Using Case Studies for implementing Reflective Practice in In-Service Teacher Education

Abstract
This paper takes the context of the in-service master’s programme at University College Worcester and explores how case studies can be used to implement improvement in learning. It deals initially with models of learning and the concept of reflective practice as embodied in the rationale and assessment criteria of the programme.

The notion of critical incident analysis is then utilised, this involving the selection by the learner of a key professional moment where a claim for new learning is made. This approach to professional development is characterised by an exploration of one’s own values and the subsequent tension that arises when they are juxtaposed with the reality of the workplace.

Through the selection and subsequent analysis of three critical learning incidents as case studies, the authors present a perspective on the employment of reflective practice and draw conclusions with regard to the role, the process and the outcomes of engaging in critical reflection for continuing professional improvement.

Introduction and Methodology
It is the intention of this paper to examine and comment on the use of case studies to facilitate the implementation of reflective practice within in-service teacher education at University College Worcester. The master’s programme will be used as the example within which the study is located. The methodology adopted for this paper is essentially that of the analysis of qualitative evidence (Patton, 1987; 1997) where the aim is to seek interpretations and meanings from written data presented as part of the assessment process of the master’s programme. The first part of the paper will deal with models of learning and the concept of reflective practice as embodied in the master’s programme. The second part will contain three examples of critical incidents that are subjected to analysis. The final part will reflect upon the implications of using case studies within a reflective paradigm. Italicised text is used to highlight the words of the teacher in each critical incident. In this way, case study material is distinguished from commentary by the authors of the paper.

Models of Learning and Reflective Practice in the Master's Programme
The master’s programme treats the process of learning and teaching in a metacognitive manner by expecting all of its students to reflect on the process as it affects their professional lives. It is an
applied degree that establishes links between theory and practice. It expects all students to engage in research aimed at bringing about improvement in their workplace. The rationale for the scheme is that improvements in the workplace, professional development and organisational improvement need to be systematically linked if real and significant progress is to be achieved. Also, that significant progress is difficult to sustain by individuals working alone. Professional support networks across workplaces and between organisations, including higher education need to be used or formed. The other main feature of the programme is the utilisation of the model of the professional as learner. The dimensions of this are:

i) the development of an enhanced professional practice within a clear framework of the learner’s own professional values

ii) the development of an enhanced critical and reflective attitude towards practice

iii) the adoption of a research-based approach to personal and organisational development

iv) an understanding and articulation of the interdependent and transformational relationship of practice and theory.

v) the ability to generate a learning enriched working environment.

These principles of the professional as learner are reinforced by the assessment criteria employed in the programme. These include an understanding of the theoretical models from which issues and key concepts in the student’s professional workplace are derived; an ability to see and apply the links between conceptual frameworks and professional practice; the use of evidence for personal and professional self evaluation and critical reflection in relation to the political, social and educational context of the workplace.

The rationale of the master’s programme commits everyone to the concept of the ‘teacher as reflective practitioner’. Eraut (1994) sees this concept as containing the following assumptions. These are that a teacher needs to have a repertoire of methods for teaching and promoting learning. A selection from this repertoire and adaptation of methods within that repertoire is necessary to best provide for particular students in particular circumstances. Both the repertoire and this decision making process within it are learned through experience. Finally, teachers continue to learn by reflecting on their experience and assessing the effects of their behaviour and their decisions.

Case Studies in Research
The use of case studies in the master’s degree was fronted by initial work on communication skills, sharing ideas with peers, developing the concept of the critical friend (Francis, 1997) and finding a ‘voice’. Such activities, which permeate all of the Master’s level modules at UCW, are designed to develop a culture of reflective practice and to construct what Francis, (1997) calls a ‘community of inquiry’. The term ‘case study’ and ‘critical incident’ are here being used synonymously. Burgess (1984) includes a useful discussion on the origins, development and potential use of autobiographical accounts for the study of educational settings. Particularly apposite is his
inclusion of a set of guidelines to assist case study writers in dealing with the formal and informal procedures of doing research in this ethnographic tradition. The methodology of research by case study, particularly the techniques of handling the data generated in a communicable and interpretative manner are important. Bell (1993) emphasises the aims of case studies as the identification of the particular features of what she calls an ‘instance’ and the analysis and interpretation of these characteristics for potential decision making within the organisation. What Bassey (1981) calls the ‘relatability’ of a case study rather than its ‘generalisability’ is important here. He considers that if case studies:

"are carried out systematically and critically, if they are aimed at the improvement of education, if they are relatable and if by publication of the findings they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of educational research."

Critical Incident 1

The pale January sunlight slanted through the stone windows and fell on the 21 twelve-year-old heads bent over their books - in some cases. They were supposed to be engaged in 'silent reading'.

"I always do silent reading on Fridays," their regular teacher had explained before leaving to have his Achilles tendon put right. "It makes for a good quiet lesson at the end of the week."

"So what exactly are they expecting?" I had queried.

"Well they just help themselves to books from my cupboard over there and then just read to themselves. They like reading; and it's good for them to have a lesson of reading quietly to themselves."

As a supply teacher you don’t want to do anything out of the ordinary: you want to keep the ship afloat and heading in the same direction until the regular captain can pick up the tiller again easily on his return. So I had acquiesced. And here I was on Friday morning, well the third Friday morning to be precise. They weren't silent; and I'm not sure how many of them were reading.

The two girls at the end of the back row were giggling over a picture in one of the books and Alan, as he got up suddenly to go to the cupboard, just happened to fall over Tim's bag and send it skating across the floor.

"That bag's new," Tim said, loudly and crossly.

"Tough!" retorted Alan rudely as he stamped to the book cupboard.

"Tim, I'm sure it was a mistake," I said placatingly, "and Alan, don’t be so noisy."

I could hear the sound of gentle snorting from the back row.

"Who's making those animal noises? Thomas, is it you?"
Tom grinned at me angelically. I could prove nothing.

"Have you read this, Miss? It’s dead good. It’s got three murders in the first chapter," announced Harry from the right-hand end of the front row.

"You're supposed to be reading silently," I reminded them with irritation. "Be quiet!"

They could see they had struck a nerve.

"I don’t like my book," said Thomas loudly, "It’s boring."

"Me neither," said a voice from the other side of the room.

The snuffling and grunting, as if from a very small pig, had started again. "BE QUIET!" I shouted.

The approach to the analysis of the critical incidents has been itself subject to exploration. In this first example, emerging themes have been sought and they are characterised as the use of metaphor in narrative, the process of interrogation of text and the purpose of analysis.

Many learners employ both an individualistic narrative style or ‘voice’ and simile or metaphor in describing incidents and critiquing them. Out of the original sample of fifteen case studies more than 80% of them employed such stylistic features or imagery. In the case of metaphor this amounted to a clear demonstration of its usefulness as a tool in revealing to the learner the underlying cognitive and affective models that determined modes of action in the classroom. In addition metaphors in particular were frequently used as a way of unlocking problem-solving processes. Discourse via metaphor has been in evidence since the ancient Greeks and has prompted some provocative debate. Metaphor is regarded by some as merely ornamental. Hobbes (1962) observed in his seminal and prophetic work, Leviathan, that, "when we use words metaphorically; that is, in other senses than that they were ordained for, we thereby deceive others.” Metaphors are thus characterised as hindering objective judgement and have no place in a positivist approach to research.

In the contexts under consideration here however it is clear, that for practitioner-researchers working within the naturalist paradigm, that the metaphor serves as an analogue to leap from the familiar to the unfamiliar. It can serve as a means of pointing to the very essence of learning and discovery, to help the learner in analysing and understanding the development and formulation of a theory. Through the power of association concepts related to one thing can be transferred to another. This was elegantly exemplified in the instance of the practitioner-researcher who employed a horticultural metaphor in order to illuminate his understanding of where he was going wrong in his chosen method of managing. The situation was problematic for him because it centred on a new appointment in which he found himself in a supervisory role over a team of workers who had previously been his peers. By using a gardening analogue he was able to see more clearly how to work through and unlock the problem. Thus the metaphor, in providing a bridge for understanding a new situation in which some aspects were to remain constant while some were to
change, enabled this learner to see his world of work differently.

In the words of one of the practitioner-researchers, "I have discovered that one of the most powerful tools in my armoury is the metaphor; not just the subconsciously selected, throwaway metaphors one finds liberally sprinkled through everyday speech, but those which are consciously and carefully chosen to communicate a specific idea or concept." In practice, whether formulated consciously, or spontaneously, when the narrator intufts the image as being the ‘right’ one, it is the analysis after the incident where the metaphor can be read for its underlying meaning, and as a fingerpost for future action, which charges it with significance.

The reason that metaphor is such a powerful tool in reflective practice is that the purpose of using metaphor is rhetorical. It is, in the first instance, a device employed by the writer to convince the reader that what they are reading is correct. This in itself of course is not enough, for the reflective practitioner must also adopt a questioning stance when moving from the descriptive identification of an incident (the rhetoric) to its being rendered critical via analysis (the interrogative). This is pursued in the next section.

For the learner in the first critical incident it is both metaphor and attention to detail in narrative style that brings the incident to life. The employment of the nautical image with the teacher as ship’s captain betrays an empathy with a certain type of authority that this learner, through the kind of diagnostic analysis advocated below, is subsequently able to recognise and adapt according to her situation.

An interrogative stance is invariably perceived as central to reflective practice (Ashton, 1980; Whitehead, 1989), a view represented with some elegance by Smyth (1991) in his pursuit of a sustained and developed critique of pedagogy. He advocates the need to describe, inform, confront and reconstruct as integral to professional development. Each of these has a question as a vital adjunct so the learner is directed towards cumulative interrogation:

‘What do I do?  
What does this description mean?  
How did I come to be like this?  
How might I do things differently?’

This is not dissimilar to Tripp’s (1993) approach to the analysis of critical incidents:

‘Why do I see it like that?  
How else could I see it?  
What do I consider the right way(s) of seeing it?’

Such an approach is also used by Francis (1997) in her work on critical incident analysis with pre-service teachers. None of these authors however intend these as algorithms, recognising that, ultimately, critical incident analysis is coloured by a personal approach. Dealing as it does with matters of self-awareness this is not surprising. In fact an important feature of this activity is characterised by what Louden (1991) refers to as, ‘personal horizons of understanding’. The learner is inevitably constrained by their own biography and circumstances and their repertoire of
techniques and strategies in their workplace context with all of its attendant micropolitical characteristics. This is not to say, however, that critical incident analysis is a lone occupation. The points of view of others are precisely what for some will give an incident its criticality. And it is the critical friend (Francis, 1997) who can help the learner to go beyond their personal horizons, to look at things afresh. A shared investigation of an incident with its accompanying support and positive critiquing of ideas and assumptions can act as an enabling device for anyone engaged in critical incident analysis. But, whether on one's own or in the company of a critical friend:

'We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will to be arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.'

Four Quartets, Little Gidding
TS Eliot (1963)

It was in this spirit that the author of Critical Incident 1 arrived at a new strategy of modelling:

*The week after, by reading myself, I was showing the class that I felt there was some purpose in what they were doing.*

Through the kind of analysis prompted by the interrogative approach she had arrived at a way of doing things differently:

*This relatively minor disturbing incident and its subsequent solution led me to reflect on some of my professional practice that I had hitherto taken for granted with regard to classroom management and discipline. I realised that well tried methods which work in one context, may not necessarily ‘travel’; and that every teacher maintains her authority by using her own personality, status and gender. However, reflecting on your own style and recognising it for what it is, is not enough; recognising strengths that may be harnessed to meet different challenges is also important. The next step is to be able to adopt new strategies in new situations.*

The last sentence suggests that here is a learner whose analysis and interrogation of her critical incident is still moving forward, not seeking closure but imbuing the action/reflection/action cycle with the sort of significance which makes for a true reflective practitioner. She has clearly learned something about a way of dealing with the particular situation in question. But by further interrogation she has also recognised the importance of seeing any new situation, because of its uniqueness, as promoting new learning.

*Being more assertive and aggressive may not lead you forward; there are various strategies which may be more effective. It is a matter of determining the right approach for a particular group. This small incident and its subsequent solution suggested to me that it is never too late to change and improve your professional practice. Every new situation invites you to confront new solutions.*

As Tripp (1993) emphasises, an incident is only rendered critical through analysis. It is crucial to
identify the nature of this analysis if the learner is to grow in their understanding. ‘What happened and why’ only becomes significant to learning if what Tripp coined the ‘deeper structures’ of the incident are subject to analysis. The analysis then, needs to be diagnostic. It is not even just a case of what do we do about the problem. We need to reflect on why it occurred together with all of the other contextual nuances that the learner can glean from the episode. Such analysis, through its attention to detail, has the power to unearth the importance of specifics.

The author of Critical Incident 1 manages this with consummate skill, with her references to the insecurity of the supply teacher and the related issues of control and authority in the instance outlined. Her awareness of the need to move away from taken-for-granted situations and to engage new strategies emerges, in its turn, from this analysis.

**Critical Incident 2**

*I had prepared a science lesson for the children, carefully splitting into groups, differentiating the tasks and equipment needed. I introduced the lesson and set the children to their tasks. One child decided not to work and disrupted the activities in his group, continued and extended his activities to other groups around him. He took other children’s equipment, damaging and destroying their experimental work. For this child this was a regular activity. I had to leave the teaching and group work I was doing and control his behaviour, consoling the upset children and losing the focus of the lesson, an unacceptable conflict.*

In this and the subsequent critical incident, the model of analysis that is being used encompasses both the exploration of emerging themes as well as placing the commentary directly alongside the transcript. In this way a reflective dialogue is being created between the authors as critical friends and the writer of the incident.

The description of the incident finishes, promisingly, with a reference to the conflict created. Such an observation points to an awareness of the importance of taking into account underlying values when attempting to analyse the incident. The author of the incident then reflects on the importance of recently acquired experience:

*It was fortunate at this time when I began teaching in the inner city that I also began the Master’s degree. The first module I attended allowed me to research further into classroom behaviour. This explored ways in which problematic classroom behaviour of certain individuals could be modified or its effects reduced by your teaching strategies to improve the quality of education being achieved by the class.*

The recent addition to the learner’s biography enables him to rely, as some may rely upon relevant literature or a critical friend, upon personal resources. His reflection upon this then opens up an understanding of the role of his professional values:

*This was an area where my values came into conflict. Why should the majority of children in your class have their education spoilt by a handful of children?*

This conscious examination of the conflict created had the effect of driving the learner on to recognise:
The control of behaviour was a major issue to me while teaching in the inner city. Where was the cut off? Is it acceptable to have disruptive children in a mainstream classroom? Should they be removed to prevent spoiling of other children’s educational opportunities or is it now the responsibility of a teacher to deal with this issue, perhaps to the detriment of education in teaching the other children in the class? Should these children take precedence over the majority?

A contradiction in the classroom! This was my area of difficulty. Through my education and classroom practice could the control of children be achieved through education? Can the way a teacher operates change and modify children’s unacceptable behaviour? Can I, by the choice of lesson planning and delivery of lesson material, control and prevent disruptive behaviour of certain children?

The interrogation betrays the struggle here as paramount, where the author of the incident did not want to exclude children as this was in clear conflict with his belief in all of the pupils having a right to education. And yet this was difficult to reconcile with the concern that the education of the majority was constantly threatened by a minority. This is a considerable dilemma but not too much of one to inhibit the generation by the learner of three new strategies to work successfully in this environment.

I needed to learn new strategies to use in the classroom to:
I. provide a productive and effective environment,
II. develop better relationships between teacher and child,
III. direct and develop my own skills.

Critical Incident 3
Last academic year I was fortunate to go on a two-day course on teaching design and technology. However the outcome of the course taught me much more about teaching in general than about technology in particular. The first day was in the form of a coach trip, visiting two museums and looking at mechanisms. The second day I arrived with my Stugeron and sandwiches ready for another trip, only to be told that we had to make one of the mechanisms we had seen the previous day. In the centre of the room was a pile of junk materials and a glue gun. Everyone else set to the task with a will, but I simply could not think even how to start let alone what to make. I could feel the desperation rising and tears forming in my eyes. Fortunately the tutor took pity on me and helped me make a start. In the end I produced a working model of a crankshaft and was thoroughly pleased with myself.

The adoption of a personal biographical approach in describing the incident is a neat example of how reflection can begin with an immersion in the values, political motivations and social and cultural ideologies which are embedded in our actions. The emergent ‘voice’ in this instance is a highly personalised one; the author’s candour and preparedness to show herself as vulnerable is what generates for her the power to learn through an empathetic process. The author of Critical Incident 3 begins her analysis of this incident in a spare but dramatic, introspective vein:

It was only later in the day, driving home alone, that I realised that my experience must be replicated by children in almost every school, every day. The desperation and embarrassment I
felt was powerful and distressing, particularly in front of my peers. That incident was critical in that it gave me an insight into the needs of learners and the importance of aware and understanding teachers. This need is particularly vital in the setting of the Language Unit where children have limited understanding of the spoken word and can become easily confused. I was determined to put this insight to good use during this academic year, building into lesson plans extra time for introductions and explanations; ensuring we were always watching for signs of distress or insecurity.

At first this seems unproblematic the learner having earlier rehearsed the way in which she felt her values must determine her practice:

*I hold firmly to the belief that the individual child must be at the heart of teaching - the much-maligned child-centered approach. I accept that it is easier for me to continue with this belief in my special setting, with small classes and classroom assistants. However, unless we as teachers have some understanding of the needs of the individual children with whom we work, the job becomes little more than a learning conveyor belt.*

The metaphor underlines her aversion to a reproducing model of learning. And subsequently her awareness of being a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1994) is vividly evoked:

*Looking through my professional journal, the needs of the children are hardly mentioned. The other part of my job, that of administrator and manager - as teacher in charge of the Language Unit - has eclipsed those concerns. The day to day issues are largely those of multi-professional relationships and staff difficulties.*

As this learner so clearly demonstrates through the interrogation and analysis of her critical incident, for pragmatic reasons values are not always realised in practice. Ultimately however this awareness of negatives are turned into a positive, revealing the benefit of reflective practice of this kind in a twofold manner. Firstly a determination to change emerges from the awareness of being a living contradiction. Secondly this determination is crystallised through the critical learning incident, illuminating the point that the learner, and by extrapolation the children, will achieve potential only by gaining confidence in themselves and in their teachers / critical friends.

**Reflections**

This analysis of the three critical incidents highlights a number of issues arising from the employment of case studies within in-service teacher education to implement reflective practice. This is seen as ‘the process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and so inform learning about practice’ (Reid, 1993). Ghaye and Lillyman (1997) list a range of reasons why the analysis of critical incidents can be useful to a practitioner. They all focus on the facilitation of professional development, the evidence based support given to decision making and subsequent justified change and the clarification of professional values in order to promote experiential knowledge. Such is the general case being made. More specifically for this paper, the issues are related to the role, processes and outcomes of such a utilisation.

Let us take the first of these, that is the role of critical incident analysis, and explore how it may promote learning. The work place of the teacher is the starting point for the majority of
assignments set on the in-service master’s programme at University College Worcester. Work place based scenarios are commonly utilised to provide a focus for student assessment and take the form of case studies, essays, verbal presentations and at the final stage, an extended dissertation. An essential point here is the quality of the feedback given to students. Feedback has long been accepted as a necessary part of the curriculum process. Curriculum, conceptualised as all the learning provided by a school (Kerr, 1968; DES, 1985) contains the requirement to assimilate and accommodate the results of that learning, determined by the processes of assessment and evaluation, though not meaning the same thing (Parlett and Hamilton, 1971), back into its classroom and student context (Tyler, 1949; Skilbeck, 1984). In this way, so it is argued, learning both takes place and is taken forward. The argument, however, hangs on the points of who does the feeding back and in what ways. Typically, assignments are set, marked and commented upon by tutors. Work is handed back. The student is expected to read the comments and internalise them, ready for the next learning leap forward. But, there are problems with this model of feedback. Such a process of academic osmosis assumes that the student is motivated to act beyond the grade received. Gibbs (1992) would argue that some students are only interested in surface learning and that a deeper exploration is of little interest to them. An opportunity for a follow-up tutorial is commonly offered but may well be only pursued if the grade is poor. The feedback process here is one way, from tutor to student. Furthermore, this model establishes a particular form of tutor/student relationship where the tutor is dominant and the student subservient both in actions and ideas. It is hardly surprising that this view of feedback has arisen, given the fact that a curriculum tends to be owned by those who oversee its production, rather than those who receive it. The National Curriculum in Britain is a good example here (SCAA, 1996), where central government is highly prescriptive in terms of aims, content and assessment. Initial teacher education is another example where standards of competence, external to the profession, are laid down by central government edict (TTA, 1998) and must be achieved before qualified teacher status is granted.

Given these constraints of the feedback process, it would appear that the employment of the analysis of case studies as critical incidents in a teacher’s professional life has much to offer the learning process. What is lacking in a more traditional feedback process is ownership by the student and a sense of partnership where ideas can be exchanged without the impediment of status. Kolb (1984) postulates that learning arises from critical reflection upon experience. So, why not make the act of feedback on a case study, or any other assignment for that matter, a reflective experience in itself? The means of doing this would be by conducting a reflective conversation (Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998) between the student as the author of the critical incident and the tutor as a critical friend, in an attempt to engage in an active process of meta-reflection. The characteristics of this conversation would be a focus on educational values, an examination of what has happened, trying to make sense of any decisions taken and the challenging of current experience. All of this would be conducted in a spirit of open questions and answers. Here ownership of ideas would stay with the student and there would be a real sense of partnership in the exploration of issues.

This approach has much in common with the notion of phenomenological interviewing as described by Sorrell and Redmond (1995) where the purpose is to elicit shared meanings and understand the richness of the lived experience as evidenced in the critical incident. This hermeneutic enquiry is aimed at interpreting the hidden meanings within the case study experience. The student will benefit from such an exercise by coming to a deeper understanding of the
experience and the values immanent in it. The process of reflection will benefit by the exercise of this active meta-reflection. The recent trialling of this approach with a group of nurse educators undertaking a course in reflective practice at University College Worcester as part of their in-service degree underlined some of its possibilities as well as its problems. Students were asked to describe a critical incident and present a written commentary on it. The resulting critical discussion between tutor and students explored issues related to both the process of writing an assignment and to the advancement of practical, work based knowledge and insight gained by the students from such a writing task. Academic conventions, clarity of text, organisation and structure were all examined as were the consequences for self learning, future action, improvement of the work place and accountability. Thus case studies can be powerful tools for developing reflective practice if the process of feedback on them is redefined and exercised as active meta-reflection between the student and tutor.

A second issue relates to the process of handling case studies as learning opportunities. The act of producing a case study is in itself an attempt to implement reflective practice. However, the implication of this statement is that it presupposes that students know both the value of engaging in such reflection on action and also know how to conduct the process of analysis. The first of these points is concerned with making sure that the notion of reflective practice is understood by students and that it has a particular role to play in the improvement of the professional lives of practitioners (Schon, 1983). The second point emphasises the need to have a systematic plan to examine a case study. Francis (1997) suggests a multi layered approach which encompasses the following stages: a description by the individual of the incident delineating the facts of ‘where, when, who and what happened’; a second stage which focuses on the action taken or decisions made, in order to explore values, beliefs and feelings; a third meta-reflective stage where a group of peer students discuss and challenge the assumptions made. Ghaye and Lillyman (1997) produce a similar list of guidelines to assist in the systematic exploration of a case study based on the following questions emerging from a description of the incident:

‘By whom was it handled?  
What learning occurred?  
What were the outcomes of this incident?  
How has this incident affected your practice?’  
(p.85)

Tripp (1993) also makes a useful contribution to the process of analysis by suggesting a number of advantages that may accrue. These he lists as the development of thinking strategies, the importance of the question ‘why’, the identification of dilemmas in our work practice, the analysis of personal theory and a critique of our ideologies as organising sets of beliefs and values. The important point here is that the rationale for reflective practice (Ghaye et al, 1996) and the skills of analysis cannot be taken for granted in students. They need to be built into courses and learned and practised by students. Only in this way can case studies be said to support the implementation of reflective practice.

A third issue concerns the outcomes arising from using case studies as a basis for reflection. The general thrust here is that a reflective treatment of a case study gives potential for action. All students on the master’s programme at the dissertation stage are encouraged to locate its focus in
their workplace. A critical analysis of their work context on an autobiographical basis allows them to explore the tensions that emerge between their own values and the constraints imposed by the reality of their situation. Burgess (1984) offers some interesting comments on the value of autobiography as a research experience whilst Whitehead (1994) would have professionals view themselves as ‘living contradictions’. This recognition of dilemmas in the workplace and the contradictions between what ought to be (espoused values) and what is (practice and reality) generate specific research questions which are of direct relevance to improving the workplace of the practitioner. So the first consequence of reflective case study utilisation is the emergence of a research question of direct and personal importance to the writer of the case study. Therefore, the outcome of using case studies in a reflective way is to encourage their authors to undertake research centred on themselves as researchers of their own work practices. It is in this way that the master’s programme students are encouraged to frame their dissertation aims in a way that supports both reflection on action and reflection in action (Schon, 1983).

Encouraging students to engage in reflective practice, however, has its problems not least in the professional education context within which the students work. The formal, state teaching milieu established by central government in Britain by and large wants technically competent teachers who can deliver the National Curriculum, produce good assessment results, manage well run schools and generally provide politicians with hard evidence to substantiate claims for an efficient and well organised education system that delivers a quality service. In the words of Wellington and Austin (1996), this would be a technical view of reflective practice imposed by the system. On the other hand, what may well be required by teachers is a more transformational and creative approach which allows for personal and professional needs to be developed and which encourages teachers to challenge the ideologies of the education system. In other words, there is a heavy political agenda attached to the notion of reflective practice. What may be perceived by teachers as important for their development may be viewed by their political masters as a threat to the stability of the national organisation of education.

In summary, using case studies for critical reflection does assist the master’s students in their learning. At Worcester it operates at a number of levels, those of personal, group and organisational. Critical incident analysis helps individual practitioners to facilitate their own professional development by exploring their own values and by identifying and justifying improvements in their practice. Evidence for this claim comes from the many dissertations which take an ‘I’ focus and which use the workplace as the source of data. The sharing of interpreted meanings through the notion of critical friendship (Francis, 1997) amongst student peers and colleagues at work encourages a group perspective on the development of values based knowledge. This is especially important for accountability (Scott, 1994), given the education, health and police contexts in which many of our students work. Reflective practice becomes a useful tool for gathering evidence, justifying decisions taken and accounting to the clients of those services for the values held and justified changes made. The concept of ‘clinical governance’ within the British National Health Service is pertinent here, where directors of medical services within hospitals take responsibility for the quality of the service provided. This system will only work if there is an infrastructure of data gathering and analysis procedures to meet the demands of quality assurance. Obvious parallels exist in the education service where teachers are formally accountable to clients through the process of school inspection and quality assurance mechanisms such as the quantification and publication of examination results on an annual basis.
The transformational level of reflective practice is more problematic. It takes the master's degree students into the political arena and has consequences also for the management of change process. There are issues here common to all professionals as learners, notably of how to validate knowledge claims as a basis for change and how to handle the ethics and micropolitics of potentially sensitive work scenarios. The Worcester master's experience supports the process of managing change within the existing values of the education system. Indeed, it is a strand in the taught elements of the programme. Whether the programme wishes to act as a catalyst for cultural and professional change outside the accepted values and framework of the national education system is another matter.

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Questions for discussion
1. The paper raises the notion of feedback as active meta-reflection. What are your views on this concept? Please give examples from your own institutional experience.

2. What kind of benefits would accrue from reflective practitioners writing in a style which employs the use of ‘voice’ to explore their personal, professional development?

3. To what extent should in-service teacher education programmes in reflective practice attempt to act as catalysts for socio-political and professional change outside the accepted values and framework of their national education systems?