



Reflective Questions

To be considered by MTL Primary students during their Practicum.

Introduction

The Reflective Questions focus on the following six competencies related to classroom teaching:

- a. planning, preparation and lesson delivery
- b. classroom management skills
- c. communication skills
- d. questioning skills
- e. motivation/self-directed and independent learning
- f. assessment and feedback

Application

The questions are addressed to you directly as a student-teacher in a primary school context. They are designed to assist you with your reflection as you write up your weekly and the one-lesson-a-week reflection/self-evaluation during your practicum.

Once you embark on your reflective writing you can select any section and any questions you would particularly like to reflect upon. This means that you do not necessarily have to answer all the questions in each section. However, the questions should help you in your own analysis and judgement of your competencies.

The Reflective Questions are not meant to be a question and answer exercise. Each week you are expected to write your reflections on your experience in the classroom and the questions should be a tool to set you thinking about issues which are part and parcel of daily classroom practice. You are not expected to exhaust all the questions each week. Select which questions are relevant for you. You can reflect on more than one competence in one week. You can even reflect on one competence more than once during your practicum. Reflect on what is significant to you.

Whilst you are expected to identify the competences you would like to reflect upon you should also feel free to reflect on issues and concerns not included in the Reflective Questions which you consider to be significant during a particular week. This means that you can even reflect on issues, events, and strategies etc. which are not directly probed by the questions provided.

The Reflective Questions are a vital tool for your professional development and must be discussed and shared with your examiner/s during your practicum. Make sure that you file your reflections in the Practicum File.

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Section A

In this section you are asked to reflect on your planning, preparation and lesson delivery:

- 1. Have a close look at your weekly schemes of work and ask yourself the following questions:**
 - a. Does/Do the content of the Scheme/s fit with the rest of the curriculum?
 - b. Is there anything in the Scheme/s which you think should be changed completely?
 - c. Is/Are the Scheme/s a clear picture of what you plan for the whole of Teaching Practice?
 - d. Does/Do the Scheme/s cover all the curriculum areas?

- 2. Analyse a lesson or a unit of lessons (make sure that reference to lesson/s is clear) about a particular topic or curriculum area and focus on its three basic components. Ask yourself the following questions:**
 - a. Was the introduction motivating?
 - b. Was the flow of the lesson adequate?
 - c. Did you manage to tackle all the teaching points in the development?
 - d. Did you do any intermediate closures in the development of lesson?
 - e. And if you did, why did you do them?
 - f. How did the students react to the conclusion of the lesson?
 - g. Was the time factor adequate?
 - h. What could you have done better?

- 3. Select a lesson (make sure that reference to lesson is clear) that you have delivered and ask yourself these questions:**
 - a. Did you envisage any change/s at the planning stage?
 - b. Did the lesson fit with the rest of the curriculum?
 - c. Did you change anything whilst delivering the lesson?
 - d. How did the students react to the lesson content?
 - e. Were the learning outcomes achieved?
 - f. Did the resource/s facilitate the learning process?

- 4. Select a lesson (make sure that reference to lesson is clear) that you have conducted. Reflect on the decisions you made when you were planning the lesson relating to:**
 - a. instructional objectives
 - b. teaching materials/resources
 - c. selection and sequencing of activities
 - d. assessment of student learning.

Reflect on those decisions you made during the lesson itself relating to the above. What changes did you make to your original plan during the actual implementation of the lesson? Why did you make those changes? Were they the right decisions? What would have happened if you had adhered to the original plan? What implications can you draw for future planning?

5. Focus on the resources of a lesson (make sure that reference to the lesson is clear) that you have delivered and reflected on:

- a. Are there resources intricately linked to the lesson?
- b. Was the time invested in preparing the resources worth it?
- c. How many resources did you prepare?
- d. Was the timing of the resources appropriate with the flow of the lesson?
- e. Did the resources facilitate teaching and learning?
- f. If the lesson was void of resources would learning have taken place just the same?
- g. To what extent did the resource determine the success of the lesson?

6. Have a look at your Practicum File and ask yourself the following:

- a. Does the Practicum File indicate your preparation?
- b. Is it well organised?
- c. Does it contain all the relevant sections?
- d. Is it a true picture of your efforts?
- e. Does the Practicum File contain a variety of learning materials?
- f. Is the Practicum File a waste of time?
- g. Did you update your Practicum File during Teaching practice?
- h. What kind of updating did you do?
- i. Was the updating relevant?
- j. How important do you think is the Practicum File?

Section B

In this section you are asked to reflect on your classroom management skills:

1. **Focus on your style of classroom management and try to fit it in one/more of the following role models. When you do, reflect on it.**
 - a. strict disciplinarian
 - b. democratic leader
 - c. laissez-faire leader
 - d. poor organiser
 - e. inconsistent legislator
 - f. incessant critic.

2. **The effectiveness of any classroom management depends on a teacher's attitudes and practical intelligence. Reflect on these basic principles:**
 - a. Have you established a friendly relationship with your students?
 - b. What did you establish the relationship on?
 - c. Do you consider yourself to have established a supportive and trusting relationship?
 - d. What is your regard towards disruptive students?
 - e. Can you honestly say that you have a positive regard towards disruptive students?
 - f. Do you consider your approach to be optimistic and no-nonsense approach?
 - g. If you do, how did you set about establishing it?

3. **One of the positive ways of establishing classroom control is by promoting a positive classroom environment. Reflect on these questions:**
 - a. Have you managed to create a routine in class?
 - b. How did you set it up?
 - c. Do you feel you are committed to an organised work routine?
 - d. Have you managed to engage your students in meaningful learning activities?
 - e. Do you consider that you can maintain a certain amount of momentum and smoothness in the direction of class activities?

4. **A constructive approach to effective classroom management requires that students be aware of the limits of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. A set of class routines and rules should be clearly established and students should be informed of the consequences if the rules are broken. Keeping this in mind, reflect on the following:**

- a. Do you consider yourself consistent in dealing with problem behaviour? Give an example.
- b. When did you establish management routines during your T.P.?
- c. What was/is the effect of early establishment of class management procedures?
- d. What was/is the effect of late establishment of class management procedures?
- e. Did you consult your students or seek their participation in devising classroom routines?
- f. And if you did, what was the effect?
- g. What principle/s did you adopt in establishing rules?
- h. What reinforcers did you use to encourage acceptable behaviour?

5. Inappropriate behaviour is bound to occur in class from time to time. Reflect on it in the following questions:

- a. Did you experience unacceptable behavior during your T.P.?
- b. What form of unacceptable behaviour? Describe.
- c. How did you deal with it?
- d. Was/were your strategy/ies effective?
- e. What were you concerned within your approach?
- f. What did you feel at the time of dealing with the behaviour?
- g. What was the final outcome of your strategy?

6. A 'good teacher is a good disciplinarian.' How far do you agree with this statement depends on your effective coping strategies. Focus on:

- a. Did you experience highly critical situations in relation to behavior during your T.P.?
- b. Was there a situation that you couldn't cope with?
- c. Do you feel prepared now, to deal with any 'problem' situation?
- d. What do you think is the students' perception of you?
- e. Have you managed to help your students accept your class rules?
- f. How did you do it?
- g. Do you think you have acquired effective coping strategies?
- h. How did you achieve them?

Section C

In this section you are asked to reflect on your communication skills:

1. An important effective element in class is a positive attitude. Reflect on your attitude in class.

- a. Have you developed a positive attitude towards your students?
- b. Do you consider yourself as having a friendly attitude in class?
- c. How did you establish it?
- d. What strategies are you adopting to nurture the positive attitude?
- e. Have you ever felt that the attitude you have established is being threatened? And if yes, by what/whom?

2. Non-verbal communication is a useful tool in class. Basically, it refers to the use of space, movement, gestures, facial expressions and posture in communication. Keep this in mind and reflect.

- a. Are you visible in class?
- b. Is there eye contact between you and the students?
- c. Do you use facial expressions to communicate with your students?
- d. Do you vary the tone and pitch of your voice?
- e. Do you drop your voice at the end of an utterance?
- f. Do you have voice modulation?
- g. Do you think that you are audible from all corners of your class?
- h. Do you think you can project your voice effectively?
- i. Do you use non-verbal gestures? If yes, what for?

3. Reflect further on whether you are communicating effectively in class by replying to the following:

- a. Are you making yourself understood?
- b. Do you use heavy-laden, adult structures/vocabulary/ language?
- c. Are you clear in your pronunciation?
- d. Do the students understand what you say?
- e. Are you logical in your arguments?
- f. Are you interesting?
- g. Have you managed to bring down the material of teaching to the level of the students?

4. A competent teacher has proficient communication skills. The first of these skills are the 'personal qualities and attitudes of a teacher'. Reflect on these skills:

- a. Are you friendly and patient with your students?
- b. Do you deliver your lessons in an open, calm manner?
- c. How would you define your classroom climate?
- d. Do you think that the students feel comfortable in your presence?
- e. Do you think that the students feel threatened in your presence?
- f. Do you ever talk down to your students? If you do, why? when?
- g. Are you a good listener?
- h. Do you respond to your students' queries?

5. The second set of proficient communication skills are related to the 'transmission, encoding and means of obtaining feedback'. Focus on these questions:

- a. What kind of language do you use to make your demands in class?
- b. Do you use ordinary language which students can understand?
- c. Or do you use a lot of technical jargon?
- d. What kind of messages do you present to your students?
- e. Are they overburdened with excessive details?
- f. Are they relevant?
- g. Do they instill a sense of security and ease or the opposite?
- h. Are you able to anticipate comprehension problems of students where messages are involved?
- i. Do you use precise language when giving directions and in explanations?

6. The third set of proficient communication skills concern 'learning'. Reflect on these questions:

- a. What are you planning to enhance communication skills in your students?
- b. Do you train your students in active learning?
- c. Do you use group discussions?
- d. Do you teach your students how to verbalise ideas?
- e. Do you train your students how to make a point without being aggressive or demanding?

Section D

In this section you are asked to reflect on your questioning skills:

- 1. Take a lesson from your T.P. File (make sure that reference to lesson is clear) on any topic you like and focus on the questions in the lesson plan. Reflect on the following:**
 - a. What kind of questions have you asked?
 - b. Give examples of high-order questions.
 - c. Give examples of low-order questions.
 - d. How many questions did you ask?

- 2. 'Questioning is effective for promoting classroom interaction.' Keeping this statement in mind, reflect on these questions:**
 - a. Do you use questions to promote interaction in class?
 - b. Do you think that questions promote interaction?
 - c. How is it possible?
 - d. What happens as a result of the interaction?
 - e. How do you, as a teacher, take up the cue and use the stimulus created to enhance learning?

- 3. Children seem to be able to answer questions but are hard on asking. Reflect on this aspect:**
 - a. What strategies are you planning in your lessons to promote active questioning by your students?
 - b. Why do you think your students are reluctant to ask questions?
 - c. When they ask, what kind of questions do they ask?
 - d. How do you cope with their 'no-questioning strategy'?
 - e. How do you react to their questions when they do ask?
 - f. Do you follow up their questions in your lessons?

- 4. Sometimes children are inhibited from asking questions by the threat of criticism from their classmates, because they feel that their question might not be relevant or due to the negative reaction of the teacher. Keeping all these issues in mind and others which you might think of, reflect on the following:**
 - a. Do you create 'question time slots' in your lessons?
 - b. Do you invite students to ask questions?

- c. Do you wait, patiently, for questions or is eager to get on with the lesson?
- d. Do you welcome questions when they are asked?
- e. Through your strategies, do you encourage students who show a degree of perplexity?

5. The problem with questioning probably depends a great deal on subject matter besides the ability to ask questions which enhance learning, ensure high success rates and provide adequate coverage of the subject matter. Focus on these areas:

- a. Do you ask questions which involve different levels of processing subject matter?
- b. Do your questions cover the whole range of planned objectives?
- c. Are your questions concerned with prompting students' thinking abilities?
- d. Are your questions directed at confident learning and high motivational objectives?
- e. Do you focus on the vocabulary and syntax of your questions?
- f. Do you match your questions with the ability of your students?

6. Now you must reflect on how you ask questions.

- a. Have you ever rephrased questions? Why?
- b. Do you create an order (from easy to difficult) in the questions you ask?
- c. Do you match the sequence of questions with the series of specific objectives in your lessons?
- d. Are your questions formulated in a proper logical order?
- e. Do you allow students to formulate an answer before asking the man other question?
- f. Do you allow the pace of question-asking and wait-time to suit the questions being asked?
- g. Do you distribute questions to all the students in your class?

Section E

In this section you are asked to reflect on your skill to motivate students and your ability to promote self-directed and independent learning:

1. Getting students motivated to take part in learning and to maximize on the expectancy, value and emotional aspect of motivation is important. Reflect on these issues:

- a. Are your objectives realistic, relevant and attainable?
- b. Do you use reinforcers to help students achieve learning goals?
- c. In your lessons do you encourage co-operation among students to achieve common learning goals rather than stressing competition?
- d. Do you provide challenging, novel, and varied learning activities and experience to motivate students to high levels of achievement?
- e. How far do you ensure that your students experience success and feelings of competence?
- f. Do you provide 'on task' assistance to promote motivational success?

2. One way of getting students motivated is to provide extrinsic incentives. Reinforcements, if used effectively are highly motivational. Focus on some here:

- a. Have you ever juggled up with potential reinforcers for different students?
- b. Do you use popular classroom activities as reinforcers for less desirable learning activities?
- c. What kind of verbal encouragement and praise have you used in your teaching?
- d. Have you ever used negative reinforcers when positive reinforcers have failed?
- e. Do you use continuous reinforcements in the early stages of learning?
- f. And if you have, what were the effects?
- g. Do you use intermittent reinforcements when learning has been established?

3. When and how to reinforce is the key question now. Reflection this:

- a. Do you provide immediate reinforcement for new learning tasks?
- b. Do you criticize your students frequently?
- c. If you do, why?
- d. What is the effect of dependence on criticism?
- e. Do you provide reinforcements upon group performance?
- f. Do you in any way chart and display the achievements of your students?
- g. Do you use punishments?
- h. Why and when do you use them?
- i. What are the short and long term effects of punishments?

4. Goal-setting and planning are important aspects of self-regulated and independent learning.

Focus on these issues:

- a. Do you encourage your students to set up their own goals for learning besides the ones you set?
- b. Children like to be involved in their own learning. Have you ever encouraged them to plan their own learning activities?
- c. Do you include personal organisation strategies for learning in your teaching?
- d. Are your students encouraged to offer/think of alternatives of achieving stated goals?
- e. Are class projects part of your teaching strategies? If yes, how do you apply them for self-directed learning?

5. Self-regulated and independent learners have a repertoire of learning strategies for selection and implementation according to the demand of tasks. They constantly monitor and update their strategies. Reflect on these strategies:

- a. Do you expose your students to a range of strategies for various learning tasks?
- b. Is the teaching of studying skills part of your repertoire?
- c. If yes, how do you use it?
- d. Do you encourage your students to produce their own representations of subject matter?
- e. Are you a teacher who demonstrates strategies that promote self-directed learning?
- f. Are your students capable of monitoring their own learning?
- g. Do you encourage students to believe in their own cognitive worth?
- h. What kind of support do you provide?

6. To maximize the conditions for independent learning one must promote cooperative goal structures in the classroom setting. A classroom atmosphere which supports the value of learning for its own sake and collaboration is encouraged, providing students with opportunities for exploration of ideas. Focus on these issues:

- a. Do you devise co-operative learning activities in your classroom?
- b. Are your instructions for working in groups clear and precise?
- c. Do you reward acceptable individual behaviour for whole group members?
- d. Do you use pair work in your class?
- e. How, when and why do you use it?
- f. Do you encourage social skills?
- g. How do you do it?

Section F

In this section you are asked to reflect on assessment and feedback :

- 1. There are different types of assessment procedures. Our NMC is promoting formative assessment in contrast to summative assessment. Reflect on initial assessment procedures:**
 1. List the different types of assessment available.
 2. What form of assessment do you use in class?
 3. Are the children in your class aware of 'your' assessment procedures?
 4. Are they compliant with the procedure?
 5. What is the reaction of the parents to 'your' procedure?

- 2. You are requested by a parent to provide a profile of her/his daughter's performance in your class. Consider what you would write:**
 - a. Where would you start from?
 - b. How would you set about compiling evidence of your claims?
 - c. Do you base your assessment on factual data?
 - d. Do you use the child's work to put a cross a weakness or success patterns?
 - e. What conclusions would you arrive at?
 - f. What is your evidence to support your conclusions?
 - g. Is the evidence based on your impression/s or on actual samples of the child's work?
 - h. Do the assessment and comments provide a 'complete' picture of the child?

- 3. Short assessments at regular intervals are more effective than protracted testing at the end of a long term of instruction. Keep this in mind and reflect on the following:**
 - a. What are the benefits of continuous assessment?
 - b. Do you use continuous assessment?
 - c. If yes, what format/procedure do you use?
 - d. How do you follow up your assessment?
 - e. How do you use your assessment data?
 - f. Is it school policy to use continuous assessment?
 - g. If not, why are you using it?
 - h. And if yes, what are the school's procedures?

4. If you gather assessment information then it is important that it is used to good effect. You must make careful analysis of the assessment information and use it to the benefit of the teaching process. Reflect on these processes:

- a. Do you keep class assessment files/cards for recording test data?
- b. Do you keep up-to-date records of class and individual performance?
- c. Do you adopt any form of error analysis?
- d. Do you use your assessment data to plan/update instruction?
- e. Do you use assessment information to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of your teaching strategies?

5. Feedback is highly important for all the stakeholders in your classroom. Reflect on feedback through these questions:

- a. Do you set standards for performance on learning tasks?
- b. Are the students aware of these standards?
- c. If yes, do you give feedback according to achievements measured against your standards?
- d. Do you use your feedback to inform your students of the stages achieved in reaching learning goals?
- e. What kind of feedback do you provide?
- f. Does your feedback assist learning?
- g. Would you consider your feedback as accurate?
- h. Why?

6. When to give feedback is an essential dimension in classroom practice. Reflect on such issues:

- a. When do you provide feedback?
- b. At the beginning of a learning task or the end of it?
- c. When do you use partial feedback?
- d. How much are you available to provide feedback?
- e. What approach do you adopt when you provide feedback?