

Reflection

Key: Reflection

The term “reflection” has recently become one of the most used terms in the area of education and learning, and there are different and partly overlapping definitions of what “reflecting” really is about. As an example Jack Mezirow focuses on changes in an individual’s “meaning perspective” and “meaning schemes” and especially emphasizes the intellectual and contextual side of reflection. The same applies to Stephen Brookfield who, with the term ‘critical reflection’, adds an ethical-political dimension (Illeris 2013).

In other cases, far more attention is directed at what is action oriented. Here, focus lies on reflections and decisions about what, in the given situation or context, could be done to go further. Donald Schön has studied “the reflective practitioner” as he calls it. He developed this term around “reflection in action” where especially reflecting intuitively - and without conscious and systematic reflections – will lead to making appropriate and actionable decisions (Illeris 2013).

Reflecting as a tool for change

Among others, Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) attaches great importance to the teacher’s and social educator’s thinking. It is the cornerstone of all school and kindergarten development. Without a reflecting teacher or social educator, no development would take place in our schools and in our pedagogical institutions. Stenhouse is inspired by Dewey’s view of development and one could argue that Stenhouse is – for the teachers and the social educators – what Dewey is for children and pupils.

The ideal thought of the reflecting teacher and social educator has, ever since then, had a central place in the education of teachers and social educators in the western world. Reflecting must be recognized as an investigation of impressions and experiences where new possibilities appear. Stenhouse mentions a set of tools, which can contribute to the development of our schools and institutions. Using these tools, you can focus on the subject “inclusion” for a group or for a single child

- To question your own teaching and pedagogical practice in a systematical manner as a base for developing
- To hold the skills necessary to study the way you practice teaching and learning
- To be focused on and able to question and test theory using these skills

Furthermore, the individual teacher and the social educator must be willing to let others observe the teaching or the pedagogical course with the intention of discussing it afterwards. Beside you have to reflect on what you want to assess, how you want to assess and why you want to assess.

In the context of inclusion, it is necessary that employees have an appropriate understanding of what inclusion is and what methods that will promote inclusion.

As a social educator and teacher you cannot automatically follow a regulatory system or recipe. It is important to relate to the foundation of your work and interpret it in a way you can vouch for in terms of personal and professional assessments of the task. You have to relate independently and interpretively to act responsible and therefore childcare workers and teachers own theoretical reflections are necessary.

In all development and learning, reflecting is a key word, and especially transformative learning implies reflecting. The term reflection has become such a matter of course that we see it being used automatically and superficially – and therefore it can easily get in its own way of a deeper analysis and understanding of what happens and what is at stake. This term has to be qualified, partly linguistically by using more precise terms as self-reflecting and critical reflecting, and partly in practice by close inspection of what reflecting means in each case. It is not enough to reflect on how or why you have experienced, thought, felt or acted in specific contexts. The essence is to think about how you should act in new and similar situations, based on your experiences and understanding. If your actions are based upon these reflections, you can speak of critical reflecting.

The didactical relationship model

Teaching and learning is complex and several didactical categories are connected and affected at the same time. Therefore, it makes good sense to use didactical models – not as a checklist but

more as tools for reflecting, and this is why it is important a didactical model is dynamic. It requires academic and theoretical skills to apply models in a professional manner.

The didactical relationship model was first formulated by Bjørndal and Lieberg (1978) in the book “Nye veier I didaktikken” (New approaches to didactics). The model is based on the idea that there is an interrelationship between the different elements that exist in teaching. Hiim and Hippe later elaborated the didactical model of relations and to them it is a model for critical analysis and understanding of teaching and learning. As mentioned previously, there is in some understandings of reflection an orientation towards action. Here, focus lies on reflections and decisions about what, in the given situation or context, could be done to go further. It is in this way the model is to be understood.

The didactical model of relations is well known everywhere in the educational system in Scandinavia but especially applied by childcare workers, social educators and teachers in an action oriented and analytical perspective. One of the reasons that the model has gained such popularity could be because the elements are quite generic and thus enable the user to define and add sub elements depending on own needs and purpose. The model can be used for planning but also as a model for reflection.

The model can be used for planning an inclusive setting for example, by having an attention on the child's living conditions. Do the living conditions have an influence on the child's ability to concentrate; does the child have any friends in the institution?

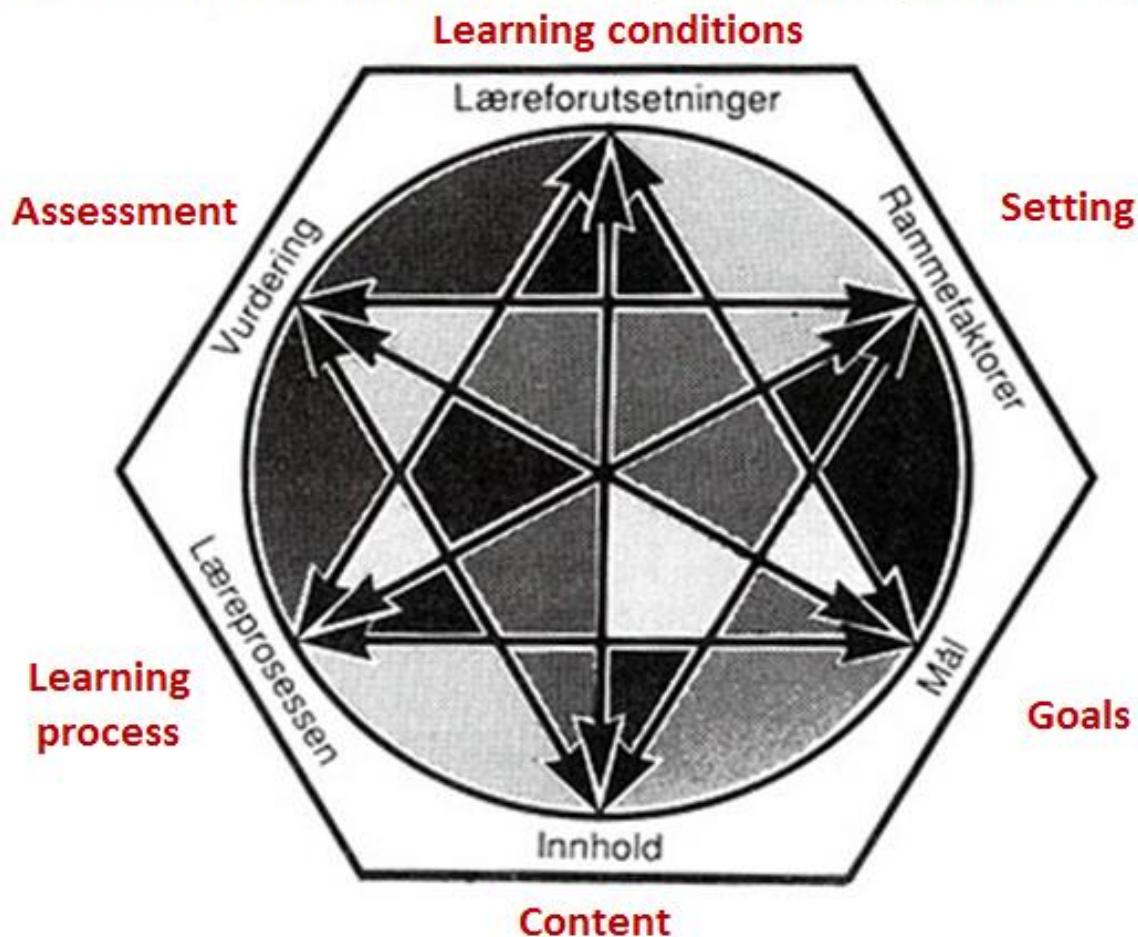
Using the model for reflection the social educator or teacher could point out “friends” as the goal for the inclusive setting and make the plan from that focus.

To embrace the complexity in teaching- and learning situations as a whole, it is key to focus on these issues:

- The pupils'/the children's social, cultural, psychological and physical conditions of learning
- Cultural, social and physical framework (including the teacher's conditions)
- Learning goals
- Content
- Learning process
- Assessment

All these issues will be used to adjust the didactic. If one e.g. wishes to include a child, inclusion must be incorporated in all categories.

The Didactical Relationship Model by Hiim & Hippe



All the categories are connected and interrelated, and to illustrate this, they are put in a holistic system to reflect the interdependence. When changes occur in one of the categories it will affect all other categories in various ways and to various degrees.

At first glance people are absent in the model, but in fact the people involved must be considered to be the most influential elements. Below are examples of content in the different categories:

The pupils'/the children's conditions of learning: the pupil's/the children's learning and development conditions do not represent something absolute or unchangeable. It means the teacher/the social educator and the pupil/the child have to be conscious of the pupils'/ the child's current starting point.

Framework: e.g. disabled pupils may require a certain organization of the teaching and pedagogical activities.

Goals: The level of precision in the goals must be adapted to each individual situation and it is important to question why those exact goals have been set. Not all study and learning patterns will be appropriate for every type of goal.

Content: Who decides what the content will be and what set of values does it intended to represent? Will pupils and children have an active influence on the content? Those are questions to ask regarding 'content'.

Learning process: Influence, cooperation and active participation are all linked to democratic values. The learning process is connected closely to the pupil's and children's conditions of learning.

Assessment: This will show what the teaching and the learning did, and it will say something about the outcome of the teaching or the pedagogical course.

Some childcare workers and teachers will reflect carefully upon their relations to specific children and the problems of those. Others will reflect upon their own role as a teacher, and how they relate to dilemmas and issues connected to the conditions of the school and general meaning in society in relation to the key problems of pedagogy.

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<https://vimeo.com/32803752> Gert Biesta