice. Schön acknowledges the importance of ‘practice’ and considers reflective practice as the ability to know what the practitioner of a field of work puts into practice (1983:45). He describes practice as both the performance of doing an activity as well as having an element of repetition (1983:50). Through repetition a practitioner improves and strengthens their performance in their field of knowledge/expertise. The practitioner may not be aware of what they are doing or how to explain it, but they use reflective practice intuitively to effect positive change and growth.

Schön (1983:55) proposes that the reflective practitioner is one who is able to reflect both *in* practice and *on* practice. He refers to reflecting-in-action as the ability to reflect and adjust in the moment and reflecting-on-action as reflecting on the event after it has occurred. He further included the concept of on-the-spot reflection, which is an intuitive approach to the lesson as it happens.

### **2.2.8 Reflection-in-action**

Reflecting-in-action is defined by Schön (1987:36) as taking a constructionist view of the world. In this view the problems or challenges that arise are dealt with as they occur. The reflective practitioner makes adjustments to their reality as they go about a task, thereby constructing the situation in real time. Reflecting-in-action requires the practitioner to problem solve as the situation occurs. The practitioner assesses the situation they are in and adapts to meet the needs of the situation. The reflective practitioner is adaptable to change and sometimes this change happens in a moment.

According to Schön (1983) Reflection-in-action involves making changes to teaching as the lesson proceeds. To do this type of reflection the teacher adapts and changes the lesson as they see the child respond to what has been presented. Being able to reflect-in-action allows the teacher to meet the individual needs of the child. However, this could be a difficult form of reflection in whole class teaching as the teacher may not have space or time to consider the uniqueness of each child in the classroom. Schön (1983:101) describes reflection-in-action as a process where the individual is taken into consideration. The lesson is then adapted to meet the needs of the individual. This can be a challenge when teachers are expected to apply standard theories or curricula, especially in Grade R where teachers are expected to deliver the curriculum, “like a recipe” (Shaik 2015:83).

Schön (1987:66) describes this type of reflective practice as experimental, taking a scientific approach to researching the unfolding events and making necessary adjustments as they go. The practitioner uses each unique situation to try a different approach in order to facilitate a successful outcome. In a classroom this includes the ability to adapt lessons to the individual child, or group of children, with whom the teacher is working. Schön (1983:108) does not think it is possible to apply past situations to current ones. He suggests that greater value is derived from a comparison of the two situations. This may require that the teacher suspends the curriculum plan in order to achieve this degree of adaptability and effectively reflect-in-action.

Reflecting-in-action in Grade R allows the teacher to identify 'teachable moments' through observation as a way to maximise teaching and learning which will support the children's learning (Excell and Lington 2015:110).

### **2.2.9 Reflection-on-action**

Reflection-on-action is in contrast to reflection-in-action. It involves reflecting on the lesson before it begins and once it has finished (Schön, 1983:60). Reflecting-on-action involves the practitioner reflecting on a situation whilst applying theory and knowledge gained (Schön 1983:56). This knowledge helps inform their practice. The ability to apply knowledge gained over time supports the teacher to make an assessment of new situations. It involves the practitioner thinking back on past experiences and knowledge to gain deeper insight and understanding into the situation. The teachers are aware of their intuitive thoughts, and what they instinctively know, and use this to consider changes they can make to their practice.

Schön (1983:57) is aware that some teachers may consider themselves experts in their field. The implication of this is that they do not see the need for reflective practice as they are confident in their theoretical knowledge. This confidence in theoretical knowledge could reduce adaptability and flexibility as the teacher may feel threatened by change. Teachers who have taught Grade R for many years become comfortable with their routines and way of teaching and may be less flexible when it comes to developing new teaching strategies. Classroom challenges may not improve if teachers hold firmly to their inherent knowledge as they are less likely to take responsibility for classroom challenges and tend to view challenges being a result of children not conforming to the requirements of the teaching environment.

### **2.2.10 On-the-spot-reflection**

Schön also recommends the use of "on-the-spot reflection" (1983:58). He presented this concept during a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in-service teacher training session. During this in-service training, teachers were given the opportunity to explore their intuitive reactions to learning situations with children. The teachers could then make changes to what was being taught as the need arose. He considers on-the spot-reflection as experimental. The teacher is described as experimenting with how to build success in the child who is struggling to learn a concept. Schön (1983:60) considers the teacher who reflects in this way as being equivalent to a researcher, as this allows the teacher to consider the uniqueness of each situation instead of relying only on theory. On-the Spot reflection may be similar to reflecting-in-action as both consider the changes made during the lesson. However,

on-the-spot reflection involves the teacher following her intuition and trying a different approach to the lesson where reflection-in-action sees the teacher responding to the needs of the child as the lesson unfolds, accommodating the individual needs of each child.

Schön (1983:60) determines that the teacher is able to construct new theories, relevant to individual children, dependent on what is being observed. Reflecting on the experiences in the classroom allows the teacher the opportunity to develop and grow, making changes where necessary to support the child's success. Reflection can happen both during the teaching day, as part of lessons, or at the end of it. When reflection happens as part of the day the teacher appreciates the uniqueness of each child and constructs individual understanding of the child, from his perspective (Schön 1983:107). When the reflective practitioner operates in this way they reframe what they have seen happen and construct a more suitable environment, to help the child shape their learning. Reframing the learning is described by Schön (1983:102) as looking at the problem the child may face in the learning situation and then suggesting different ways to approach it. This may have the effect of making the child feel empowered to take charge of their individual learning. It can also lead to further personal success as the child sees the possibilities of being flexible and adaptable.

A reflective practitioner constructs knowledge using their experience. Schön (1983:220) states that; "intuitive knowing is always richer than any description of it". The reflective practitioner attempts to understand both the situation and the problem and uses their intuitive knowledge to make changes that support personal development. Being aware of one's knowledge informs adjustments and changes made when reflecting on the problem. This knowledge is informed by actions and events and also includes emotions, experiences and responses to events (Patil 2013:356). This level of awareness encourages deeper understanding of what is happening in the environment. There may be unintended changes that occur as the situation changes, and Schön (1983:105) views this as an opportunity for the reflective practitioner to look for new understandings and how the problem may have changed, or may have been solved. The need to implement the national curriculum may present a challenge for the teacher to reflect and make the necessary changes. However, on-the-spot reflection encourages and supports the Grade R teacher to be creative and construct the learning environment in collaboration with the children's responses. Shaik (2015:83) describes the teacher who reflects in this way as being a risk taker and creator of the learning environment.

### **2.2.11 Pollard and reflective practice**

Expanding on theories presented by Dewey (1910) and Schön (1983), Pollard (2014) views reflection as a practice that connects teachers to their personal values and the aims of education, as they understand them. When teachers are able to reflect on the principles that motivate their practice they can adapt and change, leading to self-improvement. Pollard (2014:34) argues that self-improvement for teachers occurs in conjunction with awareness of past experience. Reflecting on experiences encourages teachers to make changes in order to improve their practice. Reflective practice motivates teachers to make a commitment to professional development by thinking of and implementing new ideas (Pollard, 2014:85).

### **2.2.12 Characteristics of reflective practice**

To understand the nature of reflective practice it is useful to define how a teacher can determine what it is they are doing in their teaching that would be considered reflective practice. In *Reflective Teaching* (2005:14), Pollard identified seven key characteristics of reflective practice. These are:

1. An active concern with the aims, consequences, means and efficiency of teaching.
2. A cyclical or spiralling process of evaluation and practice.
3. A competence in evidence-based classroom enquiry, for improved teaching.
4. An attitude of being open-minded and responsible.
5. A teacher making judgements informed on evidence-based enquiry.
6. Collaboration and dialogue with colleagues.
7. The opportunity for teachers to mediate creatively whilst teaching.

Through collaboration with their colleagues Grade R teachers are able to identify their strengths and limitations (Shaik 2015:82). They use this knowledge to adapt to the needs of the children by creating relevant teachable moments. It also contributes to developing a level of flexibility, where the Grade R teacher is encouraged to consider the children agents of their own learning (Shaik, Excell and Linington 2015:34).

### **2.2.13 The context of reflective practice**

Pollard (2009:90) emphasises the value of teachers being aware of the social contexts in which teaching takes place. Social awareness supports reflective practice as it opens possibilities for alternative explanations as well as individual perspectives on the situation.



Pollard (2009:91) suggests that the social context of schools includes shared perspectives, ways of thinking and the level of teacher accountability. Schools include teachers who hold a personal understanding of teaching and learning. These understandings are subjective and personal. These understandings need to be discussed and debated in an attempt to provide quality teaching and learning.

Reflecting on the social context creates a level of accountability on the part of teachers. The teachers are accountable for the quality of the teaching and how they respond to classroom situations. Pollard (2009:103) states that being accountable reminds teachers of their legal requirements as well the impact their decision making will have on the children in the classroom. For example, in South Africa, the legal requirements of a Grade R teacher include making use of continuous assessments to monitor teaching and learning as part of supporting each child's development (Kruger and Greyling 2015:168). As a team, teachers can work together and reflect on their individual teaching approach as well as the whole schools' approach to teaching and learning. This accountability also reminds teachers of the need for successful teamwork, as Pollard (2009:99) states; "teachers are the most important resource."

Accountability encourages academic success through teamwork. Teachers who understand the context they teach in and the developmental and learning needs of the children promote quality Grade R teaching (Excell & Linington 2015:100). Creating a child-centred Grade R environment (Excell & Linington 2015:92) supports the notion of accepting individual perspectives of both the teachers and the children.

#### **2.2.14 Reflective practice and self-knowledge**

Pollard discusses the importance of self-knowledge as part of reflective practice. He states; "of even greater importance is the capacity to know oneself." (2009:104). Teachers should be individually aware of their personal strengths and challenges. Developing self-knowledge is a continual, conscious process (Pollard 2009:119). Self-awareness creates change as the teacher uses every opportunity to develop and grow personally. Teachers who have self-knowledge are aware of how they may support and hinder each child's success in the classroom.

The process of building self-awareness is continual as the teacher reflects on their educational values and pedagogy. As part of self-awareness it is also important for the reflective practitioner to have knowledge of their own personal educational background. What experiences did they have at school, and how does this impact on the running of their classroom? Pollard (2009:121) states; “The values we hold are evident in our behaviours and in our teaching.” Teachers should be aware of how their own school experiences affect the way they teach. Equally, teachers need to be aware of their personal values and beliefs. Shaik (2016:1) highlights the importance of Grade R teachers being aware of their personal beliefs about children as this influences their teaching practice. These values and beliefs are passed on to the children. For this reason, teachers need to recognise the effect they have in the classroom.

Teaching is a socially constructed occupation and the teacher’s own experiences of being a child in a classroom influences their teaching style. Zeichner and Liston (2014:37) refer to this as “emotional labour”. Teachers create their teaching style and methods based on experiences of being taught. These past experiences have emotions attached to them. For these reasons, teachers need to commit to their own learning, change personal behaviours and gain new knowledge with different understanding and values (Pollard 2014:175). Awareness of personal responses to the teaching environment is further supported by Rodgers (2002:852) who emphasises that a teacher’s interpretations and suggestions are based on her perceptions and experiences.

School and classroom practice are supported by the values and beliefs each teacher holds. This contributes towards creating the school experience of each child. Self-aware teachers are aware of which practices they support. This will encourage them to confront established practices that conflict with personal practices. Shaik (2016:4) proposes that if Grade R teachers recognise their own belief systems they are better able to change the limiting ones as a way of improving classroom practice.

Pollard (2009:104) stresses the importance of self-awareness being objective and constructive. Teachers who are self-aware use their knowledge to be adaptable and supportive of each child in the classroom. This form of support for children goes a long way to supporting life-long learning and school success.

### **2.2.15 Reflective practice and assessment.**

Reflective practice is a method teachers can utilise to consider the strengths and challenges children face in the classroom. As part of a team of reflective practitioners Pollard (2009:52) suggests that one can consider both existing and emergent problems children face in the school and classroom setting. Reflective practice brings these problems to the fore and helps teachers implement possible solutions. Practicing reflectively encourages teachers to be cognisant of the results of their considered solutions and interventions. Some teachers may use assessments prescribed by the school or Education Department to reflect on problems and the possible solutions.

Prescribed assessments are part of what Pollard (2009:210) describes as the “Official Curriculum”. This is the curriculum that schools are required to follow by the Education Department. The official curriculum does not take individual needs into account. It is a standardized document that covers all aspects of teaching and learning. Pollard (2009:211) discusses two additional curricula; the hidden curriculum and the observed curriculum.

The ‘hidden curriculum’ is the attitude towards learning held by the school, the teachers and the children. It is observable in how all the individuals behave, and the differences between them. The hidden curriculum has a strong influence on the way each classroom is run, and how children feel about school and themselves as learners. It also helps explain why differences occur in each and every classroom, even though the same official curriculum is being taught. Excell and Linington (2015:103) describe the ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ curriculum as the planned and unplanned activities that happen throughout a school day which have a direct influence on each child’s learning.

Pollard (2009:211) describes the ‘observed curriculum’ as what can be seen taking place in the classroom. The observed curriculum gives insight into what the children are actually learning and enjoying as part of the learning environment. The reflective practitioner observes when effective learning occurs as well as the teaching strategies that are being used to support the learning. Reflective practitioners use the observed curriculum to consider their own professional development. They reflect on what has been experienced and look for examples in which meaningful learning has occurred.

### **2.2.16 Reflective practice as performance evaluation**

Pollard (2009:50) acknowledges teachers make judgements about children's performances based on their own classroom recordkeeping. This implies that the information teachers generate may have a bias, depending on their observations and opinions of children.

Pollard (2009:53) discusses the possibility that "what we choose to collect and the way we collect it will directly affect what we find." As a reflective practitioner the teacher must be aware of the validity and reliability of that on which she is reflecting. To avoid bias a teacher can look for regularity and irregularity in data collection with an intention to make sense of the data they collect. Potential bias can be explored in collaboration with colleagues in order to develop appropriate and positive responses to the learning environment. In addition, the reflective practitioner should be aware of the sources of information they collect and the impact of this on findings.

### **2.3 Voices on reflective practice**

Reflective practice is a topic that has enjoyed much analysis and discussion. Researchers (Larrivee, 2000; Pollard, 2005; Zeichner & Liston, 2014; Colwell, 2015) describe reflection in terms of a spiral when reflecting in and on what has happened. Both forms of reflection allow the practitioner to constructively change a problem into a solution. Perceiving reflective practice as a spiral process allows the teacher to constantly monitor, evaluate and revise their practice to improve teaching and learning. Reflective practice develops the ability to be flexible and make changes (Colwell, 2015:63).

In order to achieve effective professional development and improved classroom practice Colwell (2015:52) describes reflective practice as a continual process that should include collaboration. Colwell (2015:63) argues for a shift toward Dewey's concept of reflective action which involves a willingness to engage in constant self-appraisal. Failing this, classroom practice tends towards routine action (Dewey, 1933:14) which is guided by factors such as routine and habit and serves to maintain the status quo.

Colwell (2015:64) describes several characteristics of reflective practice including open-mindedness and collaboration with colleagues to develop supportive learning and teaching. By way of example, a Grade R teacher who is concerned about a child's social development may ask a colleague to observe the child at play. The two teachers are then able to collaborate and reflect on ideas that best support the child.

In a South African context Rousseau (2015:1) views reflective practice as a tool that can be used to integrate theory with practice educators implement. Reflecting on lessons taught or general classroom practice enables the teacher to make changes according to what the children need. It also helps the teacher make decisions about effective teaching and learning beyond that prescribed by curriculum needs or educational theory. Rousseau (2015:31) describes reflective practice as a tool that integrates theory and practice.

In an earlier national study Excell and Linington (2010:8) list the qualities of successful Grade R teachers. These qualities include the ability to reflect on practice in order to implement strategies for purposeful play and to mediate learning. Mphahlele and Rampa (2015:335) suggests that reflective practice is a valuable tool for professional development among South African teachers as it involves learning new skills and developing new knowledge. This, in turn, encourages teachers to be effective lifelong learners.

Robinson and Rousseau (2018) highlight the different interpretations of reflective practice that exist within the South African educational setting, and the challenge this creates for curriculum implementation. The variety of views and knowledge of reflective practice and its role creates an inconsistency in the ability to implement it successfully.

#### **2.4 Reflective practice as critical thinking**

Dewey (1933) views reflective practice as enhancing critical thinking. Choy (2012:168) discusses the need for teachers to use reflective practice with critical thinking skills. As they do this they build awareness of the prevailing teaching and learning and the changes they need to make to bridge potential gaps in learning. The ability to think critically develops problem solving skills as well as allowing for change to be implemented. Once changes have been affected they become the subject for further reflection. This makes the whole process of reflective practice a dynamic one.

The ability to think critically and make changes is unconsciously observed by children who are also encouraged to think critically about how and what they are learning. To think critically is one form of assessment. The critically reflective teacher and the critically reflective child are able to individually assess their responses to the learning that has occurred. Brookfield (1995:3) emphasises the importance of teachers being critically reflective and to be aware of

the assumptions they make and what they consider to be the norms of teaching. He describes the critically reflective teacher as one who knows; “that methods and practices from outside rarely fit snugly into the contours of her classroom” (Brookfield 1995:19). Critical reflection enables teachers to create a classroom environment that encourages quality teaching because they examine their understanding and expectations as a way to improve teaching practice (Larrivee 2000:294).

## **2.5 Reflective practice as teacher development**

In ECD, Excell (2016:8) suggests the need for reflective toolkits. These toolkits create opportunities for participation by teachers and the development of teaching practice. The toolkit guides teachers in the process of reflecting on practice in order to improve classroom practice and the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in the environment. The toolkit allows the teacher to consider their understanding of the situation and to relate it to their experiences and classroom contexts. The reflective toolkit is part of a self-reflective developmental process in which “practitioners will be encouraged to think about their understandings of quality in their specific contexts.” (Excell 2016:8). The subjective nature of reflective practice must be understood and acknowledged in order to create an adequate sense of what is defined as quality teaching and learning. As part of self-assessment Pollard (2009:272) suggests using a number of tools to collect evidence. These include discussions, asking questions, making observations and evaluating lessons.

Teachers have a reputation of persisting with methods and activities to which they have become accustomed. Pollard (2014:135) identifies that teachers do not like change because they prefer to maintain comfortable routines. However, if teachers are to be effective they need to be adaptable to what is happening and meet the individual children’s needs. Reflective practitioners are fundamentally involved in self-development in order to understand themselves and their responses to situations.

An aspect of self-development is the teacher’s ability to reflect on their experience of being taught as the teacher forms their own assumptions, beliefs and values of teaching as a result. Zeichner and Liston (2014:25) describe teaching as being rooted in who we are and how we perceive the world. Reflection becomes a continual process of being aware and mindful of what is happening in the classroom and how it is impacting the children.

The reflective practitioner is aware of the interdependence between themselves and the children and can use reflection to change what is happening in the classroom environment to create positive experiences for the children, as well as increasing teacher efficacy that doesn't limit expectations (Larrivee 2000:299).

The way in which children and teachers interact is an important aspect of ensuring quality levels of education in the classroom. Excell (2016:3) believes that the quality of teacher knowledge and the effective use of teaching materials support quality education. In addition, she acknowledges the influence that a teacher's personality and interaction with children has on the way children respond to the lesson being taught.

A teacher should understand her view of both children and education, realising that teaching is dynamic and that the needs of children change over the course of a year. As a result, teachers can be aware of changes and influences that will affect their teaching. MacFarland, Saunders and Allen (2009:505) discuss the need for reflective practice as a support for teachers that helps to develop a depth of understanding of the influences and practices they use. They describe self-reflection as providing teachers an opportunity to assess their practice, being aware of the reasons they include certain practices and what benefits these practices have for teaching and learning within the classroom.

## **2.6 Vygotsky and socio-constructivism**

The theory of socio-constructivism as proposed by Vygotsky (Woolfolk 2014:55) provides a useful conceptual understanding for this study. Socio-constructivism proposes that humans learn naturally within their social contexts. Learning, thinking and understanding is constructed in the interactions between an individual and the situation and is influenced by the culture and context in which it occurs. Using reflective practice, the teacher is able to think about the influences on both her teaching style and philosophy as well as the influences the child has had outside of the classroom environment. Reflecting on these influences can guide teachers in their approach to presenting lessons to the children. Teachers can make use of reflective practice to better understand their approach to teaching and their responses to various classroom situations.

Social interactions are central to the development of our thinking processes (Woolfolk, 2014:55). Using collaboration and interactions to reflect on practice helps guide our thinking processes. reflective practice enables teachers and children to interact with each other,

understanding that personal development and support is important to successful classroom interactions. These interactions build and develop a strong network of communication. Children can take time to reflect on how a lesson went for them, and what they learnt. Teachers can reflect on what they think worked well, and what could be done differently. These reflections can be discussed by the teachers and the children to support social development and interaction in the classroom as well as encouraging collaboration.

Vygotsky (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, & Souberman, 1978) describes learning as a socially constructed event that occurs within the relationship between a teacher and a child. Vygotsky (Cole et al., 1978:84) situates a child's learning and development within the cultural context of their environment proposing that children begin learning before they get to school. This should be acknowledged within the classroom and the school. In addition, it is valuable to understand the cultural context in which the child lives. The reflective practitioner takes the time to consider what the cultural climate of the classroom is and the context of the school setting. This reflection supports the teacher to help each child in the classroom achieve their potential.

Vygotsky (Cole et al., 1978:86) introduced the concept of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) associated with social learning. The ZPD is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Cole et al., 1978:86). A reflective practitioner is aware of what each child can do on their own, and what they can achieve with help from others. The teacher, as a reflective practitioner, takes into account who can best support the needs of the child and makes use of collaborative learning opportunities to ensure successful learning. The ZPD can be used as a tool for reflection in which the teacher and the child consciously construct an understanding of developmental needs for successful teaching and learning.

### **2.6.1 Socio-constructivism and reflective practice**

Reflective practice has strong roots in Vygotsky's socio-constructivist theory and supports effective learning. This includes the teacher learning from the children to support each child's development by reflecting both in and on their teaching practice (Cole et al.,1978:89). The teacher can reflect on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning taking place in order to support a child's potential academic development.



Thompson & Pascal (2012:314) consider reflective practice as learning from experience. This idea is fundamental in Vygotsky's (Cole et al.,1978:88) socio-constructivist theory where human learning is social by nature. Children learn and develop intellectually from those around them. Woolfolk (2014:55) describes socio-constructivist theory as children learning through interactions with more knowledgeable members of society. Pollard (2009:116) stresses the importance of teachers knowing their own personal biography, as the values they hold influence those around them. Values, such as consistency, self-belief and behaviour, cannot be understated, as the ways in which children respond to the teacher will impact their learning (Pollard 2009:122). Teachers who reflect on their values will be aware of how they respond to each child in the class. They will also reflect on how they treat the children and the influence they have on them.

The teacher's values and the character of the classroom has a strong influence on the levels of learning that happen for the children. Where children learn is as important as who they learn from. Armstrong (2015:129) describes the context children learn in as being extremely influential on their performance. Children understand their world through the interactions they have with those around them. Broderick and Hong (2011:2) view teachers as being constructivists as they provide classroom environments that support children constructing their own knowledge and understanding. Teachers can use children's knowledge acquisition to develop an 'emergent' curriculum that motivates learning and follows the needs of the child (Broderick & Hong 2011:3).

Excell and Linington (2010:6) view socio-constructivist theory as being highly relevant within the Grade R classroom in South Africa. Not only does this theory view the teacher as a 'co-creator' of learning alongside the child, but it has great relevance within the multi-cultural background and contexts of classrooms in South Africa.

## **2.7 Tools of reflective practice**

A number of researchers suggest using tools in order to support the growth of professional reflective practice and teacher development (Larrivee 2000; Wlodarsky 2005; Pollard 2009; Excell and Linington 2010; Watkins 2015).

To make use of effective reflection in classroom environments Pollard (2009) discusses a variety of tools that can be used by teachers. These tools are used by the reflective practitioner to contemplate and consider the effectiveness of the teaching and learning happening in the

classroom. The tools suggested by Pollard can be used by the individual reflective practitioner, by the children in the classroom and by a staff as a whole.

### **2.7.1 Observation as a tool for reflective practice**

Observation is an active process of reflection that allows the teacher to explore and examine the unknown (Dewey 1910:193). Dewey (1910:209) continues to explore the relationship between observation and reflection, observing that reflection is a process of “stopping external observations and reactions to let an idea mature”. Observations provide the material on which teachers can reflect in order to inform their planning and classroom environment.

Pollard (2009: 65) considers the social and academic observation of children as an important tool for “early-years” teachers. Grade R teachers can use observation as a natural and continuous reflective tool to assess each child. Furthermore, observations provide an opportunity for the teacher to be guided by the children’s needs, based on their interests, abilities and the skills they need to acquire (Kruger, Wessels, Ebrahim & Shaik 2015:153).

Pollard (2005:52) describes observation as a natural, ongoing process in which the teacher regularly records events in the environment. This is especially valuable in the Grade R classroom where the actions and behaviour of children provides the teacher with insight into their response to the environment. Observing should be an objective process in which the teacher records classroom dynamics and children’s behaviour following a lesson. Objective observation involves noting observable behaviour without the addition of subjective evaluations.

Once the teacher has completed an observation they make the time to process and think about what they have seen. Dewey (1910:191) believes that it is possible to use observation to identify the facts of the problem as they occur. Reflection gives the teacher time to think about what they have seen and consider the best response to support the child in the classroom. Observations can be used as a tool to reflect on a way forward as well as being able to consider all the options and solutions (Dewey 1910:192). The reflective practitioner is one who supports each child by taking the time to observe what is happening subconsciously, and then making decisions based on good judgement (Pollard 2014:67). Pollard (2009:51) expands on the process of observation suggesting that teachers make use of children’s academic performance to determine changes that may lead to greater success. In addition, Pollard (2009:69) proposes that video recording can be a powerful tool for information gathering as both verbal

and non-verbal behaviour is captured. The use of video makes it possible for the teacher to review a lesson as a method of observation. The video can also be used as a discussion tool as part of professional dialogue. Despite these benefits, the use of video as a process of observation and reflection may not be common in most Grade R classrooms due to ethical considerations and lack of parental consent, among other reasons.

### **2.7.2 Interviewing as a tool for reflective practice**

Questioning and interviewing (Pollard, 2009:72) allow the teacher to explore their understanding of the subject of reflection. Interviews give teachers the opportunity to verbalise their understanding of what is happening in the classroom. Verbalisation can be a catalyst to encourage change for better teaching and learning. Teachers can interview children to reflect on the learning that is happening in the classroom. Interviewing the children in a class provides the reflective practitioner with alternative perspectives. Interviews can extend beyond the academic aspects of the classroom to include children's perceptions of their peers and the school day. When children are part of a reflective interview they are able to think about their learning and aspects they found challenging and enjoyable. The information they share can direct the teacher to more supportive classroom practices and valuable insights regarding factors that contribute to children experiencing success.

Teachers can also interview other teachers in order to gather information for reflective practice. An interview could be scheduled to follow an observation of a colleagues' lesson. The interview will provide insight into another teachers practice and provide material for the interviewing teacher to reflect on their practice. Seng and Seng (1996:5) suggest capturing interviews on video to be collated as part of a teacher's portfolio of work. They further suggest that portfolios be shared and assessed. Sharing encourages collaborative learning and teaching alongside reflective thinking (Seng & Seng, 1996:7).

### **2.7.3 Professional dialogue as a tool of reflective practice**

Wlodarsky (2005:157) suggests that teachers should develop a language for talking and thinking about their classroom practice. This allows teachers to reflect critically through the use of dialogue as a tool. Mentoring and collaboration with colleagues in order to enhance classroom practice is endorsed (Wlodarsky, 2005:161) as collaborative discussions provide teachers with an opportunity to self-reflect on their beliefs and practices. Simoncini, Lasen and Rocco (2014:28) advocate for professional dialogue that encourages teachers to collaborate as this supports deeper understanding of practice and the promotion of professional practice.

Making use of professional dialogue should not be a threatening experience for teachers. It is best viewed as an opportunity to discuss and reflect on classroom practices. If professional dialogue complements observation and interviewing a collaborative process in which teachers share personal experiences and understanding of teaching and learning is attainable. Broderick and Hong (2011:1) value professional dialogue as a component of teachers reflecting on emergent curriculum within their classrooms. Through professional dialogue teachers are able to view colleagues as a support system and be creative in their approach to teaching.

#### **2.7.4 Communities of practice as a tool of reflective practice**

Wenger (1998: xvi) describes communities of practice as people constructing their individual identity based on the social connections they make with those around them. These communities of practice are informal as a result of collective learning that reflects a shared understanding of the environment (Wenger 1998:2). Excell (2016:4) identifies teachers as 'communities of practice' as they constitute a group of people who share common goals around social and work practices. Communities of practice are flexible, depending on the needs of the individuals. As a tool for reflective practice communities of practice share ideas, experiences and knowledge with each other. Communities of practice may exist within a school, or teachers may create their own communities of practice in spaces where they feel supported and encouraged to reflect and develop professionally.

#### **2.7.5 Journaling as a tool of reflective practice**

Journaling is another tool that can be used for reflecting on practice. Lowe, Prout and Murcia (2013:12) view journaling as an effective tool to gather data, and formalise one's thoughts. Although daily journaling can be time consuming (Rintakorpi 2016:405) it is an excellent tool for connecting theory and practice. Reflecting on practice by means of journaling promotes problem-solving and it helps make sense of events in order to move forward productively (Lowe, et.al, 2013:6). Journaling is a useful tool for reflection as teachers have concrete access to their past experiences and thoughts. Journaling creates a set of reference notes teachers can use to record and accurately reflect on changes introduced and the effect of these changes on teaching and learning in the classroom.

## **2.8 Reflective practice and the Grade R teacher**

In South Africa Grade R is the first year of formal schooling for children. It is part of the Foundation Phase of the National Curriculum. Excell and Lington (2010:5) describe Grade R as amounting to “one leg in pre-school and the other in the gateway to formal schooling.” This first year of schooling is aimed at helping children master the basic skills they will need for success within the formal school environment.

It is critical to understand and appreciate the effect this formative year of schooling has on children's perceptions of school. The objective should be to create a positive experience as it is the foundation of all the learning to come. Excell (2016) acknowledges the profound effect quality learning has on a child's development. She describes quality education (2016:2) as having the hallmarks of flexibility, subjectivity as well as being dynamic and changing in understanding dependent on the setting. She encourages teachers to be receptive towards children, allowing for many play opportunities alongside open-ended questioning and moments of relaxation. It is imperative to focus on the intellectual development of children and the social and emotional aspects of child development. Aronstam and Braund (2016:3) suggest that Grade R teachers recognize the value of play as a means to scaffold learning by reflecting on children's engagement with those around them.

The Grade R teacher plays an important role in shaping how children respond to the school environment. This response is likely to become a key component of the way in which children view teaching and learning. Biersteker and Dawes (2008:186) describe this phase of schooling as laying the base for future school success. The school environment at the Grade R level should encourage and support learning, utilising high quality teachers who are well resourced and able to view the child holistically (Biersteker & Dawes 2008:187).

Reflection is one of the tools teachers can utilise to better understand their role in the classroom and how the children respond to them. Effective reflective practice requires that teachers are aware of their beliefs and values as “beliefs hold strong implications for practice because beliefs guide and direct the practice of teachers.” (Shaik 2016:3).

The powerful influence of personal beliefs on classroom management suggests that teachers should reflect on their own school experiences as well as on their views of children. Pollard (2009:126) supports this principle and discusses the need for the teacher to have enough self-awareness to see the classroom from the child's perspective. "The way children think of themselves in school will directly influence their approach to learning" (Pollard 2009:126).

Rousseau (2015:1) advocates for FP teachers to "know what they are doing in the contexts they teach in." When teachers make informed decisions they are able to respond appropriately to the developmental needs of the children and meet the needs of each child in their classroom. In this way the teacher is able to adapt to the child's academic and social development as the year progresses and as new children enter the classroom environment. Brown, Cheddie, Horry and Monk (2017:178) discuss the complexity of teaching in a Preschool environment and encourage Preschool teachers to make use of reflective practice. Brown et al (2017:181) acknowledge that a teacher's ability to reflect is dependent on their level of knowledge and experience.

Employing reflective practice within the Grade R classroom supports teachers as they develop strong academic, social and emotional skills that will continue throughout the child's formal schooling. The reflective practitioner is aware of their strengths and challenges and is adaptable in meeting the needs of the children under their care. Lemon and Garvis (2014:89) view reflective practice as a tool that strengthens the classroom environment and positively affects teaching and learning.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

Reflective practice is considered a vital tool in the development of professional teaching practice. Pollard (2005:5) emphasises reflective practice as a way to support teachers' professional knowledge and help improve the quality of teaching and learning.

South African research into the contribution reflective practice makes in the Grade R or FP is limited. White Paper 5 on Education (1995) includes reflective practice as an important component in teaching. This small scale research considers Grade R teachers' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice, the tools they use to implement it within their individual classrooms and the challenges and benefits they encounter.

In this chapter the theoretical perspectives that support reflective practice were explored. This was done by considering the emphasis and importance that Dewey, Schön and Pollard place on effective reflective practice to enhance teaching and learning. International and South African knowledge of reflective practice was examined to provide a context for the value of using reflective practice in the Grade R classroom.

Tools that support professional reflective practice among Grade R teachers were discussed within the context of the socially constructed classroom. These include observation, professional dialogue and journaling.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCHING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

#### 3.1 Introduction

This Chapter will focus on the methodological approach used to research reflective practice in this case study. This qualitative case study enabled me to focus on one phenomenon in one setting. A qualitative case study approach was most suitable for this study as it enabled me to explore Grade R teachers' knowledge and understandings about reflective practice in Grade R. The study took place in one Grade R site with two teachers.

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, looking for common themes and patterns. These themes allowed for the exploration of understanding the participants have around the phenomena. Credibility of the study is considered through connecting the responses of the participants to the theoretical framework for reflective practice. The ethics of this research are considered and issues regarding ethical considerations and ethical clearances are identified and discussed.

#### 3.2 Research approach

A case study approach is utilised in this research. A single case, two Grade R teachers in one school, form the focus of the research. The case study approach allows for exploration of reflective practice in a natural setting in order to develop themes that can be generalised to other settings.

Rule and John (2011:1) note that the case study approach is valuable as it provides rich insights into particular and specific situations. In addition, the use of a case study allows the researcher to draw information on a phenomenon from a single case (de Vos et al 2011:320) and to study a real-life setting in order to build theory (Bhattacharjee 2012:40). Creswell (2007:73) describes the case study process as an opportunity to do in-depth data collection using single or multiple sources of information. The case study allows the researcher to gather in-depth insights from the participants' point of view in order to understand the ways they view the situation. Yin (2014:17) suggest that using a case study inquiry allows the researcher to use a variety of means to collect and analyse data based on theoretical knowledge acquired. A case study also permits me to use a multiple source approach to collecting data (Maree, 2013:76).



### **3.2.1 Research Paradigm**

To gain insight into Grade R teacher's knowledge, understanding and use of Reflective Practice I used an Interpretivist paradigm (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:6). Interpretivism allowed me to gather subjective information from the participants when they shared their personal interpretation of Reflective Practice and how they used it in their classroom. King and Horrocks (2011:11) describe interpretivism as allowing the participants to share their experiences of how they understand the context and relationships they are in. Yin (2014:17) uses the term relativist as a way to describe interpretivism. Interpretivism acknowledges there are multiple meanings and interpretations of events. Interpretivism supports the notion of a subjective approach acknowledging that events are socially constructed and should be meaningfully explored by the researcher (Maree 2013:59). As the participants' view and understanding of the classroom is subjective, the interpretivist paradigm enabled me to gain an understanding of a subjective topic from the teachers' personal points of view.

Reflective practice is described by Pollard as a personal experience of teaching and learning in a classroom setting (2009: xi). Teachers construct how the classroom operates based on the experiences they have had as well as their interactions with, and knowledge of children. Interpretivism allows for a subjective interpretation of the participants, as well as acknowledging the researchers own subjectivity (Bhattacharjee 2012:19). The use of the Interpretive paradigm approach is appropriate as reflective practice is a personal and individual approach to working in the classroom environment to improve the quality of education and aid teachers feeling personally fulfilled in their role (Pollard 2009:5). The Interpretive paradigm allows the researcher to look at many approaches to the situation, as it views reality as subjective, based on personal experiences.

Using this paradigm to approach the case study allowed me to understand and describe reflective practice based on the perceptions and views constructed by the Grade R teachers in the classroom. The use of the Interpretivist paradigm enabled me to use language and shared meanings to access the Grade R teachers' knowledge of reflective practice within their classrooms and the wider school. Employing qualitative research methods, such as interviews, allowed me to place emphasis on collecting data that occurs naturally (McMillan& Schumacher, 2010:23).

The Interpretivist paradigm is supported by the constructivist framework which proposes that interactions with others inform our view of the world and allow participants to be active in the case study (Creswell, 2013:24, de Vos et al 2011:7). Constructivism provides a framework to understand the ways in which people create knowledge based on their historical and cultural version of reality. Knowledge is not objective as it is based in the meanings created by reality presented (King & Horrocks 2011:22). Using this perspective, I was able to gain insight into the teachers' individual understanding of the classroom environment and the ways in which they reflect on experiences and interact with the children.

### **3.3 Research Context**

A qualitative case study of two Grade R teachers in one public School in Cape Town's southern suburbs is used. Qualitative research is flexible and helps researchers understand people in the context of their natural environment (Silverman 2011:412). It allows for a rich collection of data to understand the phenomena being studied (Maree 2013:46). This allows the researcher to develop an understanding of the meaning participants give to the phenomena being researched.

The Grade R context in which this study was carried out forms part of a public primary school in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. I chose this school as it is considered by the public to be progressive and has been used a pilot school by the Western Cape Education Department, in the past. At the time of the study I was also a parent at the school, however my child had never been in the Grade R environment, so I had no personal experience of the environment. The public school is a quintile one school. The DOE (2011) describes quintile one schools as catering to the least poor children of the population. Generally, parents in quintile one schools' pay school fees. This school manages its own finances and is therefore defined as a Section 21 school. This school is set in what is called the 'leafy' suburbs of Cape Town. This school is a co-educational school with both boys and girls. They offer Grade R to Grade 7. They are a racially diverse school and draw children from many areas of Cape Town.

They describe themselves as having many strengths including excellent academics with a very involved parent body and enthusiastic learners. The school has a keen focus on contributing positively to the South African education system through a commitment to being progressive and innovative. They embrace innovation and are happy for the DOE to use them as one of their pilot schools and are proactively involved in implementing ideas and discussions from Education Department committees.

When I approached the school to discuss using them as a research site, they were enthusiastic and willing to contribute to the field of knowledge on Reflective Practice.

### **3.3.1 Purposive Sampling**

The participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling. De Vos et al, (2011) states that purposive sampling is left entirely to the judgement of the researcher as the researcher is aware of the characteristics that are mostly representative of the study. This allows the researcher to choose the cases being included in the research based on their own judgement of the characteristics they are looking for and their specific needs (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007:114). As this case study focuses on the nature of reflective practice in Grade R, purposive sampling as a tool allowed me to choose Grade R teachers for my specific purpose. The intention was to determine their understanding and knowledge of reflective practice, including the tools they use for reflective practice (Rule & John 2011:64).

By its very nature purposive sampling does not represent all Grade R teachers. Cohen et al (2007:115) describe purposive sampling as enabling the researcher to find participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied. They further consider the reason a researcher would use purposive sampling is to gain deep insight into the phenomenon being studied, in this case Grade R teachers understanding and use of reflective practice.

### **3.3.2 The Grade R setting**

The school has two Grade R classrooms which are located away from the main school building. There are two large classrooms with their own access to the outside area. There is a kitchen and communal bathroom for both the classrooms in the centre of the building. They have their own playground adjacent to the school sports field. Once the Grade R day has ended the classrooms and the playground are used as an aftercare space for the Foundation Phase children who stay at school until 17h00.

The teachers describe the Grade R programme as consisting of child-initiated learning with some teacher-initiated learning during the day. They view this as the children being allowed to move freely between the classrooms and the outside area and garden during the morning. One classroom is set up as the toy room or playroom and the other classroom is set up as the art room during the day.

The children start the day with morning circle time in their own classrooms, and are then free for the morning, making use of either classroom and the outside area. The day ends with circle time in their own classrooms.

Children arrive from 07h30 in the morning. Circle time at the beginning of the day is used as the opportunity to introduce themes, discussions and new language. Art, which includes baking, is a compulsory activity for the children each day. This is an opportunity for children to develop their fine motor skills. During the week the children also have a visual motor integration time, I-pad time, library time and music. In summer they participate in swimming lessons in the school pool. The day ends at 12h40, after story time.

The teachers make use of micro-groups to help the children understand concepts. At this school the teachers describe the allocated classrooms for the children as 'home' classrooms. The teachers make use of the micro-groups in these classrooms to make sure all the children are exposed to the same learning concepts where assessment also forms part of the micro-group time.

The teachers follow the Curriculum and Assessments Plan (CAPS) very loosely. They describe CAPS as being rather limiting, and not necessarily meeting the needs of the children in their environment. They use the aspects of the curriculum they believe best supports each child's learning. They draw assessment tools from CAPS as they find the rubrics wholesome and it allows assessment to happen on many levels.

### **3.4 Details of the participants**

Two teachers were purposively selected to participate in this study. They will be referred to as Teacher A and Teacher B.

#### **3.4.1 Teacher A**

Teacher A has a Bachelor of Education and a Diploma in Special needs and remedial work. She has been a Grade R teacher at this school for four years. She makes the most of visiting other Grade R classrooms around Cape Town in order to get a bigger picture of what is happening in classrooms.

Her classroom has 22 children, 12 girls and 10 boys. She has an assistant who helps her during the morning. On occasion she also has student interns in the environment.

As a teacher she expressed a keen awareness of the diversity of the children in the classroom and how this has made her equally aware of parenting styles and cultural differences that makes running the class a challenge at times.

### **3.4.2 Teacher B**

Teacher B has an Honours in Education and has been working at the school for six years. She has had many years' experience in other Grade R environments and has been able to instinctively implement aspects into her current classroom. She was exposed to the idea of 'open plan' classrooms and has implemented these concepts at this school. Open plan classrooms make use of the physical learning environment and provides children with an opportunity to move between the indoor and outdoor environments offered within the Grade R space. She enjoys the opportunities this gives the children.

She has 26 children, 14 boys and 12 girls in her classroom and has an assistant who helps her in the classroom and in the outside area. She likes to ask the assistant for her thoughts on children as the assistant views the children differently to the teacher. Teacher B finds the CAPS curriculum 'very prescriptive' and tends to rely more on the old National Curriculum Statement (NCS) when it comes to planning activities.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

In this case study research two data collection methods were used in order to understand the teachers' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice. Cohen et al (2007:181) discuss the need for the researcher to choose data collection techniques that fit the purpose for which they are needed. Some data collection instruments a researcher can use include; observations, field notes, journal notes and recordings (Cohen et al 2007:181). For this study I used semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Many authors (Cohen et al 2007; McMillan & Schumacher 2010; De Vos et al 2011; Rule & John 2011; Creswell 2013; Yin 2014) include these two methods of data collection as instruments that are valid for case study. Making use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore teachers' knowledge and

understanding of reflective practice by giving me the opportunity to ask probing questions to gain deeper insight.

Analysing documents used as part of teaching practice enabled me to investigate written evidence of reflective practice and to connect this with the information they shared in the interviews.

I initially met both Grade R teachers informally to give them my research proposal and discuss the research topic and the documents I would use for analysis. At this meeting they provided me with the documents I would need for analysis. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled two weeks after this meeting when the teachers had completed report writing and parent interviews.

### **3.5.1 Semi Structured interviews**

In order to explore Grade R teachers' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice I used semi-structured interviews. Semi structured interviews make use of open ended questions where the researcher is able to use information the participants offer as a platform to make further inquiry into the phenomenon. The researcher can 'probe' to find more information (Cohen et al 2007:182). The probing can include exploring subjective information to identify feelings and beliefs around practices. In this research it was possible for me to ask for explanations and reasons concerning certain reflective practice information the teachers shared, to gain further insight into the phenomenon.

For this study semi-structured interviews were most suitable to gather information as interviews can be conducted in a conversational format with loose structure (Yin 2014:110). Semi-structured interviews allowed me the flexibility to ask probing questions regarding information shared by the teachers in order to give me rich insight into the use of reflective practice in the participants' classrooms.

Rule and John (2011:65) agree that semi-structured interviews allow for the initiation of discussions and provide flexibility as other questions can be added. This allows for the unique personal experiences of each participant to be expressed. The value of semi-structured interviews is that they allow for an understanding of reflective practice from the participants' point of view. I ensured that the participants were comfortable sharing their knowledge by

reinforcing that there is no 'right' answer to any question and that the interviews were conversational in nature.

The core set of questions for the semi-structured interviews were based on information compiled in the process of reading for the literature review. My supervisor reviewed these questions with me to ensure they addressed the aims and objectives of the research. I scheduled interview times with the teachers making sure that they would have an hour available at the end of their workday. I gave them a set of interview questions to review in order to familiarise themselves with the focus of the interview. Prior to the interview I met with both teachers to talk about the topic of the interview and ensure that they were comfortable. We set a time for individual interviews based on their availability. Once the interviews were concluded they were both available for a follow up interview if required.

Using semi-structured interviews enabled me to gather information from the participants regarding their knowledge and experience of reflective practice in the classroom. Driscoll (2011:162) describes the semi-structured interview process as one that provides the researcher with 'self-reported' data as the participants share their personal experiences and practices. These views may be biased as the participants try and present themselves in a positive way to the researcher. Driscoll (2011:163) acknowledges that semi-structured interviews are valuable as they provide the researcher with an opportunity to uncover in-depth information from a few people. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to ask follow-up questions to responses from the participants. During the interviews I was aware of body language and other non-verbal communication that occurred.

I informed the teachers that I would record the interviews with a Dictaphone. These recordings allowed me to ensure I did not rely solely on my memory (Driscoll 2011:165). It was essential to ensure that the participants knew they were being recorded and that they were comfortable with the process. I transcribed the interviews to create a verbatim record and used the transcripts to search for common themes. Driscoll (2011:166) reminds the researcher to transcribe exactly what has been said, including all sounds, in order to analyse the interviews.

### **3.5.2 Documentary analysis**

As this research takes the form of a case study, documentary analysis was a valuable source of information. In the interviews the teachers were asked about the tools they use for reflective practice.

Analysis of the documents they use provided written evidence of the use of reflective practice. Documentary analysis was conducted by viewing the annual, termly and weekly planning.

This gave me the opportunity to review the evidence of tools the Grade R teachers spoke about using during the semi-structured interviews. The documents would provide evidence of reflective practice through the use of observations and curriculum planning.

Rule and John (2011:67) suggest that a combination of document analysis and interview form a useful data collection tool in case studies. Analysing the documents helps the researcher get a sense of the case from the participants' written interpretations and evidence they keep on the phenomenon. Creswell (2009:180) and Rule and John (2011:67) indicate that documents demonstrate the language participants use around the topic being researched. This can help in the development of interview questions. Analysing documents is an important component of the research as this is where the researcher can make sure the research questions are being answered (Driscoll 2011:168). It is important to ensure all bias is eliminated so that the researcher can be accurate.

The challenge of document analysis is that participants may not have a complete set of documents due to the fact that they may not have recorded information accurately or with much thought (Creswell 2009:180). The assumption may be made that teachers in the same school setting are required to keep records in the same way. A further challenge concerning the use of documentary analysis may be the lack of standardised templates that the teachers use to record their planning and observations.

Document analysis and analysis of the interviews support the triangulation of data. Triangulation of data occurs when the researcher uses a variety of sources to collect the data and is able to gain insight into the phenomenon by comparing this data (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:331). Aligning teacher interviews with the information they record in documents verifies the data and adds credibility to the findings.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

According to Maree (2013:104) the aim of data analysis is to summarise all that the researcher has seen and heard. The researcher interprets and makes sense of the data in an ongoing process rather than a series of successive steps (Maree 2013:103).



The process of data analysis is to organise and explain the data, making sense of the ways in which the participants in the research understand the topic being researched (Cohen et al 2007:184).

Data analysis gives the researcher the opportunity to categorise common themes that are generated from the participants understanding of the subject material. To collate the data into themes the researcher looks for similarities and patterns in the answers given.

### **3.6.1 Analysis of the interviews**

On completion of the interviews the recordings were transcribed. These transcriptions were read, re-read and organised into a filing system. The transcribed data collected during the interview process was organised into themes based on common words and descriptions used by the interviewees. Looking for themes allows the researcher to examine and compare the transcribed data (Yin 2010:210). The data was then categorised into comments and ideas that are connected or similar. This allowed me to create main themes and analyse the collected data.

Rule and John (2011:80) recommend reading the documents multiple times to look for gaps or find relevant information in an attempt to understand the participants view of the topic. Information gathered from documents can also be categorised according to common words and themes. When this process was complete, I created a table of the information in order to explore the common themes that emerged from the interviews. Rule and John (2011:81) believe that a table of information is useful when triangulating the data. The themes that are generated from the data are used to build an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. This process of thematic analysis is a useful tool with which to examine the perspectives of the participants on a topic. The researcher is able to consider key features of lots of data and develop insights into the phenomenon (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules 2017:2). I further explored the themes in discussion with my supervisor.

### **3.6.2 Thematic analysis**

Taking the time to thematically categorise the data gave me the opportunity to search for patterns of meaning and systematically develop insights from the data gathered. Thematic analysis gave me the opportunity to 'play' with the data (Yin 2014:135) and discover emergent themes. I read and reread the interviews noting emerging themes and refined those themes with the support of my supervisor.

Whilst searching for themes I became one of the instruments of analysis and therefore needed to have clarity on what my focus was. This is especially important as thematic analysis is a flexible approach with few prescriptions and procedures (Nowell et al 2017:2). Maguire and Delahunt (2017:3352) describe it as a clear and flexible approach to data analysis where the researcher interprets the patterns that emerge in a way that makes sense of the data.

I used thematic analysis, in the manner suggested by Nowell et.al. (2017:4), to identify themes and sub-themes over a period of time. This provided insight into the varying perspectives held by the participants with regard to reflective practice. Being fully immersed in the data enabled me to explore the patterns and meanings of the participants around the topic. During the process of thematic analysis, I was aware of my perspectives, thoughts and beliefs and made sure I paid attention to all the data, building qualitative richness and consistency whilst searching for themes (Nowell et al 2017:5).

The themes that were created were abstract but brought experiences and ideas together (Nowell et al 2017:8). I used a flexible approach to thematic analysis allowing for the generation of themes and giving these themes meaning based on the participants' experiences of the phenomenon. Nowell et al (2017:8) suggest the researcher explain in detail how they coded the data, as well as how it was organised and analysed as this allows the reader to assess the final outcome of the data analysis. As I read and reread the interviews, I coded the data to develop an initial set of themes based on the common language the participants used in describing their understanding of reflective practice. Maguire and Delahunt (2017:3353) describe this first level of theme identification as 'semantic' theme creation in which the surface meanings of data are explored. The second level of theme creation is described as 'latent' (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:3353) where I looked beyond what was being said and applied meaning and interpretation to the data I collected during the interviews.

To analyse the data in detail I clearly explained each identified theme. This was written as an interesting and informative account of the data using direct quotations from the participants. Nowell et al (2017:11) suggest that these extracts of raw data embedded within the account provide validity and richness to the analysis. They further recommend the inclusion of extracts from literature that give the findings merit and value. I presented the raw data from the participants and used literature to support the understanding of the themes generated by the data.

### **3.6.3. Analysis of the documents**

In this study documentary analysis formed an additional method with which to analyse the data. Merriam (2009:139) describes documents as a 'ready-made' source of data. The texts collected included weekly, termly and annual planning, as well as teachers' observation records and assessments of the children. These texts were required as I wished to explore the tools Grade R teachers use for Reflective practice and to corroborate data from the semi-structured interviews. The teachers generously shared their documents and I made sure no school logos or children's names were visible on the documents they provided. This was done to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The foremost challenge I faced during documentary analysis was the scarcity of evidence demonstrating knowledge of the tools of reflective practice. The documents were vague and often incomplete making them difficult to analyse.

Creswell (2009:180) values the unobtrusive nature of document analysis as participants are sharing information they have already formulated. The teachers used in this research were comfortable sharing a variety of documents with me and spent time ensuring I understood the purpose of each document. One advantage of analysing texts is that these demonstrate the consideration given by the teachers to past and future lessons. They will generate documents to record their thoughts and ideas as part of their required record keeping.

### **3.7 Data verification**

Good qualitative research must be trustworthy. Triangulation of data builds a level of trustworthiness and limits the chance association of ideas and bias as information is collected in more than one way (Maree 2013:39). This case study relied on themes emerging from the interviews and analysed in the documents to support the views expressed by the teachers. Yin (2012:67) states that we only understand something by viewing it from different approaches. Babbie and Mouton (2009:275) propose that triangulation of data is one of the best methods to enhance the credibility, validity and reliability of research, allowing it to be used in a variety of contexts. Yin (2012:13) describes triangulation of data as the process of checking and rechecking information from the same and different sources. Analysing two data sources allowed me to corroborate and gain insight into the participants' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice.

Rule and John (2011:108) recommend the use of rich descriptions in order to establish trust. In this study trustworthiness is achieved through the description of credibility, reliability and validity of the data collected.

Achieving trustworthiness creates a credibility and transferability of the case to other environments. Although this is a small-scale case study, it is possible to transfer the information to other environments.

### **3.8 Credibility of the study**

Credibility of data relies on the researcher making an accurate account of the research done. To do this I was aware of the influence that my knowledge of reflective practice may have had on the semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Credibility also relies on the interviewee being truthful in their responses to the questions presented (Silverman 2011:369). I met with both teachers two weeks before the interview date and spent time talking with them about their classroom environments. This gave me the opportunity to familiarise myself with the Grade R environment and the teachers, enabling me to understand their responses to questions in the interview process. In the interviews I made sure the teachers felt comfortable with the interview process by creating a conversational approach and asking probing questions in response to aspects of reflective practice. Following the semi-structured interviews, I analysed their responses to the questions using the work of Dewey (1910), Schön (1983) and Pollard (2009). Connecting the emerging themes to this theoretical framework of reflective practice confirmed the trustworthiness of the study. After the interviews I met with the teachers to discuss their response to the interview process and checked if they wished to add further information. They were satisfied with the information I had collected, and I was able to begin the process of analysis.

#### **3.8.1 Dependability of the study**

Semi-structured interviews require a core base of questions that I used to interview both teachers. This question format ensured reliability as both teachers were asked the same set of questions. The semi-structured interview format also allowed me to ask relevant probing questions to gain clarity on aspects of reflective practice from the perspective of the teachers. The themes that were identified were checked with my supervisor and the participants. This process builds dependability as the participants confirmed that the information gathered represented their understanding (Maree 2013:305).

The documents provided by the teachers contributed to the reliability of this study as the teachers are required to maintain record keeping on a weekly and daily basis. The teachers explained their use of each set of documents they shared with me. Following the semi-structured interviews, I reviewed my understanding of the documents with the teachers in order to gain clarity. I also spent time with my supervisor looking at the documents to ensure I had a clear understanding of the data that was evident in them.

### **3.8.2 Triangulation of Data**

Triangulation of data allows the researcher to view the case from more than one point of view (Yin 2010:67). This enabled me to corroborate the emerging data using a variety of sources whilst looking for common themes (Merriam 2009:178). To do this I transcribed, verbatim, the semi-structured interviews. The focus was to create accurate transcriptions of the rich interviews. Transcribing enabled me to identify common themes in the interviews. These common themes provided an understanding of teachers' knowledge and use of reflective practice in the Grade R classroom. The emerging themes were developed using the literature review to support the trustworthiness of the information. The documents the teachers use for record keeping provided evidence of the teachers' use of tools for reflection.

### **3.9 The Researchers Position**

Creswell (2013:172) posits the necessity for the researcher to bracket their personal experiences of the phenomenon within the setting. As a teacher trainer I have not trained any of the participants involved in this case study. I do not have personal knowledge of the ethos of the Grade R environment. I am aware of my own beliefs regarding reflective practice and how these may contaminate the interview process. This can happen if I do not remain objective in the interview process. Due to the nature of the semi-structured interview it was my responsibility to ensure that the interviews remained relevant to the phenomenon being researched.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations create a standard for the researcher when researching a phenomenon. Strydom (2013:115) explains that the researcher should internalise ethical principles to ensure they make good decisions and are sensitive to the participants. In this way the researcher behaves ethically and with moral consideration towards the participants. In this research I was ethically bound to ensure the teachers did not experience any judgement from me as the researcher.

In order to respect the participants, it was essential that they voluntarily participated in the research. To make an informed decision they received all the relevant information regarding the intended research. Strydom (2013:117) describes the importance of informing the participants of all the information that will be required of them, what the goal of the research is as well as how they are to be involved in the research.

For this research consent to participate in this study was sought from the Principal and the Grade R teachers using a letter of consent. I met with the Principal to discuss the research topic and provided her with a copy of the research proposal to share with the Grade R teachers. I was available to answer questions and concerns before the research was conducted. I ensured that the Principal and the teachers received accurate information to understand the research topic, the voluntary nature of their participation, and that confidentiality would be maintained during and after the data collection process.

Ethical clearance for this study was granted by The Western Cape Education Department and Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).

### **3.10.1 Confidentiality**

The Principal and the Grade R teachers who consented to participate in this study were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. They were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Denzin and Lincoln (2011:557) view anonymity and confidentiality as central to academic research. Research participants were given the choice not to be identified in the research. Their personal information is confidential, and they cannot be identified. This builds a relationship of trust between the researcher and the participants as their interests and well-being are protected (Babbie & Mouton 2009:523). I ensured the teachers' privacy was maintained during the data collection process. Strydom (2013:119) considers privacy the act of keeping to oneself what is not intended for others, including attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. In the semi-structured interview participants may share more information than is intended and as a researcher I ensured their privacy remained intact.

The school and the teachers may have access to the study once it is completed and accepted by Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).

### **3.11 Conclusion**

Chapter 3 has explained the methodology used for this Case Study. The study uses a qualitative approach in an interpretivist paradigm. This was done through the use of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The research approach, data collection instruments and participant participation were discussed, making use of literature to support the choices made. Ethical considerations, trustworthiness and reliability were also considered as an important aspect of the research methodology.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the analysis for this Case Study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS ON TEACHERS KNOWLEDGE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN GRADE R

#### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the data gathered through semi-structured interviews and data analysis. To consider this, I investigate two Grade R teachers' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice keeping the overarching question of the research study in mind; "What is the nature of reflective practice in Grade R classrooms?" This study explores the ways in which teachers utilise reflective practice to inform classroom practice, and the tools they use to inform and support reflective classroom practice. In addition, the research explores the challenges that teachers experience in relation to reflective practice.

In this chapter the research findings are thematically presented to identify Grade R teachers' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice. I created my analytical framework and built my arguments from the work of Dewey (1910,1933), Schön (1983,1985) and Pollard (2009) in order to provide a holistic picture of Grade R teachers' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice.

Upon analysis of the data the following five themes were identified:

- Reflective practice as a means *for* planning,
- Reflective practice as a means *for* curriculum management,
- Reflective practice as a means *for* adaptation,
- Reflective practice as a means *for* relationship building, and
- Reflective practice as a means *for* personal Growth.

The importance of reflective practice has been well documented nationally and internationally to enhance personal and professional development (Dewey 1910; Schön 1983; Pollard 2009; McFarland, Saunders & Allen 2009; Appleby 2010; Reed and Canning 2010; Excell & Linington 2015; Shaik 2016). The five themes identified promote reflective practice *for* quality teaching and learning.



## **4.2 Perspectives of reflective practice**

It was important to establish at the very beginning of the interviews what teachers' understandings of reflective practice are. The first question presented to both teachers was,

What do you understand by the term reflective practice?

The initial response to this question from both teachers differed.

Teacher A: Just reflecting on what is going well and what's not. So, anything from relationships, from dynamics, in amongst the staff, what lessons, or what I've been covering in my lessons, by trial and error, somethings that have worked, some things that haven't worked.

Teacher B: I'm thinking it is about what you have planned and how it has worked in practice and how the children have reacted to it and altering what you do on the basis of that.

The data demonstrates a different understanding of reflective practice held by each teacher. The findings to each response are analysed in this chapter by exploring each teacher's understanding, supporting this discussion with relevant literature.

## **4.3 Reflective Practice as a means *for* Planning**

In this study both Grade R teachers referred to the importance and value of reflective practice as a means of informing their current and future planning. In the excerpt below Teacher B speaks directly to planning as the core reason she uses reflective practice:

reflective practice is what you have planned and how it works in practice...how the children have reacted... allowing it to inform your future practice.

She describes reflective practice as a means of influencing her planning, relating it to meeting the needs of the children. She uses reflective practice to consider how children have responded to what has been taught and then decides how to progress. Pollard (2009:18) concurs that planning is part of the process of reflective practice. He argues that planning is a 'dynamic' process as the teacher reflects and plans based on the reflection. This teacher explains that once she has acted on the plans she has made she reflects on how her planning worked out. reflective practice as a means for planning is further supported by Kruger and Greyling (2015:167) who note that teachers are able to consider how children respond and progress and use this awareness to inform future teaching and learning.

Teacher A also expressed an interest in using reflective practice to inform her planning. She describes reflection as a means to understand what has worked and what has not worked.

You know the planning; you have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. Knowing what works and what doesn't work, trying new things as well, not being afraid to try new things. Structure is good and soothing, but to try and adapt what you've already got so you don't get bored with the content.

Whilst Teacher A reflected to understand what worked and what did not work she also described reflection as a means to avoid boredom with what she is teaching. She reflects on her practice as a way to remain focused and inspired, to challenge herself to think differently about what she is teaching. She values routine and structure as long as it was balanced with being adaptable and not getting bored. The concept of using reflective practice as a way to keep refreshed and energised as a teacher is what Reed and Canning (2010:1) refer to when they discuss the importance of making teaching less mechanical and rather allowing one to take on new ideas and respond to changes in a positive way.

Teacher B further defined reflective practice as a way to evaluate how the children respond to lessons they have been given.

I think when I am doing my planning I will reflect on... I'll think of something to do and I'll think will it work in terms of the way the children are at the moment, specific children in my class, previous experience at doing this kind of thing, so that's when I'm doing my planning.

Using this information, she makes changes to how she presents information encouraging the children to be successful. She then uses this information when she is planning the same work for another group of children. Dewey (1915:35) describes this type of reflective practice as moving beyond the mechanics of what is being taught by also looking at how the children experience what they have been taught. This allows the teacher to focus on more than the subject matter and puts the child at the centre of the teaching and learning experience. Pollard (2009:292) agrees with this teachers' interpretation of reflection for planning because she thinks about the best way children will learn what is being taught.

Teacher A describes experiencing a sense of reward from her ability to plan and adapt according to how the children respond to lessons. Although the content may be the same it is important for her to be able plan in response to how the children will enjoy learning.

Researcher: How do you find reflecting beneficial to your teaching practice?

Teacher A: It's nice because it is the same, but I feel that I do need to vary it so that I don't get bored, because if I get bored with the content I'm teaching, the children get bored.

This teacher reflects to introduce variety to the content she plans to cover. Doing this helps her meet the needs and interests of the children with the curriculum needs in mind (Reed 2010:53). Being able to plan knowing the needs of the children is a valuable aspect of reflective practice. This teacher may consider Dewey's (1932:67) belief that schools need to look beyond the curriculum and take each child's experiences in the real world into account when planning.

The use of reflective practice allows Teacher B to incorporate a degree of flexibility when planning lessons in order to ensure lessons are successful for the majority of the children.

...so that sort of planning would be more about how we can alter our programme to help those children that are struggling, because if a third of the class are struggling with something it is worth altering your whole programme.

She describes using reflective practice as a means to build awareness of the academic abilities of the children so she can better plan the areas to which she needs to dedicate more time. The ability to reflect on the success or failure of a lesson is an opportunity for her to plan in order to ensure success in the classroom. This level of planning concurs with Dewey (1932:15) who elaborates on the value of teachers being aware of how the classroom can shape the success of a child.

Teacher A noted the value of creating opportunities for children to experience success within the classroom by means of reflecting on planning and encouraging children to try new activities:

Even in the planning as well, you have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. I think the thoughtful activities benefit the children. I try new things. I am not afraid to try new things.

She recognises the value of thinking about how children respond to new learning as an important aspect of reflective practice. Teacher A will plan an activity or lesson and then reflect on how the children respond to the lesson. This reflection helps her consider if the lesson was successfully planned and executed, or requires adaptation.

By doing so she is consistent with Pollard (2009:5) who supports the need for teachers to reflect in order to improve the educational experiences. Reflecting on lessons presented allows Teacher A to improve the quality of education through thoughtful planning which adds depth to learning.

Reflecting-on-practice as part of planning is described by Teacher B as a means to help her know what children need to be successful, instead of doing what is prescribed in the curriculum.

I need to feel that I'm helping them to go forward, that they are not just doing things by rote or because that is the way it is done.

Her comment addresses a dual intention to ensure children in her class have a firm understanding of what is being taught, as well as making certain that she is teaching past the needs of the curriculum whilst considering the needs of the children. This teacher is going beyond what Zeichner and Liston (2014:10) describe as 'routine action', where the needs of the curriculum are followed in planning but there is little reflection taking place.

Neglecting to reflect-on-practice serves to maintain the status-quo of the environment and may not provide the best outcome for children. Pollard (2009:5) encourages teachers to move beyond the 'static' and develop their level of professionalism through reflecting on the classroom needs. Teacher B demonstrates that reflecting-on-practice helps her find meaning in her teaching as she is able to move beyond teaching the facts (Dewey, 1910:80).

Teacher A used the example of themes as a way to present information in a different way to the curriculum. Being able to reflect on how to take content and deliver it to the children in a way that meets their needs supports her ability to maintain her interest and love of teaching.

So that's been very rewarding, being here and having the same, very similar content, but there are many different ways to be able to apply it. The themes, I think make it quite nice to present things in different ways.

Killen (2015:117) supports teachers making changes to the environment based on their reflective practice. This teacher demonstrates that she uses reflective practice to consider how children respond to learning and make changes to improve her practice. Teacher A's awareness of the need to present learning in different ways is reinforced by Schön's proposal that reflecting *in* and *on* practice be understood as 'reframing' (2015:118).

This involves looking at several options or possibilities to present learning. To do this the teacher would use reflective practice in order to adapt her teaching to support successful learning.

Teachers can encourage opportunities for academic and personal growth if they are aware of the role of reflecting for planning in the environment. Reflecting on what they have planned in the past supports decisions they make when planning for future learning. Reflecting as a means *for* planning encourages teachers to think about how their planning works in practice, and what they need to do to ensure successful teaching and learning.

#### **4.4 Reflective Practice as a means *for* Curriculum Management**

In the interviews both teachers demonstrated that reflective practice helps them consider how the curriculum is organised and managed in their classrooms. This includes the effective use of time as well as developing opportunities that support learning activities for the children.

Reflecting as a means *for* curriculum management helps the teachers know where children need support and encouragement. This is particularly relevant when children experience challenges. Teacher A used the example of scaffolding learning when the children are using the art area for box construction.

You select, or ask children to come to that activity that really have difficulties working and engaging with that kind of material, and conceptualising in more of a 3D way.... So I try and scaffold as much as I could, and not just to have it as a once off activity.

She indicates how her reflection on what the children are doing allows her to see where they need support and practice. Watching the children and reflecting on how they completed a task helps her manage future activities. She uses this information to make sure she gives the children the opportunity to try the activity again, at another time.

So that they come to the activity again, so kind of equipping them with the necessary skills to be able to make them more confident to try another, new activity because I find that a lot of children do tend to go to the same activities so trying to make them, expose them to other areas of learning and being more confident in their own abilities.

Pollard (2009:292) supports Teacher A's view of scaffolding learning as a method of managing the learning environment by means of reflecting on what the children need in order to learn best. Reflecting-on-practice as part of curriculum management enables the teacher to know how to manage the same activity in a different way in order to scaffold the learning for the children. This gives children the opportunity to work with the activity again or experience it presented in a different way. It allows the teacher to make adaptations to the planned curriculum as a method to support the children.

McFarland et.al. (2009:56) suggest that Early Childhood teachers can develop teaching skills and improve the classroom environment as a result of insights gained through reflecting on their practice. Teacher A reflects on the curriculum to support each child needs and use this information to create a classroom environment focused on quality teaching and learning.

Teacher B described using reflective practice to manage her classroom, based on her years of experience and how the children respond. She speaks about reflecting on whether or not curriculum requirements are appropriate for the children in her classroom.

Reflecting what you are doing, modifying, saying no, we'll keep this. I mean with reflecting it's also that when other people try and push other things on you, and you know and you think like the CAPS, which is paint by numbers...so I mean reflecting includes things like saying no, I am not doing that, I know through my observation of the children that this is where I need to be.

She uses her reflections to focus on effective interactions with children without capitulating to external demands that do not meet the child's needs. She reflects on her own knowledge and experience of the curriculum, as discussed by Excell (2016:2), to make changes to support the children's learning. Experience has taught Teacher B that policy documents are not always clear and often contradict themselves (Excell 2016:2) and that quality teaching occurs when she is sure of what will work best in the environment to support learning. Pollard (2009:280) posits that the children and the classroom benefit from reflective practice as the teacher considers how to structure the environment and the curriculum in order to develop plans for learning.

Teacher A describes reflective practice as important to her curriculum management because it helps her to think about how to deal with activities in a different way, as well as encouraging problem-solving for both her and the children.

Looking at what they need at that time and how we can support them best. I think it's almost like a full cycle, you know, it's a cycle where everything feeds off each other to know how to work with it best.

As a teacher she enjoys reflecting on what the children are doing and how they respond to situations. She loves encouraging problem-solving and enjoys being a part of this with children. She role-models how she would encourage the children to manage situations.

But there are usually things that work better than others.... You know, they'll start with a specific idea, but then start adapting and changing, like they are getting creative in that way with boxes. I find with teaching we also kind of like try and put things together and change things and, you know, it's nice because it's never the same.

This teacher demonstrates an understanding of the way Pollard (2009:138) describes success as the product of an awareness of the conscious and unconscious influences on the environment. Griggs (2015:204) describes reflective practice as a technique that helps teachers understand their role and make decisions to maintain the status quo or affect change within the learning environment. If there are changes to the curriculum or the classroom Teacher A knows she will need to be involved in the management of this change.

I also think that every year is completely different, and you do find that some years what you have taught before, children are just not, they're not receptive to the way that you are teaching so you have to change.

The above data shows how Teacher A sustains the learning that happens in the environment. Quality teaching and learning is influenced by the demands and expectations the teacher places on the children and her management of the classroom environment. Dewey (1916:23) explains this as the teacher being the person who controls the environment.

Teacher A has described her pleasure at being able to make changes based on her reflections of how children engage with an activity she has set. She applies Rousseau's (2015:33) suggestion to use reflection to guide future actions. Doing this allows the teacher to be flexible to the changing needs of the children.

Teacher A notes that reflecting-in-practice promotes flexibility by allowing for changes to be made that meet both curriculum and individual needs. She uses the art area as an example.

That's a really nice environment for the children to learn more about the process and be less concerned about the product and kind of work on the changes of what they have created because a lot of it is self-initiated.

Teacher B makes changes in the moment if she can, and also considers future changes she can make based on this experience.

I will think about whether I need to...modify what I do. And then putting them on the intervention register forces me to think even further about what I do...

This teacher demonstrates what Schön (1987:68) suggests is the ability to use experience to inform practice and build skills naturally within teachers. Teacher B speaks to this when she describes how her experience of teaching helps her reflect both in and on practice, to the extent that she does it innately.

Well, I'm able to shift between all of them, I think cos I'm quite experienced, but I certainly wouldn't have been able to do that, as a new teacher.

The above data shows how both teachers reflect *in* and *on* practice, which allows them to make use of many skills to offer quality teaching and learning. Rousseau (2015:33) posits that reflecting *in* and *on* practice supports the teacher professionally as it enables decision making after considering the lesson. As a Constructivist-based learning activity Shaik (2016:3) views reflecting *in* and *on* practice as an opportunity for the teacher and children to build a partnership of active teaching and learning. Furthermore, this encourages children to be active participants in constructing their own learning with the support from the adults in the environment (Shaik 2015:28).

Reflective practice as a means *for* curriculum management can be understood as a means for a teacher to use in order to discover what is useful for learning and areas that require change. This is expanded on by Pollard (2009:53) as a means of investigating and anticipating the support children need. By reflecting on the classroom, he suggests that the teacher looks for patterns of behaviour and learning. This information can inform changes the teachers make to classroom practice.



#### **4.5 Reflective Practice as a means *for* adaptation**

In the interviews both teachers spoke about using reflective practice to adapt and change the environment or the teaching to improve on teaching practice. This requires a shift in how they think about their teaching, the children they teach and the needs of the curriculum.

Teacher A: It's challenging for me, what, how can I stop it or how can I tackle this area.

Teacher B: I can't always change things in the moment, some things you can, some things you can't.

The teachers refer to the challenge of using the intellectual information they have and adapting it to the classroom situation. Reflecting on the information allows them the opportunity to consider what they know for certain and what is probable. Using the example of children doing a box construction activity Teacher A described how she reflects on lessons she is giving and thinks about how to create depth of learning for each child.

Researcher: What you are talking about is that the children are kind of modelling your reflection, because they are making changes as they go, and you kind of do the same.

Teacher A: You talk about why it is not sticking, can we use more tape on, can we secure it, you know, being the teacher facilitating that kind of activity is nice to see and it extends the children to a certain degree.

As demonstrated in the above data, the teacher is able to adapt the information and support children's needs based on what is happening in the moment. Being adaptable in a Grade R classroom is described by Pollard (2009:170) as the ability to individualise learning for the children based on the experiences they need. Teacher A demonstrates that through the use of reflective practice she is able to adapt learning to support each child within the classroom, supporting them academically and socially. McFarland, et al (2009:506) explains that teachers who reflect can make changes to their practice with individual children and the whole class.

Teacher B uses the word 'moderate' as a way to express her ability to adapt to what children need. She describes her ability to both moderate her behaviour and actions with regard to the nature of each child.

Awareness...so that my response to a child becomes, alters automatically without me having to think about it. If in the back of your head you know this is an extremely sensitive child, then I will alter, I'll moderate my response.

She describes moderating and adapting her responses to children as a means to improve her professional and personal growth. On reflection Teacher B adapts how she responds to the children to get the best from them. Killen (2015:121) supports the idea of teachers questioning their actions and responses as part of developing an awareness of their own beliefs. He believes that open-minded teachers are happy to change the way they interact and respond as part of relationship building (Killen 2015:123). Making sense of experiences and being adaptable to the needs of the children enables teachers to think about their motivation and ability to connect with the children to build relationships (Reed and Canning 2010:3).

The teachers refer to thinking about a lesson in the moment or at the end of the day. They both considered the need for flexibility when teaching in Grade R:

Teacher A: Because of the nature of Grade R, you have to roll with things sometimes, and so accidental and incidental learning has been quite an important part of learning.

Teacher B: Sometimes I can shift what I am doing in the moment, and I very often can. But if I can't then it'll be a sort of mental note to self. Think about how to deal with that tomorrow in a different way.

They appreciate that reflective practice encourages and enables them to make changes by adapting lessons and the environment to support the needs of children. The teachers describe this as an essential skill for teaching in the Grade R environment. This is supported by Excell and Linington (2010:8) who describe the need for Grade R teachers to use appropriate strategies to mediate purposeful play and learning through reflective practice. Doing this enables them to adapt their practice meaningfully.

Being flexible to make changes as the needs of the children change demonstrates that the teachers are using reflective practice as a means for adaptation. Being adaptable requires the teachers to reflect on the response of children to the lessons and to make changes to support teaching and learning. Adaptability requires the teachers to reflect critically. Critical reflection supports adaptable and flexible teachers, and in turn promotes effective teaching (Larrivee 2000:294). If teachers do not reflect critically, they limit their ability to adapt and build understanding of children's individual needs.

#### **4.6 Reflective Practice as a means *for* relationship building**

Awareness of the interactions and relationships children have with peers and teachers was highlighted by both teachers as a way of understanding and supporting the needs of each child in the environment.

Teacher B expressed her concept of the role of the Grade R teacher succinctly.

Because I like to individualise, teaching Grade R is only rewarding to me in the context of a relationship with each child. In order to build and strengthen the relationship...I need to understand where the child is at and try to meet their needs.

Her passion for understanding each child in her classroom is evident in her clarification of the reason she practices reflection. She describes reflecting as a way of getting to know each child on an academic and emotional level. She believes that meeting children's needs at this level supports them during the Grade R year and ensures they are well prepared for Grade One.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter Teacher A spoke about reflective practice as a way to build relationships with children, and her colleagues.

Reflecting...anything from relationships, from dynamics in amongst the staff...how I can make it better myself, for the benefits of the kids.

She instinctively describes the value of reflecting on the nature of the interactions and relationship she has with each child in the classroom. This teacher demonstrates an innate awareness of the influence she has on the child's experience at school (Dewey 1910:49). Awareness of a need to make herself a better teacher for the children is described by Dewey (1932:125) as being the most important aspect of education.

Teacher B also reflects on her awareness of children's interactions with other children and the way this influences their performance in the classroom.

Or if a child can't resolve a conflict between other children, engage constructively with activities and free play...that translates to that they can't engage with tasks and so you've got to work always at what's under, the sort of lower foundation.

Both teachers demonstrate the validity of Reed and Canning's statement that "reflecting on practice underpins the work of an early year's practitioner" (2010:1). The teachers make

decisions about managing children and the environment based on their reflections on practice. These reflections help them create an enabling environment by providing the right opportunities for those children and keeping the curriculum needs in mind. Teacher B demonstrated an ability to reflect on the children and then use that information across all areas of the classroom.

I mean the two things that I really look for is that the children are happy, and that they are attending, and I mean as in paying attention.... So it's coming from within themselves, it's not imposed. And that they are listening because they are curious and like they're asking questions.... You've got to find a way through, what activities could I do with that child so they will start listening.

She explains that she is able to create an environment that encourages growth and development by reflecting and acting on information emanating from the child. She is confident that children in her class are happier as a result of her ability to reflect on their needs. Pollard (2009:292) concurs with this experience as he describes the decisions a teacher makes as an important part of the organisation of the classroom. If the classroom is managed in a way that supports the children, they will be academically and socially successful.

Both teachers demonstrate Schön's (1987:101) insight regarding the importance of the teachers' relationship with the children as contributing to the social nature of the classroom. They reflect on the children responding and interacting with peers and adults and using this as a means to support the children. Pollard (2009:170) confirms and expands on the use of reflective practice for relationship building as one of the conditions that shape a child's learning by following their needs and interests.

Teacher A expressed the importance of reflecting in order to build relationships with the children. She discussed the importance of getting to know children by means of observation in order to build relationships. She promotes the value understanding individual children by observing their relationships in friend groups and in the wider classroom of peers. This is possible when you observe and reflect on how they respond in the 'world' of the classroom.

Teacher A: You use their friends and their peers because that is what they relate to most easily I think.... The new friends they are starting to make are the all and everything.

Researcher: Trying to see the world through their eyes almost?

Teacher A: Ja, ja.

She reflects on children's interactions with those around them as an opportunity to better understand them. Such reflections provide information that allow her to better support the child.

Reed and Canning (2010:1) support Teacher A's position regarding the importance of reflecting on her relationship with each child in order to adapt and make changes where necessary. Doing this builds self-awareness and helps the teacher take responsibility for her role in supporting each child. According to Larrivee (2000:295) this teacher is reflecting critically as she is aware of her beliefs about the children and uses reflective practice as a way to better understand how they see themselves and the world. In the Grade R classroom Excell, Linington and Sethusha (2015:1) posit that children are learning a broad variety of skills as they interact with the teacher, the environment and their peers. It is vital that teachers build relationships with the children in order to constructively support and extend children's learning experiences.

Teacher B relates how she supports the children when she reflects on their responses to the environment and those around them.

So when a child who is impulsive and can't help it and I know that they'll beat themselves up for it, I just try and use a very gentle voice, or I try and pre-empt the situation. I'll often say that okay tomorrow when we come in for handwashing and I know this and this child will come hurtling in like a rocket and pushes past other children, so when we get to the front door I must stop and turn around and remind them before we go in, anticipating a situation.

Reflecting on the manner that children respond to various situations helps her modify her reactions and their behaviour. Reflection allows her to use the information to create order. Dewey (1916:22) advocates this as deliberate or conscious teaching. Making use of conscious teaching helps this teacher create real learning and deeper meaning of actions. How she responds to the children's actions can lead to the child feeling accepted or reprimanded.

Teacher A values reflecting on children's behaviour and her response. She describes the children's behaviour as something that can be a great challenge in the classroom. She uses reflective practice as a support when handling the children beyond their academic needs, but also as a way to improve their social experiences and interactions.

Because the children and their behaviour and their emotional contingent ... becomes what helps, or what makes the classroom so difficult.

This teacher recognises the individuality of the children as an important component of relationship building and classroom functioning. Dewey states, “the moment children act they individualise themselves; they cease to be a mass and become intensely distinctive beings...” (1932:33). This teacher demonstrates how she reflects on her actions and what she can do differently to make change and support the individual child.

Teaching happens within a social context and building relationships supports the social environment of the classroom. This includes understanding the role parents play in the social context of the classroom. Both teachers spoke about parent meetings as an important aspect of reflective practice. Parents’ descriptions of their children assist the teachers to gain additional insight regarding the children.

Teacher A: I merge what I believe about the children with the expectations of the parents.

Teacher B: When I have parent meetings, what the parents say about their own child and what I learn about the home background informs, helps my understanding of the child and the way forward.

Dewey (1932:99) describes the social aspect of the classroom as an important part of communication and relationship building. This involves being able to work together for a common purpose. He emphasises the significance of the relationship between the teacher and the child as a critical aspect of a child’s current and future academic success. The relationship between the teacher and the child is created both in the classroom and from information the teacher gathers from parents. The data indicates that both teachers use information from parents to help give the children a positive experience of school.

Teacher A: So we have found, well I’ve found that there’s quite a lot of splinter skills that the kids have got, and to try and undo that in the parent’s, well to just try and undo that with the parents, is difficult. So ja, it’s more dealing with parents than the actual child.

Teacher B: It so often happens when a parent will give me information about their child, their perspective of their child, something that I haven’t picked up myself and I will realise...that just having that knowledge, I don’t necessarily change anything I do, but having that knowledge in the back of my head subtly changes my interaction with the child.

The views of the Grade R teachers interviewed are consistent with Pollard (2009:61) who emphasises the value of teacher’s understanding children and their needs.

This gives teachers the ability to know how to approach children based on their individual developmental needs. Teacher B's use of information gained from parents shows evidence of critical reflection (Larrivee 2000:294) as she uses the information to inform her relationships with the children.

Schön (1987:101) suggests that a teacher who builds relationships with children is able to engage in dialogue in an attempt to understand the challenges children face and the information children already know. The teachers in this study use observation of the children, their interactions with peers, and hearing what the parents have to say in order to ascertain how to best support the children. Aronstam and Braund (2016:3) concur that being able to observe children in the Grade R classroom is an essential element of understanding how they learn in a variety of situations.

The data indicates that although the teachers may not always use the information, they receive from their reflections of the social aspects of their classrooms they are aware that reflective practice as a means for relationship building is an important aspect of the Grade R classroom. They are not necessarily critically reflective as suggested by Larrivee (2000:296) in order to challenge assumptions, they have about the children, but they demonstrate an awareness of the importance of relationships in the context of the classroom.

#### **4.7 Reflective practice as a means for personal growth**

Both teachers discussed the importance of using reflective practice as development of the self. As such they spoke about using reflective practice as a means of personal and professional self-development.

Initially Teacher A spoke about using reflective practice as a way to be a better teacher for the children.

And I also think in terms of my personal growth, how I have grown within my own teaching, how can I make it better myself, for the benefit of the kids?

She demonstrates reflective practice as a tool that develops self-awareness and is supported by Appleby (2010:16) who notes that reflective thought enables evaluation of thinking and understanding. Personal growth is described by Appleby (2010:9) as a "never-ending 'learning journey' that involves personal and professional qualities". Teacher A wants to be a better teacher to help the children achieve their potential and she takes personal responsibility for

building an effective and supportive classroom environment. Reed and Canning (2010:2) discuss the importance of teachers developing self-awareness in order to understand their motivation and responses.

Teacher A demonstrates an awareness of how practising reflectively gives her the ability to understand the effect she has on what children think about themselves and the learning environment. Pollard (2009:119) describes the reflective teacher as someone who has enough self-knowledge to know that what they do and how they respond has an impact on the children. He further states: "As reflective teachers we are aware of how our personal biographies affect what we think and do" (Pollard 2009:119).

In the interview with Teacher B she spoke in depth about how she uses reflective practice as a means of realising her responses to situations and how she can manage those in a way that supports her well-being.

So I've learnt to reflect on myself, and my own actions and my own responses to things. ...To say, ok, I'm generally feeling not enthusiastic or I'm struggling to be patient with that, what could I do about it?

Teacher B describes an awareness of her daily responses and how she can make changes to alter her responses. An awareness of personal responses to situations and reflecting on these can support her in developing deeper self-awareness and professional growth. McFarland et al (2009:505) support Teacher B's assessment as they discuss the importance of teachers being aware of the personal influence, they have on the children through their interactions with them. They further describe the dynamic process of teaching, suggesting that teachers make changes to their practice by self-evaluation and reflective practice.

Teacher A also illustrates how she uses reflective practice to understand the way she responded to various classroom situations. Reflecting on her responses helps her manage the children better, especially if there are discipline issues.

How can I tackle this problem or area of difficulty, possibly children of difficulty? You know it's more behaviours and personalities as well as parenting styles...and we have to work with that.

Teacher A achieves personal development by reflecting on how she changes her responses to what she faces especially with regard to discipline in the classroom.



Dewey (1910, 1916, 1930, 1938) elaborates, at length, on the importance of the teacher being aware of the personal traits and characteristics she brings to the classroom. Both teachers interviewed spoke about self-awareness in order to grow personally. Teacher A acknowledges her need for personal and professional growth which correlates to the child's ability to relate to her as a teacher and ability to learn. As a teacher she makes use of reflective practice for personal growth and is open to change, aware of the direct influence she has on how children respond to the learning environment.

Teacher A: I reflect for personal growth. To improve my classroom practice so that the children can get the best out of the day.

Teacher B: I think; how can I improve the situation...anticipating a situation. So talking about myself, its huge, but it's so subtle...

Reflective practice as a means *for* personal growth helps the teachers assess their responses to situations within the classroom. This allows them to work out how they can make changes to themselves in order to manage their responses to situations. Appleby (2010:12) describes this type of reflective practice as 'empowering' because the teacher is able to know her strengths and challenges as she reflects on how she responds to situations in the classroom. Reflecting as a means *for* personal growth is described by Zeichner and Liston (2014:4) as a method of encouraging teachers to think critically about how they understand the children and their assumptions about teaching. They therefore become problem-solvers within their own practice.

#### **4.8 The use of tools as a means *for* reflective practice**

Once teachers' knowledge regarding reflective practice was established the semi-structured interviews allowed for exploration of the tools, they make use of to aid reflection. Pollard (2009:65-75) describes in detail tools teachers can use for reflective practice. These were discussed in Chapter Two.

##### **4.8.1 Journaling as a reflective tool**

This study found that the Grade R teachers do not use journaling as a tool to reflect. However, they gave evidence to indicate that they do think about things they have noticed in the classroom. They both referred to a lack of time to reflect and make notes or changes.

Researcher: How do you record your reflections?

Teacher A: You know, we don't put pen to paper, and have reflections then. You want to become better at a certain thing but either you don't have time or you have it on your 'to-do' list but you never get there...when you know it's an area of concern to work on and you just don't have the time.

Teacher B: Well with children that need intervention, it'll go in the intervention register and also for me just to note the main areas of concern. I don't write more than I feel is useful. They [school] are not very prescriptive and it is very time-consuming.

Teacher A related her experience of being in a system, in the United Kingdom, that encouraged teachers to write down their reflections as part of their record keeping.

When I was in the UK I used to do a reflection on our planning at the end of each week or at the end of the day.... we just jot down something about the day, what worked and what didn't.

She explained how she found journaling a useful tool to see where she had challenges with teaching concepts or if she was struggling with children.

It was a nice log to, kind of see at that time of year if I was having any challenges with specific things that I was teaching or specific assessments. If children weren't grasping a specific concept, or if I had aimed the lesson at a higher level, or if I needed to break it down a little bit.

Pollard (2009:65) supports these views of journaling as a way to record feelings and experiences. Journals can be reviewed at a later stage to inform classroom management and see how the teacher has developed professionally. To make use of critically reflective practice Lowe, Prout and Murcia (2013:1) encourage teachers to journal as a way to link the theory of what they have learnt through reflections to their practice. They further describe journaling as providing evidence of growth as a teacher. The use of reflective journaling assists teachers assess the day and the value of changing their reactions to situations. Teacher B does not make use of journaling as a reflective tool but she did discuss writing notes to herself to remember how to respond to situations with children going forward.

Like I have in the past had children who sort of started getting out of hand and then I will reflect in the afternoon and think what can I do about this. And then I remember the one time actually writing it on the wall, points to remember, to help me cope.

Even though she hasn't made use of journaling she has found value in setting reminders for herself as a way to change her reactions to the children.

As mentioned earlier, this teacher describes her years of experience as a support to her ability to think and reflect on her feet. It is possible that experienced teachers reflect 'intuitively' because they are used to being in the social environment of the classroom (Lowe, Prout & Murcia 2013:2).

From the data gathered above it is evident that the teachers in this study did not intentionally use journaling as a tool to reflect. This could be due to there being no requirement from the DOE or the school for teachers to use tools such as journaling to reflect. Larrivee (2000:296) discusses the value both teachers would get through daily journaling as a way to assess themselves and their experiences. Doing this would encourage them to be critically reflective as they use the journals to see patterns over a period of time and make changes to these as required.

#### **4.8.2. Professional dialogue as a reflective tool**

During the interviews the teacher's discussed impromptu and informal dialogues they would have with their assistants and each other throughout the day. They spoke about these conversations as an opportunity to bounce ideas and thoughts off each other.

Making use of discussion amongst colleagues to support children's learning is encouraged by many authors (Pollard, 2009; McFarland et al, 2009; Simoncini, Lasen & Rocco, 2014; Kruger & Greyling 2015; Killen, 2015; Griggs et al, 2015). Teacher B includes discussions with the assistants and her colleague as a way to support her understanding of the child's needs.

Yes, I do just discuss with my colleague, but it's on a sort of, need help basis.  
As I need help I discuss with her, and she with me. And then I do sometimes call the assistants. Like if I write a report I think does this child actually do that or am I imagining it?

Although this Teacher B indicates that she uses discussion she is using professional dialogue to reflect with her colleague. To use professional dialogue as a tool for reflective practice helps this teacher consider how she makes sense of each child's progress in the classroom. The informal discussions are described by Simoncini, Lasen and Rocco (2014:28) as a 'potent tool' as they create a space for her to voice her observations supporting the enhancement of her knowledge and reflective practice to resolve her concerns. Simoncini, Lasen and Rocco

(2014:35) highlight the benefits of professional dialogue as skill development, gaining insight and awareness of different points of view to develop professional practice. Dialogues give these teachers the opportunity to consider aspects of the classroom with guidance from their assistants and each other. Being able to voice concerns and successes naturally involves a process of analysis that can lead to change and deeper understanding. Expressing concerns and discussing beliefs and assumptions helps the teacher think about her approach to situations. This has the ability to encourage new thought and practice as well as contemplating beliefs and practices that are used (Simoncini et al., 2014:29).

Both teachers make use of professional dialogue as an informal discussion to help see things from a different perspective and to think about things they take for granted (Brock 2015:28). Teacher A described her informal conversations with her colleague as an opportunity for professional dialogue where she can reflect on what has happened during the morning and get advice and support to tackle difficult situations or children.

But often, you know, we bounce ideas off one another, especially at lunch time... and kind of just giving scenarios and situations about what has happened and do I deal with this.

This informal professional dialogue is described by Simoncini et al., (2014:29) as discussion that helps the teacher put into words how she understands what is happening in the classroom. This in turn helps her decide if she needs to change the way she reacts to situations and develop a better understanding of how she can do things differently. Brock (2015:36) posits that these dialogues are one of the tools teachers use to have a balanced perspective on the children and the environment. Teacher A values sharing her thoughts and ideas as a way of strengthening her classroom practice and teaching beliefs, as suggested by Dewey (1916:14). However, Teacher A expressed frustration at not having the time to really discuss children, their behaviour and well-being.

If we could talk, discuss the children. Their emotional contingent doesn't get much airtime. The rest of Foundation Phase is worried about the academics.

The lack of formal encouragement for professional dialogue to reflect on the needs of the children is a source of frustration for the teacher as she focuses only on their academic needs and the prescribed work. Teacher A doesn't see how this can support effective teaching and learning.

Reed and Canning (201:10) explain that if teachers can reflect and share their thoughts and experiences, they are able to make sense of them to support change in the environment. Jackson (2010:193) supports the idea of teachers engaging in professional dialogue as a way to challenge the established norms and preconceived ideas. Doing this develops the teachers' ability to improve teaching and learning.

#### **4.8.3 Assessment as a reflective tool**

Whilst exploring tools for reflective practice both teachers spoke about the value of reflection as a way to assess the children academically and socially. Teacher B listed the following amongst her tools for reflective practice;

- Intervention register for referrals
- Profiles for each child
- Reports and marks
- Assessment book

In the interview she explained how she made use of tools for reflection as a way of assessing how children are coping. She will make notes and refer back to them and see where a child has progressed or may be struggling. She uses this information to suggest interventions with specialists if the need arises.

We have profiles for each child, which are primarily about meetings with parents. But where I have had children with difficulties, I want to monitor their progress in different areas.

Kruger and Greyling (2015:169) discuss the importance of assessment being based on daily activities that are not rigid, especially in Grade R. They further posit that teachers can use these assessments as a way of assessing their own teaching, knowing what worked well and what didn't (Kruger & Greyling 2015:181). Speaking about her use of reports and assessments Teacher B noted.

So you've got a record of what you've said and then they do also get...marks...and then my assessment book. I really do go back to that often and say but what did they get for that and then also sometimes different things linked together. So like, if I think they are having problems...then I'll go back and say what mark did they get...

Pollard (2009:65) agrees that marks and child assessment are an important aspect of teacher inquiry as they can be used to plan teaching and learning whilst monitoring children's progress.

The use of profiles and assessments support the teachers' decisions regarding children's interests and the individual needs of the child. Pollard describes assessment results as 'benchmark evidence' (2009:115) which places children at the centre of all decisions when it comes to teaching and learning (Rutgers 2015:46).

Teacher A also linked aspects of reflective practice to assessment. She listed the following ways she records reflections to support the children.

- Reports
- Observations
- Parent meetings
- Assessments
- Relationships with peers/friends

Although she spoke about using various assessment tools as a way to reflect, she was less focused on the child academically and showed concern for the children's social and emotional well-being.

It's really nice to observe the children because you are getting to know them properly, you're building relationships with them, and you are kind of trying to build them into different areas they're not confident in.

In the interviews both teachers mentioned making use of assessment as a tool to help children develop socially and emotionally. This position is echoed by Excell, Linington and Sethusha (2015:3) who view assessment as relevant in a Grade R classroom where children are refining aspects of their development which, in turn, affects their response to future teaching and learning. The teachers agree that it is essential for the children to feel supported by adults in the environment as this contributes to the development of a positive attitude towards school.

Teacher A indicated that she uses assessment as a tool to reflect on improving her practice to support the children.

I suppose the assessments do help, but I don't find the curriculum, or I don't find the marks a very true reflection of the child.

Just being more thoughtful in planning lessons and also posing questions ...just giving depth to some of their learning.

This teacher uses assessment as a tool for reflection to see what has worked and what hasn't worked. This is described by Kruger and Greyling (2015:181) as an important element to support the children in the classroom. By reflecting on assessment, Teacher A is mindful of academically supporting each child by encouraging them to question, experiment and learn from those around them (Rutgers 2015:39). The children are encouraged by the teacher to make decisions and take responsibility for the choices they make. This enables the Grade R teacher to be cognisant of the ways in which her preparation and attitude can affect the learning that happens in the classroom (Shaik 2015:77).

#### **4.9 Documenting reflective practice**

A review of the documents the teachers use on a daily, weekly and termly basis indicate no evidence of reflective practice. None of the documents have space for the teachers to write down their reflections. This lack of reflective practice in documents provided by the teachers challenges the views of Harcourt and Jones (2016: 83) who focus on the value and importance of documenting reflective practice. According to Harcourt and Jones (2016: 83) documenting reflective practice helps the teacher know herself better and develop her ability to support children educationally. They refer to documentation as being an 'intellectual compass' (Harcourt & Jones 2016: 83).

When interviewing Teacher A on the tools she uses for reflective practice she mentioned the documenting of observations. Upon further probing she indicated the use of detailed observation notes as a reflective tool when it comes to assessing the children.

Researcher: Is there any way you record your reflections?

Teacher A: Well observations

Researcher: So you've got observation notes that you use?

Teacher A: Quite detailed, even in the assessments that we do...small notes that I think are quite useful when we write reports as well.

Although the teacher spoke about using observation notes as a tool for reflection there was no evidence of this in any of the record keeping she shared with me. There is no 'visible' evidence of teaching and learning using reflective practice as suggested by Rintakorpi (2016:400). Documenting reflective practice allows the teacher to build evidence of ways in which children can be supported. Documents can be used to construct new ways of teaching and learning and support change. Teacher A does not record any of her reflections.

Researcher: So when do you find yourself reflecting?

Teacher A: I'd like to say almost all the time, but you know, we don't, I have not, you know we don't put pen to paper, and you know, and have reflections then.

Teacher B referred to formal documents within the school as a way of recording her reflections.

Researcher: How do you record those reflections, if you do?

Teacher B: Well with children who need intervention it'll go in the intervention register... and also for me to just note the main areas of concern. The other one is reports, you've got to record what you have said and then they also do get marks.

This teacher refers to the use of formal school documents as a means of documenting reflective practice. She also makes use of profiles for each child as a way to reflect on how they have made progress during a term.

In my profile in the first term I'll put headings of various areas and I'll say where they are in each area and then in the second term I'll look back at that and write up if it's changed...

The way this teacher uses documents to record information is not necessarily evidence of reflective practice but supports the observation that, "we live in an age where measurable, observable learning takes priority" (Rodgers, 2002:844).

The challenge of documenting reflective practice is evident for both the teachers. As the school has no requirement for teachers to document reflective practice they rely on their memories of experiences with the children. While discussing pressures placed on teachers Schön (1983:20) suggests that time constraints and the normal pressures of teaching limit their time to reflect as they are required to be increasingly efficient and teach the 'basics' to children. This position is echoed by Rintakorpi (2016:405) who sites time constraints as a challenge to documenting reflective practice as teachers are required to reflect in their 'free time'. It is possible that an additional challenge for these teachers may be a lack of knowledge of methods of documenting reflective practice (Rintakorpi 2016:405).

Documenting reflective practice is a tool these teachers can use to understand the life of the classroom and reflect on effectively supporting children (Harcourt & Jones,2016:82). If the teachers interviewed documented their reflective practice they would have a record of the interactions that occurred between the children and the adults. Such a record would provide



the teachers with an effective critical tool to better understand what is happening in the classroom (Harcourt & Jones 2016:83).

#### **4.10 Challenges of reflective practice in Grade R**

##### **4.10.1 Time as a challenge for reflective practice**

Both teachers acknowledge that they encounter various challenges which limit their ability to use reflective practice as a tool for personal and professional development. Teacher A indicated that it is a challenge to support the children and to meet the demands placed on them by the school.

We've got these staff meetings that we have to go to and the pressures of the external schooling having to meet the demands of what the school wants and needs...we could be applying ourselves here, preparing ourselves for a lesson the next day.

In the interviews both teachers alluded to the limited time in which Grade R teachers are required to meet the needs of the school and prepare for the children. This severely limits the time available to reflect on the events of the day and plan to make changes. Teacher A expressed frustration at the 'rest of the school' not understanding what is required of the Grade R teacher to make the environment work for each child. Excell et al. (2015:6) identify with this frustration as they describe the learning needs of the Grade R child as being unlike those of children in a formal classroom. They emphasise that Grade R teachers need time to reflect and make changes as required (Excell et al., 2015:6).

Teacher B also spoke about the challenge of time to implement reflective practice. Although she acknowledges the importance of written reflections as a means of sharing information with teachers she notes that the practice is time consuming.

I mean it is time consuming. For example, writing up the profiles...that is very time consuming and so time is always an issue. But it's absolutely necessary...you reflect because it's necessary and you write that stuff down so that the next teacher can know and can reflect about what has already happened.

Griggs (2015:205) draws attention to the need for teachers to have adequate time to reflect on practice and then implement changes. He asserts that a lack of time is a barrier to reflective practice. Rousseau (2015:62) reiterates the issue of time as an obstacle to using reflective practice successfully as part of quality classroom practice. Teachers need to have adequate

time available in order to achieve effective reflection (Pollard 2009:17). When teachers have sufficient time available to them they are able to use the information they have observed to reflect on changes that benefit the classroom. If teachers have time to reflect, and record these reflections, they are in a powerful position to consider the effect of the curriculum on children's learning and be flexible to make changes.

Alluding to the conflicts that occur within education Dewey (1930:6) notes that the challenge of time is not unusual. Time is required to develop a child-centred curriculum in an attempt to help the child learn naturally. If we value reflective practice as a form of creating a flexible curriculum that is aimed at meeting the needs of the child Dewey (1930:6) asserts that conflict is bound to occur.

#### **4.10.2 Curriculum requirements as a challenge to reflective practice**

Excell et al. (2015:1) emphasise that Grade R should not be a formal academic year for children and that teachers should reflect on the value of play in the Grade R classroom. This is further emphasised in the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (DOE 1997: 18).

Teacher A and B noted the pressure they experience to prepare children for Grade 1 by means of a formal curriculum while being aware that the focus of Grade R should be a play-based and informal.

Teacher A: I think the way we've set it up here lends itself to preparation for Grade 1. You know we've got more formal activities that we do...in the latter part of the day, in the micro-time activities where they learn to sit and attend and...hold pencils correctly, and it's a bit more formal, but it's still fun.

Teacher B: I can't see that there would be any reward in being here if I wasn't reflecting. [But] I actually can't...that's what the problem is for me with these CAPS curriculums and those new Grade R Maths and that Lit whatever thing is called...

Both teachers demonstrate awareness of the external curriculum pressures placed on Grade R teachers that limit their time to engage in reflective practice. Shaik (2016:7) suggests that the Grade R curriculum is intended to develop each child's knowledge and skills. For this to happen successfully Grade R teachers need the opportunity to reflect on planning and adapt this planning to the needs of the children.

### **4.10.3 Inability to affect change as a challenge to reflective practice**

Teacher B described frustration at her inability to support children who need support. Reflective practice provides her with an awareness of children's individual requirements. However, her experience is that this information is often overlooked by parents and the school resulting in a lack of intervention in the classroom and home environment.

When I know I can identify what the problems are with children and I'm completely unable to give them what they need and shift the way they are. I kind of almost stop reflecting with that child because it's not helping, which is awful.

In the interview Teacher B expressed a clear awareness of how she stops reflecting when she knows nothing is going to change. The challenge for this teacher is to remain open-minded and dedicated to each child, regardless of the obstacles. Dewey (1933:29) describes the reflective practitioner as having an "active desire to listen to more sides than one, to give heed to facts from whatever source they come, to give full attention to alternative possibilities". By her own admission Teacher B tires of reflective practice focused on individual children when no obvious improvement is discerned.

Grade R is an important year in which teachers lay foundations for children's future learning experiences. During this play-based year children prepare to enter formal schooling. Quality teaching in Grade R is essential (Excell et al., 2015:8) and teachers are responsible for how they relate to children in an open-minded and flexible way. Ideally, teachers need the opportunity to reflect on their ability to be adaptable whilst knowing her strengths and challenges (Shaik 2015: 83).

For meaningful reflective practice to occur teachers need the support of colleagues, parents, the wider community of the school and the DOE. Such support will empower them to overcome the challenges of time, curriculum requirements and the inability to affect change.

## **4.11 Formal support for effective reflective practice**

### **4.11.1 School support for reflective practice**

Building on the challenges expounded above both teachers clearly expressed a lack of support for their need to use reflective practice to support their decisions and planning. Instead, they spoke of the expectations, demands and approval, echoed by Dewey (1916:16), placed on them by the school.

Both teachers were asked about how the school encourages and supports reflective practice.

Teacher A: It's quite difficult because we want to be part of the school, but we don't want to be part of the school. I don't really know if the other part of the school can help with my reflections. I don't know, I don't think that they can.

Teacher B: No, I don't feel very supported by the school. The school is very keen on [being a Thinking school] so things are done in terms of that. I think we should be having more case studies [to look at children's needs].

The teacher's expressed the absence of support for reflective practice being due to a lack of understanding of the Grade R environment. They believe the school is focused on the academic ability of the children and less on their emotional and developmental needs.

When asked if the principal or other staff place emphasis on reflective practice, Teacher B referred to a dominant academic focus.

Well, none of them use the word reflection, but some of them would lend themselves to reflection, so there is metacognition, thinking about your thinking. But that's quite academic, thinking about your thinking...because to me reflecting is as much on your emotional response to things...

Both teachers expressed the desire to have the opportunity to reflect on how the children are responding to the learning environment. Being able to do this may help them better support the children and prepare the other teachers for the needs the children have. The need to have professional dialogue across the whole of the Foundation Phase would be highly valued by the Grade R teachers. Excell and Linington (2010:8) discuss this lack of support for Grade R teachers and suggested that this could be due to a lack of understanding of the needs of these teachers and children. Both teachers imply that if they were encouraged to reflect it would allow them to use the knowledge and beliefs they have about teaching and the children to improve practice (Zeichner &Liston 2014:4).

Teacher B also describes reflective practice within the school in the following way,

It's not a big buzz word here.

This understanding of the value of reflective practice conflicts with Appleby (2010:19) who discusses the value of reflective practitioners being able to discuss various aspects of teaching and learning as an opportunity to gain a new perspective on how to manage and improve the

environment. Accomplishing effective reflective practice in Grade R will ensure that a foundation for successful schooling is created as children are prepared for the formal schooling environment (Biersteker & Dawes 2008:185).

The teachers noted that they are able to support each other as elaborated by Harcourt and Jones (2016:84) who emphasise the value of teachers being able to debate and learn from each other.

Teacher A: I think my colleague has been an incredible help. She is just such an insightful woman, and I think she is an untapped resource you know.

Support between colleagues encourages both professional and personal growth. When teachers share their experiences with colleagues they can debate and reflect on daily activities which help to reconstruct support for the children by making changes to the environment (Rintakorpi 2016:400).

#### **4.11.2 Education department support for reflective practice.**

In the MRTEQ (2017) the DBE highlight the need for Grade R teachers to have the necessary skills, including reflective practice, to be effective teachers. This knowledge can be used to design learning programmes based on the needs of the children in the Grade R classroom. MRTEQ encourages teachers to “demonstrate the ability to reflect on classroom practices, experiences and actions to transform and build pedagogical knowledge” (2017:39).

With this in mind both teachers were asked of their experience of support from the DBE and any policy documents that encourage reflective practice.

Teacher A: There have been department gatherings where they’ve had Elit training and the maths training as well. I am not aware of any on Reflective Practice, not that I have looked up or willingly gone to and engage with. I am not sure.

Teacher B: I have never heard of one on reflective practice. There could be and I just haven’t registered it. It doesn’t spring to mind, no.

Although both teachers have knowledge and an awareness of reflective practice neither demonstrated familiarity of this practice being encouraged within the school or the DBE.

To be effective reflective practitioners “Teachers need to learn how to teach in context, think on their feet and reflect on how their teaching is working, and use this information to plan their teaching agenda” (Lewis 2013:28) and teachers need to be supported by these two entities in order to achieve this.

Data gathered from the teachers suggests that the failure to implement policies regarding teachers’ use of reflective practice creates additional obstacles to plan effective teaching strategies and implement changes in classroom practice. Teachers are considered to be the most important element of the classroom as their abilities relate directly to the quality of teaching and learning. It stands to reason they should receive support to promote their ability to reflect on practice and use this knowledge to develop quality levels of education in the classroom (Van Niekerk 1997:283; Spaul 2013:24,).

There have been many significant improvements in Grade R provision since 1994, yet significant challenges remain (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper 2012:129). As previously discussed MRTEQ places emphasis on teachers’ ability to integrate various types of knowledge gained through reflective practice to think about how to learn from practice as well as in practice (DOE 2017:15). In order to achieve this the DOE need to practically implement policies to support schools and teachers in the application of reflective practice, thereby encouraging and developing reflective practice as a skill.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

The foregoing analysis has demonstrated that both teachers value the importance of reflective practice as part of a teaching strategy. In the interviews both demonstrated an appreciation for reflective practice even though they struggle to find the time to make use of it. It can be deduced that there is a lack of formal knowledge for reflective practice and this contributes to the difference of interpretation discerned from the interviews regarding the use of Reflective Practice. Teacher B speaks about using reflective practice as a tool for understanding the academic ability of children while Teacher A uses reflective practice for professional growth and as a tool to build awareness of children’s interactions and responses to classroom activities.

The teachers interviewed do not have formal training in reflective practice and implement it ad hoc to the best of their knowledge. This exposes teachers to the use of reflective practice as a ‘technician’ (Zeichner & Liston 2014:3) as problems in the classroom are viewed as being

located within children and their role is focused on altering children's behaviour. Lack of knowledge, external pressures and other obstacles to reflective practice already identified prevent the teachers interviewed from being critically reflective in all situations. Such obstacles limit their ability to adapt and make changes to their classrooms and lessons as they reflect on the response of children.

The five themes identified in interviews with the teachers provide valuable insights to promote effective classroom management using reflective practice.

Reflective practice as a means *for* planning is a strategy that encourages teachers to make decisions based on observation of children's responses to planned lessons. Further reflection on planning allows teachers to make necessary changes to ensure successful teaching and learning.

Reflective practice as a means *for* curriculum management encourages teachers to be flexible in their approach to formal curriculum requirements by reflecting on where children need support and challenges. This allows teachers to balance the requirements of a play-based Grade R year with the additional demands placed on them by the school to provide a more formal academically based curriculum. The teachers interviewed identified that greater clarity, support and understanding regarding Grade R is required from the school and the DBE in order to achieve success.

The ability to adapt the curriculum provides a foundation for teachers to use reflective practice as a means *for* adaptation. They improve teaching and learning by adapting the environment and the curriculum to the needs of the children. This adaptation may occur during a lesson or afterwards and provides a means for individual responses to classroom situations.

Reflective practice as a means *for* relationship building becomes possible when teachers adapt to the needs of the children in the classroom environment. Teachers take time to get to know the children personally and reflect on how each child responds to various situations. This is primarily achieved through the use of observation in which teachers notice the interactions children have with each other and adults in the environment. Reflecting on observations encourages the teacher to become aware of interpersonal relationships and her response to the children.

Insight regarding her responses provides a stimulus for the teacher to use reflective practice as a means for personal growth. This allows teachers to reflect on their role and the impact they have on each child in the classroom. A teacher who is self-aware reflects on her views of teaching and learning which encourages self-development and personal growth. The teachers interviewed in this research expressed an appreciation and understanding of using reflective practice *for* personal development. They demonstrate an awareness that this improves their teaching skills as they navigate the challenges of the children, the school environment and the academic programme in Grade R.

The two teachers who took part in this case study demonstrate some knowledge of reflective practice as an innate aspect of their teaching. Neither has received formal guidance to develop their reflective practice skills and there is no documentary evidence of reflective practice taking place. The teachers value the concept of reflective practice and speak about the benefits of it for the children and for good classroom practice. There is little evidence of critically reflective practice as they don't always use their reflections to make changes to how they work with the children or manage the classroom.

Using these insights Chapter 5 discusses and considers recommendations for the implementation of reflective practice in Grade R classrooms in order to support teacher development and effective classroom learning environments.



## **CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to explore the knowledge and understanding of reflective practice held by Grade R teachers. In addition, this study considered the tools teachers use to implement reflective practice and the extent to which they feel supported by the school and the DBE. This chapter offers four points of discussion, three recommendations and concludes with two suggestions for implementing and supporting reflective practice in Grade R classrooms.

### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

#### **5.1.1 Knowledge and understanding of Reflective practice**

Chapter two, the literature review and theoretical framework, discussed the framework of using reflective practice to empower teachers. The theoretical positions discussed reflect the research participants' understanding of reflective practice as a valuable way to improve teaching and learning.

The findings of this research align with Schön's (1983:43) conclusion that "our knowing is in our action." The teachers interviewed expressed theoretical knowledge of reflective practice as a concept with which they are familiar but were less able to articulate ways in which reflective practice informs their individual practice. Schön (1983:43) describes this knowledge of reflective practice as innate. The Grade R teachers struggled to demonstrate the use of reflective practice as part of their decision-making process based on daily events in the classroom.

The themes that emerged from the data demonstrate a diverse understanding of reflective practice. The teachers discussed the use of reflections to adjust classroom management, planning and the individual academic and social needs of the children.

In addition, the teachers spoke of reflecting on classroom practice in order to remain motivated as they work with the children and the prescribed curriculum. This inspires them to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of the children. In this way reflective practice contributes to the teacher's assumptions about the children as well as developing professional knowledge (Brock 2015: 23).

The findings demonstrate that although the Grade R teachers have no formal awareness of implementing reflective practice, they do express the importance of responding to the children's social and academic needs.

Both teachers indicated that they value reflective practice as a means of developing self-awareness and personal growth. The findings show that one teacher reflected on the ways in which she can develop herself as a teacher for the benefit of the children. The second teacher used reflective practice to understand her response to the children, particularly when feeling agitated and exhausted by the classroom environment.

The findings show that the Grade R teachers value the concept of reflective practice as a decision-making tool to assess effective practices or implement change that supports the holistic development of children.

#### **5.1.2 Tools of reflective practice**

The findings establish that the teachers primarily use child assessment and professional dialogue as tools for reflective practice. They alluded to using tools such as journaling, note-taking and observations for reflective practice, but the documentary analysis revealed no evidence of this. The lack of written evidence was attributed to time constraints and the absence of such requirements in their Grade R job description. Although the findings indicated that the teachers value the concept of journaling the evidence suggested that the predominant focus on academic record keeping and the time-consuming nature of journaling prevents them utilising these tools.

The data revealed that the teachers are not familiar with the tools of reflective practice. They made assumptions about useful tools but demonstrated no evidence of using them. The teachers indicated that their focus on the tightly prescribed curriculum and daily routines prevented them from engaging with tools for reflective practice.

The research findings indicate that the teachers use a numbered assessment system to consider children's responses to the social and academic life of the Grade R classroom. The numbers ascribed to the children range between one and seven, based on the CAPS assessment criteria. These assessments were the only evidence of a text-based tool that can be used for reflective practice.

Although the documentary evidence reflected a significant emphasis on academic record keeping the findings did not disclose written evidence of reflective practice pertaining to these records.

In addition, the findings reveal that the teachers use informal professional dialogue that occurs between themselves and the assistants in the environment as a tool for reflective practice. Teachers identified these informal conversations as a tool to affirm and support observations and thoughts pertaining to the children and the structure of the day.

The findings show that the Grade R teachers use limited tools for reflective practice in order to consider classroom strategies based on observations of children's responses to the lesson or the environment.

Recommendations regarding structured professional dialogue will be discussed later in the chapter.

### **5.1.3 Benefits of, and support for, reflective practice**

Findings indicate that teachers are aware of the benefits of reflective practice as a way to manage the classroom and their performance. Schön (1987:114) recommends the use of reflection to improve performance and one teacher demonstrated awareness of this benefit by describing her use of reflective practice to meet the needs of the children and support learning.

The findings further revealed that the teachers use a limited form of reflective practice, through informal professional dialogue and assessments, to support the children emotionally and socially. The teachers expressed concern that the Grade R curriculum devalues emotional and social considerations and places greater emphasis on the child's academic ability.

The findings of this case study indicate that the teachers are unaware of any support for reflective practice from the school or the DBE. The MRTEQ (2017:39) specifically refers to reflective practice, and places emphasis on teachers applying and integrating knowledge in order to be effective in their classroom practice. In addition, the DOE (2012:11) discusses reflective practice as a tool teachers' can use to learn from their practice through the use of classroom observation. However, the teachers in this study are not aware of any policy documents or teacher training workshops intended to build knowledge and assist teachers to implement Reflective practice effectively.

#### **5.1.4 Contributions of this study**

As Grade R is the first year of formal schooling in South Africa an important consideration is to ensure that quality learning programmes support children from the time of their first entry into school. Quality teacher education programmes that must include reflective practice are an essential element of such support. Teachers need knowledge of how to use the tools and the opportunity to use reflective practice as a means for improving teaching and learning.

Grade R teachers will benefit from reflective practice that is encouraged throughout the school. Implementing school-wide reflective practice supports teachers as they respond sensitively to the needs of both the curriculum and the children. Using the tools of reflective practice encourages teachers to communicate and share experiences. This allows for the acknowledgement of the diversity of individual skills, knowledge and experience in the teaching environment (Rousseau 2014:169).

#### **5.2 Recommendations**

The findings of this study show that reflective practice has the capacity to support quality teaching and learning. The individual needs of children are supported as teachers reflect on what is happening in the classroom making changes as needed to strengthen Grade R teaching.

In this study the Grade R teachers demonstrate an awareness of reflective practice. Based on the findings of this research two broad recommendations are applicable. The first addresses the need for training and awareness programmes that provide skills and empower teachers to make effective use of reflective practice and the tools that support it. Training that is presented by schools and the Department of Basic Education will reinforce and support quality teaching and learning in the critical Foundation Phase and Grade R. The second recommendation addresses teachers use of effective reflective tools in order to apply reflective practice in meaningful ways. This will support their classroom practice and develop their professional teaching skills.

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study.

### **5.2.1 Recommendations for the Department of Basic Education and schools**

Although the findings of this case study demonstrate that the DBE advocates for reflective practice in policy documents, the Grade R teachers indicated that they are not aware of policies or any support for reflective practice from the DBE or the school. Schools would benefit from Pollard's (2009:65) suggestion to examine official policy documents in order to gain insight into suggestions for quality teaching and learning through reflective practice. It is recommended that the DBE and schools actively promote the implementation of reflective practice in order to meet the aspirations of policy documents that seek to advance the knowledge, skills and practice of Grade R teachers.

The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (2007:11) makes it the responsibility of each teacher to identify their requirements for professional development. Encouraging and teaching teachers to use reflective practice supports the Grade R teachers' ability to recognise areas for professional development. It is recommended that schools implement reflective practice within the classrooms as part of Grade R teachers weekly and termly record keeping. The DBE should continue to strive towards quality teaching practice which includes the development of reflective practice skills for teachers, especially in the Foundation phase.

### **5.2.2 Recommendations for teachers**

It is recommended that teachers view reflective practice as a valuable tool to provide evidence of quality teaching and learning. It is essential that teachers understand the reasons for their classroom decisions in order to achieve effective learning. Grade R teachers can support effective education in South Africa by reflecting on their role in establishing a valuable educational foundation for each child in the classroom.

It is further recommended that teachers practice regular reflection to determine children's responses to lessons. In this way teachers build an awareness of their teaching style and the impact of this on children. They are able to use valuable insights to adjust and improve their teaching and simultaneously build children's confidence. Reflecting empowers teachers to develop a clear understanding of how they support children academically, socially and emotionally. The insights gained from reflective practice enable the teacher to make adjustments to the classroom environment to improve teaching and learning.

Documentary analysis in this case study revealed no evidence of tools such as journaling, note-taking and observations being used for reflective practice. It is strongly recommended that teachers use effective tools for reflective practice and make use of documented interviews and formal discussions as professional dialogue. Recording these dialogues provides teachers with educational documentation that can be used to reflect on observations and discussions. Furthermore, this content establishes a platform that teachers use to reflect on teaching practice and the effects of changes implemented in the Grade R classroom. A school wide policy for reflective practice, that includes documented record keeping, provides a benefit to teachers who are aware of their personal and professional development.

The findings suggest that teachers value the concept of journaling as a reminder of past events and changes implemented. However, there was evidence of the teachers' belief that journaling is time consuming and the requirement to focus on academic record keeping instead. Teachers would be motivated to use journaling as a reflective tool if they felt this activity was supported by the school. Recording reflections would make daily choices and decisions visible and create evidence of their values and beliefs.

This research revealed that the Grade R teachers undervalue their beliefs and knowledge concerning Grade R children in order to meet school and departmental requirements. A pertinent example of this is the value the teachers place in elements of a play based curriculum versus the academically aligned requirements of CAPS. It is therefore strongly recommended that Grade R teachers use reflective practice as a means of self-empowerment so that they contribute confidently and add value to teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase environment.

Effective reflective practice will create the means for Grade R teachers to take individual ownership of the needs of their classroom and support children as they observe and understand what the children are doing.

### **5.2.3 Recommendations for further research**

If a wider study of reflective practice is conducted in future the researcher, from her experience of this study, would recommend the following;

This was a small-scale study that explored Grade R teachers' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice. The findings reveal that there is a need for a larger national study that

meets the same objectives. A study of this nature will have the potential to provide a broader analysis of the ways in which reflective practice is understood and implemented in Grade R classrooms and provide possible attainable processes for implementation.

Further understanding of the nature of reflective practice in Grade R requires research to be conducted in a variety of quintile one to quintile five schools. This may reveal a diversity in the ways in which reflective practice is understood and implemented. Broadening the research sample may also create depth of insight regarding the role of reflective practice to improve quality teaching and learning.

This case study could also inform a longitudinal study that considers the nature and implementation of reflective practice in the FP over a period of time. This would allow researchers to consider the impact reflective practice has on the Grade R environment and how it helps improve and support educational change, thereby improving teaching and learning.

An additional recommendation for further study is to consider the manner in which reflective practice is taught within FP Teacher Education programmes at universities. Research of this nature might include insight into the tool's that student teachers are encouraged to use to practice reflectively.

A final recommendation is to conduct research regarding plans for the implementation of reflective practice in schools as per the Department of Basic Education policy documents aimed at providing quality teaching practice.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Teachers who are encouraged to reflect as part of their daily practice will be motivated to make decisions based on their reflections. Shaik (2016:2) considers that teachers who are taught the skill of reflective practice are likely to feel inspired to develop quality teaching and learning. They are able to construct the environment, and the curriculum, with a clear understanding of their role and the influence this has on children's perceptions of school.

Reflecting on the teachers' knowledge and understanding of reflective practice provided insight regarding their desire to support each child in their classroom. The research participants noted the dilemma created by school pressure to develop children academically and, at the same time, to meet the curriculum emphasis on play-based learning in Grade R. They expressed

concern that they were not permitted to consider the needs and abilities of the children as this may conflict with their future academic needs. Schools and the Department of Basic Education must consider how they can encourage the implementation of quality reflective practice to address the challenge teachers face balancing academic pressures and the need for play-based learning in Grade R.

### **5.3.1. Implementing reflective practice**

The literature review explored the benefits of implementing reflective practice to support quality teaching and learning in a Grade R environment. Schools and teachers need to make use of the variety of tools discussed in this research to discover what is most effective for them. There isn't necessarily a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to implementing reflective practice. Teachers construct their classrooms and teaching on their individual preferences for using reflective tools. In this process it is important that they are supported by the school and the DBE as they reflect on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.

The findings of this case study demonstrated that the Grade R teachers did not make effective use of reflective tools. Recommendations were made for teachers to be equipped with effective tools for reflective practice. This knowledge will diminish barriers to reflective practice as teachers recognise the benefits outweighing the obstacles. Teachers who are taught skills of journaling and professional dialogue, and who are supported in its use, will utilise the knowledge gained to improve teaching and learning.

### **5.3.2 Supporting reflective practice**

Grade R teachers need to feel part of the broader school as they lay the foundation for children's future learning experiences. Reflective practice that is implemented as a school wide policy encourages teachers to record and discuss reflections that lead to quality teaching and learning. To reflect effectively teachers need to be trained to use reflective tools to encourage accountability whilst meeting the curriculum needs and the needs of the children. Implementing this in Grade R supports the principle that "ECD will serve as the bedrock for child and family life as well as for future learning" (DoE 1997:12).

Grade R teachers who are encouraged to reflect on their practice create a foundation for successful learning and confident children who are nurtured and individually supported in their first formal year of schooling.



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## **APPENDICES**

Data collection instruments

### **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT**

1. Tell me what you know about the idea or term Reflective Practice?
2. In what ways do you make use of Reflective Practice either during the day, or at the end of the day?
3. What do you think makes reflection an important part of the classroom?
4. How do you decide what is working in the classroom and what needs to change?
5. What tools do you use to reflect on your daily classroom practice? Describe these.
6. How are you supported in Reflective Practice by the school, colleagues and documentation from the Department of Education?

### **APPENDIX B: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS**

A collection of the following documents will be analysed:

1. Weekly lesson plans such as lesson plans and other forms of record keeping.
2. Assessment files/processes (Teacher Portfolio)
3. Journals.
4. Minutes from Grade meetings and planning.

Information in the above documents will be analysed into themes through content analysis.

## APPENDIX C: ETHICS CLEARANCE CPUT

<b>***For office use only</b>	
<b>Date submitted</b>	<b>06 June 2018</b>
<b>Meeting date</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>Approval</b>	<b>P/Y\N</b>
<b>Ethical Clearance number</b>	<b>EFEC 4-8/2018</b>



### FACULTY OF EDUCATION

#### RESEARCH ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

This certificate is issued by the Education Faculty Ethics Committee (EFEC) at Cape Peninsula University of Technology to the applicant/s whose details appear below.


- 1. Applicant and project details (Applicant to complete this section of the certificate and submit with application as a Word document)**

<b>Name(s) of applicant(s):</b>	<b>Ailsa Sally Connelly</b>	
<b>Project/study Title:</b>	<b>Reflective Practice in Grade R</b>	
<b>Is this a staff research project, i.e. not for degree purposes?</b>	No	
<b>If for degree purposes the degree is indicated:</b>	Master's Degree	
<b>If for degree purposes, the proposal has been approved by the FRC</b>	Yes	



<b>Funding sources:</b>	N/A	
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**2. Remarks by Education Faculty Ethics Committee:**

This Master's research project is granted ethical clearance valid until 14 August 2020.		
<b>Approved:</b> Yes	<b>Referred back:</b>	<b>Approved subject to adaptations:</b>
<b>Chairperson Name:</b> Chiwimbiso Kwenda		<b>Date:</b> 15 August 2018
<b>Chairperson Signature:</b> 		
<b>Approval Certificate/Reference:</b> EFEC 4-8/2018		

## APPENDIX D: WCED CLEARANCE LETTER

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**REFERENCE:** 20180820–5453

**ENQUIRIES:** Dr A T Wyngaard

Mrs Ailsa Connelly  
15 Dreyersdal Road  
Bergvliet  
7945

**Dear Mrs Ailsa Connelly**

### **RESEARCH PROPOSAL: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN GRADE R**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **27 August 2018 till 28 September 2018**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.

10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Research Services**  
**Western Cape Education Department**  
**Private Bag X9114**  
**CAPE TOWN**  
**8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard

**Directorate: Research**

**DATE: 21 August 2018**