Classroom Incidents and the Critically Reflective Pre-service Teacher

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

This research investigates the role of critical reflection in helping pre-service teachers understand and respond to classroom incidents encountered during their final professional experience before becoming fully qualified teachers. Participants in the research were pre-service teachers whose teaching degree had a strong focus on the role of critical reflection in teaching. The research focused on the extent to which participants consciously engaged in critical reflection to inform their practice, especially in relation to their responses to classroom incidents, their capacity to question their prior assumptions about teaching in light of their experiences, and their exercise of judgement in the classroom. This research is particularly relevant given the increasingly challenging nature of teachers’ work.

Drawing on narrative approaches to research, a small group of nine pre-service teachers in their final teaching practice participated in one-on-one, open-ended interviews and focus group interviews that concentrated on their experiences, their responses to classroom incidents and their changing assumptions about teaching. In order to understand the different dimensions of participants’ reflections in terms of the relationships between their beliefs, cognitions, feelings and behaviours, responses were analysed using the approach developed by Furr and Carroll (2003).

Analysis provided an insight into how pre-service teachers engage in the daily realities of their professional lives and deal with the different challenges of teaching. Further analysis of their experiences of classroom incidents provided understanding of how the pre-service teachers’ ways of thinking and their feelings about their experiences affected their classroom practices. The findings of this study suggest that critical reflective practice has an important role to play in teacher education in order to help pre-service teachers deal with the unexpected challenges and realities of the classroom.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Research Context: Why do this research?

We teach to change the world. The hope that undergirds our efforts to help students learn is that doing this will help them act toward each other, and toward their environment, with compassion, understanding and fairness. But our attempts to increase the amount of love and justice in the world are never simple, never unambiguous. What we think are democratic, respectful ways of treating people can be experienced by them as oppressive and constraining. One of the hardest things teachers have to learn is that the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice. The cultural, psychological, and political complexities of learning and the ways in which power complicates all human relationships (including those between students and teachers) mean that teaching can never be innocent (Brookfield, 1995, p. 1).

I begin this dissertation by giving a brief auto-ethnographic account of why I decided to engage in this particular area of study. I could say that I am doing this research because of the passion and hope triggered by the quote from Brookfield above, and therefore owe you an explanation of how I arrived at this point. I entered the world of education in 1999 when I enrolled in a Graduate Diploma in Education and completed a course in the Adult and Tertiary programme. What a joy this was to explore, engage and learn about such diverse theoretical perspectives, approaches and ideologies concerning the personal and social development of the self and groups in formal and informal educational settings. Significant for me was the concept of professional development for adult educators where the focus was on developing our understanding and deepening our insights into the issues and concerns surrounding the teaching of adults. Critical reflection on our own views and approaches to teaching and learning, including the biases, beliefs, values and assumptions that help create our own persona as adult educators, was encouraged. Thus, I recognized I
had to begin with myself and also think about my practice, to understand and come to know who I am as a teacher whether of adults or of children.

It is important to state at this point that an integral part of this dissertation is that my perspective is explicitly based on the teaching of adults, because this research concentrates on the learning theories of adult teaching and learning. The teaching of adults as defined by UNESCO suggests that adult (those persons deemed as such by the society in which they belong) education whether formal or otherwise appears to recognize a holistic approach whereby there is a development of abilities and an enrichment of knowledge. Adult education can be a catalyst for change regarding attitudes or behaviour, with a personal and participatory development in the social, economic and cultural spheres of that society (Thomas, 2001). In the case of this paper the focus is on the formal (but also adult) education of pre-service teachers as adults. It is assumed that when these adult learners who are almost graduate teachers will go into the workforce to teach children (but not adults) they will espouse what they have learned in their teacher preparation programmes. By this I mean more than the syllabus or the curriculum but more specifically the focus on teachers’ practice concerning how we think in a critical and reflective manner. Importantly, one must never forget that educators are also learners too. For this reason it is crucial that ongoing professional development is maintained and espoused within the teaching and learning milieu because as Brookfield (1995) asserts, it is a lifelong journey and this is especially so with regards to how educators must continually assess their teaching practices in a reflective and critical manner.
In my study of adult education, many writers inspired me and gave me a thirst for knowledge. For example the work of David Schon (1987), Jack Mezirow (1991), David Tripp (1993), Stephen Brookfield (1995) and Patricia Cranton (1996) became influential in my learning. All these researchers espoused the concept of the reflective practitioner, but more imperative to me were Brookfield’s and Tripp’s concepts of the critical thinker in the domain of reflective practice. These concepts led me to understand the importance of developing professional judgement in the education milieu. I wholly embraced this area as it is how I imagined I could make decisions about appropriate models of instruction essential to support the given needs of my learners, whether as individuals or when learning collaboratively.

While completing my Graduate Diploma in Education (Adult and Tertiary) in October 1999 I gained employment at an all-male regional prison 110 kilometres away from my home. I became a casual tutor to Australian Aboriginal learners who wanted to improve their skills. It was my role to teach numeracy and literacy skills relevant to the individual, social and vocational post-school needs of the learners. As enrolment numbers grew the senior education officer transferred the students into the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA), a nationally accredited Technical and Further Education (TAFE) course. In December 1999 having successfully completed my degree, I initially gained part-time employment and then a full-time position at the prison as acting Education Officer. This full-time position entailed administration and face-to-face teaching duties. It was my responsibility to interview all new and existing clients (prisoners) and introduce
them to the education campus within the prison. This consisted of an informal chat about the length of their prison sentence and about the courses available within the education system. My job was to encourage the men to enrol into a pathway suitable to their needs and interests. Being employed or/and studying during the length of a prison sentence can be conducive to the prisoners gaining employment on their release, or being able to make the transition to an educational institution and continue with their existing studies. At this point it should be noted that education and/or work are not compulsory within the prison. Upon enrolment I would request the prospective learners to complete a two page pre-set questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of predominantly short answer questions to assess the prospective learners’ academic ability in both numeracy and literacy.

My teaching component comprised 2.5 days teaching the CGEA Programme, teaching “Communications in the Workplace” (a pre-set curriculum unit attached to another programme) and tutoring students (to build their academic skills in reading, comprehension and writing) who were enrolled in undergraduate and post-graduate studies within various disciplines at numerous universities within Australia. All of these areas were a joy to teach, as the students were most willing to engage, to discuss and to learn. I was also able to put into practice the teachings and the theories of the many authors I had studied as a student of adult education, and this was actively supported and encouraged by my superior, the senior education officer. The greatest delights and most encouraging aspects were the success of the application of my approach, which was based on all I had learned in the Adult and Tertiary Diploma, and the positive nature of the students’ participation in the CGEA programme. This course allowed ample scope to
explore what and how one could learn, fundamentally allowing the students to have autonomy and ownership of what they wanted to and how they wanted to learn. Thus, I saw my part in this whole process as a facilitator.

Carl Rogers advocates certain approaches and attitudes that are essential in the facilitation of learning and are more likely to be effective for the educator (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994). Rogers argues for a wholly humanistic approach. In this, the educator presents as a real person when entering a relationship with learners and does not display a façade or a front. Additionally the educator while facilitating learning is to fully accept that the learner has her/his own worth, and that the educator has trusted them to be essentially competent human beings. It is an understanding that the learner has many potentialities and different feelings especially about personal adequacy that can “both disturb and promote learning” (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994, p. 156). A key attitude that contributes to significant learning is empathic understanding. This is when the educator has the ability to understand and have a sensitive empathy, particularly for what the learners’ reactions are from the inside: that is, concerning the way the process of education and learning seems to them. “In this climate most learners feel confident and proceed to blossom, learn and grow” (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994, p. 156).

A further influence was the andragogical approach generally associated with Knowles (1984), which introduced me to the idea that teaching adults is different from teaching children. That is, adults bring expectations, motivations and experiences to the learning situations that are completely unlike those of a child. Thus, the techniques for teaching
adults must reflect these differences. Furthermore, according to Knowles, within any group of adult learners there will be a degree of heterogeneity. Because of this factor Knowles argued for the “significance in adult education for individualization regarding teaching and learning strategies” (Knowles, 1984, p. 57).

Other researchers such as Cross (1981), Brookfield (1986), Donlevy and Donlevy (1998), Biggs and Moore, (1993), Caffarella (2002) and Cranton (2006), who promote a philosophy of practice that focuses on the concept of adults developing a sense of control and autonomy during the learning process, inspired my thoughts and my classroom practice. The experience of autonomy does not emerge in isolation, but rather is obtained in personal relationships, in socio-political behaviour and in intellectual judgement. Consequently, the purpose of facilitating adult learning is to assist individuals to exercise control over their lives, within their interpersonal relationships, and within the social forms and structures in which they live. This is not to say that facilitation shall enable learners to exert full control over all aspects of their worlds. However, the underlying assumption is that life’s existence (human reality) is more or less meaningful and authentic to the individuals involved, according to the degree to which they feel they have some proactive role in the creation of their worlds (Brookfield, 1986).

Based on this perspective of knowledge and guidelines concerning the teaching and learning milieu appropriate for adults I began building a framework, which helped form the path I would tread. The education campus within the prison began to have increased enrolments and finally there were waiting lists for several programmes especially the
CGEA, music and art programmes. In collaboration with my boss I initiated art and music classes delivered by specialists in their field. I had initially incorporated the art and music into the CGEA programme by suggesting to the students to choose a piece of art work or a song and then deconstruct their chosen piece and consequently research and then write about it. This was very successful for both the education department and for the students especially, as their personal and participatory skills were greatly enhanced as was evident from their completed work.

Unfortunately after 16 months at this regional prison I resigned due to the toll of working full-time and driving 230 kilometres per day. Living in a relatively small coastal town hundreds of kilometres southwest of the main metropolitan area in Western Australia did not offer many opportunities in adult education, and one cannot live on love of theories alone. This was the catalyst for my decision to go back to university and enrol in the secondary teaching programme of a Graduate Diploma in Education. As a footnote I did return to work part-time at the same prison twice after my first resignation. However, the encumbrance of the 230kms per day drive became too much and I finally left the prison service in 2006.

In 2001 I enrolled in the secondary programme of a Graduate Diploma in Education. Again I revelled in many of the aforementioned and similar philosophies and was introduced to other scholars such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Jack Mezirow, who once more ignited my passion for thinking about the reflective practitioner. I became aware of the crucial implications of critical teaching and critical reflection in the teaching
and learning milieu in relation to the day-to-day teaching practices in the classroom (Dewey, 1933; Freire, 1973; Schon, 1987; Mezirow, 1991; Tripp, 1993; Brookfield, 1995). With these thoughts at the forefront of my mind I entered the compulsory education system initially as student teacher and then as a graduate high school classroom teacher in the school learning area of society and environment.

As a high school classroom teacher in WA government schools I experienced many disappointments. The pedagogical freedom and flexibility to select content that I had experienced as a teacher of adults was not really present. I felt rather constrained. There was a syllabus, a curriculum and a preferred pedagogy that seemed to be implicitly and covertly maintained within the teaching and learning practices of the school environments in which I taught. For example, students who were passive recipients of the teacher’s input and rote learning seemed to be the norm in the classrooms, and promoted in the culture of the schools. Generally, there was not much evidence of a vibrant, dynamic or interactive teaching and learning environment where the students were actively involved and had a sense of responsibility and ownership towards their learning. The teaching approach seemed to result in learning being much more passive and rote-based.

For example, while I perceived my teaching area of Studies of Society and the Environment to be a vast and comprehensive learning area, the curriculum itself was narrow, and books and resources available in the school were rather limited. There seemed to be a covert acceptance by many of the other teachers (in other learning areas
also) that work sheets and watching videos were accepted approaches to teaching and learning! Interestingly, what was incongruent was that the head of my department in the first high school I taught in did not teach passively or use rote learning. He encouraged his students to be motivated, to actively research and have ownership of their own learning, maybe because his classes were usually years 10, 11 and 12. It is interesting that the attitude of such a motivated departmental head did not rub off onto all his colleagues. Indeed some teachers were motivated like him, but others within our discipline and in other disciplines in my observation were not. They tended to adopt ‘chalk and talk’ or passive teaching methods. This seemed a limited approach to the teaching of students, in this amenable socially constructed world of teaching as Tripp (1993) suggested it could be. I can only hypothesize as to why this was so and I have often thought that maybe these teachers were not exposed to alternative approaches (such as through professional development) or were not consciously aware enough of the limitations of their approach. I thought at the time that if teachers were to continue throughout their careers to actively participate in critical reflective practice concerning their classroom practices, what a very powerful learning tool this would be for the development of both teachers and students. However, the head of department did give me guidance and encouragement and shared his considerable resources with me.

My experiences resonate with those described in Bullough and Gitlin (2001), who suggest that many teachers (not all) tend to view most “teaching practices and the processes of learning with scepticism and pessimistic beliefs” (Bullough and Gitlin, 2001, p. 186). Numerous teachers I conversed with believed most students did not enjoy
learning and had to be coerced and/or spoon-fed. The students were coerced through the use of extrinsic rewards. For example, the teacher would negotiate that once a task was completed the students were free to basically do want they wanted for the remaining time, thus allowing students to be completely disengaged from schoolwork. It was very disheartening that teachers had to resort to extrinsic motivators to achieve any sort of results or outcomes. It seemed from my observation that if the teacher did not offer this ‘free time’ or ‘complete disengagement from school work’ after the initial tasks were completed, the students would not in any constructive way engage with the work as given by the teacher. It appeared that it was easier for the teacher just to negotiate a deal by which the students as quickly as possible could revert to their own agenda of social networking and listening to personal iPods until the end of class. These experiences raised questions for me as to why such limited or unacceptable practices occurred, and whether teachers who engaged in critical reflection and reflective practices would be more able to motivate and encourage students to become more intrinsic learners.

On the concept of ‘spoon-feeding’, I observed various teachers would have the blackboards in the classrooms covered with instructions that gave the same information over and over again, in essence requiring that the students make no effort at all to be engaged, active or responsible for their learning. In addition it was my perception that many teachers, by way of a look or a comment, assumed that most new theories and practices espoused to engage students in new, innovative and interactive learning were on the whole mostly a waste of time. These factors, compounded with negative student behaviour in the classrooms, appeared to contribute to many teachers feeling despondent,
ambivalent and becoming ‘burnt out’. It would seem that as a consequence of the above factors some teachers in the classrooms condoned practices such as eating, drinking, sucking lollipops, wearing hats, listening to music on iPods and allowing students to talk amongst themselves about their out-of-school social experiences. These incidents suggested to me a connection between the negative behaviour I encountered and the teaching approaches that I saw. It seemed to me that what was crucial within this milieu seemed to be the overall lack of consciousness or support for critically reflective practice.

I was perturbed. These experiences of teaching were so different from my earlier experiences of teaching in a prison. Basically (and surprisingly) I found school teaching to be far less rewarding or purposeful than prison education. The students within the prison were all mostly positive and motivated in their approach to their education. It could be said that the education centre did have a captive audience with very limited choices, even though attending school was not compulsory in prison. These men had the choice to go to work, go to the gym or library, or if nothing else they could stay in their rooms. Those who chose education initially did so for different reasons. Some came to learn as they viewed this as a second chance to improve or complete their education. Others came because they were bored. It was also a safe place (away from sexual and/or aggressive predators) to be for most of the day from Monday to Friday. The education centre was a comfortable, supportive environment for students, who were given direction and were helped towards achieving their needs and goals (Brookfield, 1986). Once enrolled in a course these students actively participated; they became motivated and constructively engaged with me, other teachers and, importantly, with their peers. As a
result, within all the courses, the drop out and withdrawal rate was negligible, and there were waiting lists for most of the courses.

Thus, when I compare high school teaching to prison teaching there are some interesting differences. For example, within any prison the environment does not allow individuals much scope with regards to mobility, flexibility, diversity and the vast array of life’s choices that non-incarcerated individuals take for granted. Incarceration does allow individuals to stop and reflect upon their life to date, and on where they can or will go from now on. In contrast, it could be assumed that the approach of most high school students to education and learning would be different from incarcerated students. For example high school students are generally teenagers who are experiencing social, physical and biological developments in their lives. All or a combination of these factors may hinder any high school student to concentrate solely on their schoolwork. Thus, it must be acknowledged that the social, cultural and intellectual perspectives that most high school students have at that particular time in their lives may have an adverse impact on high school students’ attitudes to education and learning. However, as a teacher and acting Education Officer within the prison system I experienced firsthand adult learners who had to deal with some very harsh realities involving family and friends on the outside. For example, celebrations such as the birth of their child, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, and the death of loved one. The “Dear John” letters that ended a relationship left many devastated, as having a partner and child(ren) were what held these prisoners together emotionally and socially as they completed their sentences. These differences between the motivations of prison education students and high school
students gave me food for thought. Nevertheless, there remained in my mind the possibility that negative behaviour and unacceptable or passive teaching practices could be diminished in high schools if teachers practised some of the principles of adult learning that I had adopted in the prison, and in particular were supported to be critically reflective practitioners.

Relevance of the Reflective Practitioner and the Criticality of Teachers’ Work

While reflecting on these experiences it is interesting to consider the credibility and usefulness of the notion of the critically reflective practitioner, and why it is so important for teacher education programmes to promote this practice and for teachers to adopt it. A recent internet search of the curriculum content of teacher education courses in 15 randomly selected universities in Australia, Canada and the U. K. indicated that if not wholly integrated into the programme then there was at some level the concept and/or active promotion of the “reflective practitioner” in the curriculum of each teacher education programme. From this it could be assumed that the concept of the reflective practitioner in teachers’ work is considered important, if not critical, to teacher education programmes. A reasonable question to ask would be whether the teachers’ practices I have discussed above developed because of a lack of criticality in the teachers’ reflections. According to Tripp (1993) and Brookfield (1995) the concept of the reflective practitioner is all very well but it is this concept of the ‘critical’ within the reflective practice that is essential to the development of good teaching practices. For example Brookfield (1995; 2012 and Lyons 2010) stated the adoption of a critical
approach leads to intelligent, stringent and informed practice with additional insights to be gained. Further, for reflection to become critical teachers must question their assumptions and practices with regard to their teaching, thus take the personal out of teaching? For Brookfield, this is how the teacher becomes a professional (Brookfield 1995).

Similarly, Tripp (1993) discussed the personal and general as being the basis of the reflective practitioner, especially in relation to judgements that teachers make in teaching. Tripp identiﬁes a critical approach in the development of professional judgement, which consists of a combination of ﬂexibility, informed guesswork and constant self-monitoring. This type of approach Tripp has labelled as ‘diagnostic teaching’ where teachers are able to analyse their practice in an intellectual and academic manner thus allowing for expert interpretations that provide a basis for and justify their professional judgements. Brookﬁeld’s and Tripp’s deﬁnitions of a critical approach to teaching have many similarities. Importantly, both argued that a critical approach moves beyond the technical aspect of teaching, replacing it with “specialist theoretical knowledge” (Tripp, 1993, p. 7) as the bedrock for judgements concerning teachers’ experiences and practices in the classroom.

Tripp argued in his book ‘Critical Incidents in Teaching’ that “teaching is currently in a crisis” (1993, p. 7) and thus wrote this practical guide so anyone interested in the value, nature and achievement of “professional judgement” could take immediate practical action and consider longer-term aims to overcome this crisis. I adopted Tripp’s model of critical incidents in teaching for this research. Any described critical incidents (see
Appendix 1) that occurred to my participants were recorded and analysed. These analyses were then weighed against Furr and Carroll’s (2003) application of Beck’s (1993) model (see Figure 1 page XX) to analyse data, which synthesized the data and assigned a code for each critical incident, using the participants’ statements of their experiences as evidence of how the participants thought about themselves. I also wanted to go beyond “critical thinking” in the way that Boxler (2003) commented, where the “critical” is the expected approach for students of graduate studies, and the concept of “critical” is apparently everywhere in the realm pertaining to adult education to the point that the meaning of “critical...becomes axiomatic” (Boxler, 2003, p. 23). It is for this reason I have adopted the different methodological approaches to this research so as to explore different dimensions of critical thinking. Such approaches include phenomenological and heuristic research and an inductive approach to analysing narrative data, and the two approaches described above and used by Furr and Carroll (2003) to analyse the data.

My previous experiences made me begin to reflect about how and why we act and think as we do when we teach. I reflected on the implications for teaching and learning if my colleagues and I engaged in neither critical teaching nor critical reflection, such as that advocated by Brookfield (1995). What are the unexamined assumptions, values and/or biases that guide the things we do and say as educators in our daily work? Importantly, as teachers and educators, are we consciously aware of all we do and say? Do we engage critically as reflective practitioners in relation to our teaching practices? If so, or if not, what are the ramifications for our students and for ourselves, not to mention our
professional cohort, parents and community? Such issues are explored in Dewey (1933), Freire (1970), Mezirow (1991) and Brookfield (1995).

The rationale behind my research stems initially from a belief based on the concept of Dewey’s (1933) work ‘How We Think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process.’ This edition of ‘How We Think’, Dewey explained, was an extensive rewriting of the original text of 1910 as indicated in the subtitle by the inclusion of the word ‘restatement’. What was of interest to me was Dewey’s discussion of stream of consciousness and how this is crucially linked to reflective thought, which according to Dewey is a central feature of a way of thinking that can lead to critical thought.

Dewey asserted that for most of our waking life, and at times while we are asleep, the thoughts we have are “automatic and unregulated” (1933, p. 4). This uncontrolled sequence of ideas is made up of an inconsequential procession of fleeting mental images that are random reminiscences, pleasurable but groundless hopes and “half-developed impressions” (Dewey, 1933, p. 4). Dewey acknowledged that in many contexts and situations a person’s consecutive train of thoughts concerning some ideas are assumed and there is no need for these to be “consciously formulated and expounded” (Dewey, 1933, p. 281). However, according to Dewey, it is reflective thinking involving a sequence of ideas but with a “con-sequence” that determines a stream of consciousness. This occurs by a process of consecutive ordering that connects with what comes before and after each phase of thought, (to identify any patterns in the thinking of the
participants) and becomes a chain of thought with an aim to arrive at a resolution to some problem (Dewey, 1933, p. 5). Therefore, the application of reflective thought “involves conscious and voluntary effort” that impels “personal examination, scrutiny and inquiry” (Dewey, 1933, p. 9).

Freire also wrote extensively on the concept of consciousness or as he termed it “conscientization” (Freire, 1973, p. 27) which was the essential concept in his theoretical writing concerning learning and education. Freire claimed that human beings through the process of conscientization “achieve a deepening awareness of both the sociocultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it” (Freire, 1970, p. 27). Mezirow (1991) agreed with Freire’s analysis concerning ‘consciousness’ and ‘action’, in that the intervention of consciousness in learning enables students to bring about a transformation of that learning and of the world in which they live.

This is reflected in Freire’s concept of “banking education” (1970, p. 58), Freire’s phrase for the teacher-student relationship wherein the student is viewed as a vacant receptacle that the teacher as a narrator of content fills, thus rendering education an act of depositing. This situation, Freire declared, turns the educator into a depositor and the student into a depository, making the student a passive recipient who will mechanically memorize the content received. In this process the more the depositor fills a compliant receptacle, the ‘better’ a student will become, and moreover, the more highly the teacher will be regarded for this action. Friere (1970) claimed an implicit assumption of this
banking concept is that man/woman is a spectator in this world, neither with the world, nor re-creator, nor with others. Therefore, from this standpoint neither man nor woman is a conscious being or “corpo consciente” (Freire, 1970, p. 62). Rather they become “the possessor of a consciousness: an empty ‘mind’ passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside” (Freire, 1970, p. 62). As a result of this banking notion of consciousness the educator is able “to regulate the way the world ‘enters into’ the students” (Freire, 1970, p. 62). Freire argued this realm of education creates an even more passive, adapted being, a much better “fit” for the world, where the need to think - critically, laterally or reflectively - is obviated. This, and an unquestioning attitude, can be desirable characteristics of individuals where compliance is valued (Freire, 1970, p. 63).

With regard to the prior discussion it is interesting to point out that with the exception of the department head I discussed earlier it would seem from my observations that most high school teachers I encountered operated from Freire’s viewpoint of the ‘banking notion’. Lacking in these teachers’ practices seemed to be the concepts relating to the idea of ‘consciousness’ and ‘con-sequence’, which Dewey (1933) examined and which was discussed above. As a result of the absence of such critical thinking, most teachers I observed displayed a very technical approach to their teaching practices.

When one is acting in the professional role as a teacher it would seem one really has no choice or excuse not to be corpo consciente as explained above. We as teachers have a responsibility and duty to our students to guide and facilitate their learning so they can
reach their full potential as human beings to function within society (Brookfield, 1987). Further, if teacher educators themselves engage in critical thinking, there can be assumed an expectation that the pre-service teachers they teach will in turn will become capable of engaging in critical reflection. The experiences of my own learning and teaching and my critical reflection on those experiences have been the bedrock and the focus of this study, and have informed its content. This was due to my engagement and interest in the theory and practice of critical thinking and to that being modelled by my own teacher educators during my enrolment in the two different Graduate Diplomas of Education.

Consequently, because of these reflections, I envisaged a study of teacher education students (pre-service teachers) as they neared the completion of their qualifications. The aim of this study would be to investigate and discover to what extent, if at all, the curriculum and pedagogical content the participants had engaged in had been successful in enabling them to engage in critical reflection as part of their classroom practices. A major dimension for me also was the adult context in which the teacher education students themselves were learning. Adult learning principles provided a theoretical lens through which to understand the participants’ learning contexts. This interest evolved into my research question, which drove and underpinned the process of this thesis.

Thus, the research question was to uncover and reveal to what extent were principles of critical reflection evident in the thinking of the research participants and, if so, why and how did it inform their practice? Due to my own experiences I wanted to know, to understand and to seek out some answers to the question whether others thought as I did,
or if they viewed their participation in critical thinking and reflective practice as being merely a means to an end of a teaching degree. Firstly, I was interested to know if the participants thought that adopting a critical position as a teacher in the classroom was important or critical to them being and/or developing as a teacher. Secondly and importantly, unpinning the research question, I was interested to know whether the participants recognised the importance of using a critical perspective to inform their practice and, if so, to what extent.

**Research Purpose:**

A primary goal of the research was to initially understand and explore if the principles of effective practices in adult education when applied to a teacher education setting were articulated and implemented by the pre-service teachers. Basically I was interested to know how the research participants were using and applying the processes of critical reflection in the practices of their daily lives as pre-service teachers in the classroom. Of interest was to identify indicators that would enable teacher educators to model learning experiences and pedagogical practices that pre-service teachers, learning in an adult setting, may adopt and develop to become effective critical thinkers and reflective practitioners in their everyday professional, social and political lives (but for the purpose of this study the focus is only on the participants’ professional lives). Secondly, I was interested in the pre-teachers’ conscious engagement (if any) with critically reflective practice, and whether they were using critical approaches to understand what was happening in their classrooms. A further aspect that has to be explored is the question “do these discourses and course contents have an impact on pre-service teachers’ praxis”?
More crucial is the question “does the pre-service teachers’ praxis impact on them in a way that is transformative or emancipatory in relation to their engagement in what they do in their daily lives”? I have used the concept of critical incidents in teaching to do this. Thus, the fundamental question that guided my investigation was to what extent were the principles of critical reflection and reflective practice evident in the thinking and the actions of the research participants. I hoped that by engaging in this study I might generate awareness in the wider educational community of the importance of critical thinking.

**Overview of Chapters**

Following from the introduction in Chapter 1, within Chapter 2 I continue in more detail to explore the literature that has been briefly discussed above. The explanations and discussions are intended to clarify my explicit position in relation to the research and to the question of why many teachers do not seem to be conscious about the need to be, or how to be, conscious and critical reflective practitioners. Ideas in this literature offer a framework to inform the pedagogy/ies of teachers’ work, which can enable us to become more ‘conscious’ in our work as classroom teachers, and can provide us with the opportunity to model these recommendations within our everyday practices in the classroom so we may increase our professional effectiveness. Then in Chapter 3 I explain the methodology that underpinned the research undertaken, which is a broad spectrum of qualitative approaches designed to assure authentic interpretations of the detailed contextual inquiry of the study.
In Chapter 4, I present the results of the research, which comprises two sections. First I present the responses from the open-ended questions from the individual participants and second I report on the responses from the randomly selected participants that made up the three focus groups. So as to make sense of all the responses I have given detailed descriptions of the contexts of the participants’ narratives, which allowed for rich in-depth data to be exposed. Each section is followed by a short synopsis that revealed the numerous and significant themes that had emerged from the responses to the questions. Chapters 5 and 6 then present a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the results. The discussion illustrates the dimensions of critical reflection of both the individuals and the focus groups. The literature I reviewed was very worthwhile in enabling me to tease out relevant details of the participants’ narratives, and which in turn gave an insight into the day-today lives of (pre-service) teachers’ work. In addition and importantly, the model by Furr and Carroll (2003) used to analyse the data uncovered the influence of experiential learning from the responses of the participants. Furthermore, the comments and the responses to the many varied and profound issues experienced on a daily basis, (especially those considered to be ‘critical’) highlighted the impact on the participants’ beliefs, cognitive, emotional (affective) and behaviour in relation to their role as classroom teachers. The emotive aspect of participants’ experiences tended to have a significant impact on their immediate thoughts and actions, as did their ability to apply knowledge gained, which helped them to be more effective in the classroom. Chapter 7 is the final section of this dissertation and is the conclusion, which consists of a brief outline of how the findings furthered my understanding of what it entails to be a critically reflective practitioner in the classroom, and concludes with several recommendations as
to how this can be applicable in bringing about environments that can promote critical reflection to assist teachers and learners alike.
CHAPTER TWO

The Significance of Critical Thinking and the Reflective Practitioner

I cannot teach clearly unless I recognise my own ignorance, unless I identify what I do not know, what I have not mastered. (Freire, 1996, p. 2)

The Historical Context

In part the title of this chapter has been acquired from a chapter in Dewey’s (1933, p. 17) book ‘How We Think’. I have come to support the perspective of ‘how we think’ due to my engagement with the educational milieu and with this research. The research thesis has as its primary focus the possible application of learning theories and practices of adult teaching and learning to the learning of pre-service teachers. An immense advantage would be if (pre-service) teachers were consciously aware of the necessity of developing habits of critically reflecting on their practice and questioning the assumptions and values that underlie that practice (Brookfield, 2010). Interestingly, it has been noted that in the education of professionals (especially in the education milieu) to teach critical reflection has not always been the practice. Thus, there needs to be a commitment to fostering the concept of critically reflective practice and to the acknowledgement of it being a learning process. Consequently, to give it the utmost chance of success it would be best introduced, scaffolded and taught explicitly (Lyons, 2010). Researchers such as Brookfield (1986; 1995; 2010; 2012), Cranton (1996), Dewey (1933), Knowles (1973), Mezirow (1991, 2009) and Schon (1987), for many years now have stressed the need for
critically reflective teachers, and their theories show similarities to Hegel’s nineteenth-century science of consciousness (Neufeld, 2001).

John Dewey was born in the 1850s and devoted most of his life until his death in 1952 to exploring the unity between theory and practice in education. He categorised reflective thinking as being different to other modes of thought that he determined were non-reflective. From Dewey we came to understand that reflective thought was “an 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” (Manternach, 2002, p. 2). According to Dewey, in any given situation, as in teaching, if our response is based on habit or if the meaning of the situation is taken for granted then we are responding non-reflectively. Therefore, it is all very well to teach thoughtfully to overcome a dilemma in our practice but failure to inquire as to why the dilemma arose within the situation in the first place is not reflective thinking (Manternach, 2002).

Dewey’s theory was based on a problem-solving framework especially in relation to experiencing difficulties in teaching. The essence of reflective thinking for Dewey was to suspend judgement so time could be given to explore and study the context of the situation before responding to it. This approach was intentional as it was too easy to locate the problem with the learners and their actions, whilst the perspective of the teacher, their teaching styles and beliefs went unquestioned. Thus, this approach allowed the perspectives of both teachers and learners to be considered, in any given situation. For Dewey the wider contextual details embedded in the lives of the learners, the teacher’s
own experiences, the school environment and the extended culture were equally important, as all these factors contributed to the interaction and impact of the situation. These all had to be explored to negate any quick habitual response that could in effect compound problems and trigger adverse teaching responses (Manternach, 2002).

I have outlined Dewey’s theory above because it is well suited to my research concerning the teaching and learning of adults and more importantly to teachers and their practice. Dewey is widely acknowledged as one of the first modern educators to distinguish different modes of thought (Manternach, 2002; Geertsen, 2003). I use the word ‘modern’ due to the work of John Locke who in 1690 wrote the ‘Essay Concerning Human Understanding’. Locke defined his philosophical application concerning the essential characteristics of reflection as being derived from experience (Swingewood, 1991). He rebuffed the rationalism of Descartes arguing that all knowledge is derivative from what is experienced either directly through the senses or through reflection (Jary & Jary, 1995). For Locke, the raw data of experience is the basis for a transformative process leading to knowledge, inasmuch as the individual in relation to the mental processes categorises any ideas and actions that arise so as to make judgement, measurement and/or comparison, and for which the individual takes responsibility (Swingewood, 1991; Jary & Jary, 1995). What is profound is that although Locke’s concepts and theories were written over 300 years ago they have as much validity and relevance today particularly concerning my research, especially in view of the critiques concerning teaching and learning that led from Locke through Dewey to more recent scholars such as Brookfield, Cranton, Freire, Knowles, Mezirow and Schon (to mention a few).
Adult Education: Theory and Practice

Today there is an extensive and diverse anthology of theories and of researchers in the area of adult education. Mezirow stated his philosophy of adult education as “adult education may be understood as an organised effort to assist learners who are old enough to be held responsible for their acts to acquire or enhance their understandings, skills, and dispositions” (2000, p. 26). In this sense adult learners are seen as different from learners in schools. Although John Dewey had already espoused the values of experience-based and self-directed learning, from a contemporary stance, recognition in part must go to Malcolm Knowles. He wrote extensively concerning what he believed were the unique characteristics and applicable practices relevant to adult learners. It is warranted in this study to acknowledge that andragogical practice contrasts somewhat from pedagogical practice. For Knowles ‘pedagogy’, the teaching of children was quite different to the teaching of adults. Traditionally, education had been considered in pedagogical terms, which embodied a teacher-focused curriculum. In 1970 Knowles named his theory ‘andragogy’ to give distinction and recognition to the teaching of adults. This term defined and described the conditions needed for adults to learn (Hase & Kenyon, 2000).

As a result of these writings Knowles became known as the father of adult learning theory, and up until his death in 1997 he wrote prolifically, continuing to refine his initial assumptions concerning the theory and practice involved in teaching adults. Knowles (1973) himself stated he was not the first to use the term ‘andragogy’, but he hoped that it would be a unifying theory for adult education. However, Knowles created quite a stir
and his work led to a revolution in adult educational practice. Knowles’ theories have raised concern and generated reflective discourse amongst educators as to how teaching could and/or ought to be delivered. There was (and some would say there still is) a superfluity of written and spoken words discussed and analysed on how people learn (Hase & Kenyon, 2000). Nevertheless, on reflection Knowles’s 1973 book ‘The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species’ could 40 years later still be perceived as an insightful title.

Suffice to conclude here concerning the pedagogy and andragogy debate, one might concede that all learners, whether adults or children, learn best in a democratic environment that is conducive to democracy. In relation to andragogy, “the concept is a set of assumptions concerning adult learning processes from which we can derive a number of injunctions concerning appropriate teaching methods” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 120). Also in identifying the principles of effective practice, what is fundamental in andragogy is the effect of the past experience on how adults interpret their present social and personal worlds. The aforementioned ideas and the element of collaboration in learning are prevalent in both andragogy and in effective facilitation (Brookfield, 1986).

Mezirow (1991) in the opening lines of his book ‘Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning’ made an interesting response to the developments in the theory and practice of adult education. Discussing an issue that is equally relevant today he stated, “A disturbing fault line separates theories of adult learning from the practice of those who try to help adults learn” (Mezirow, 1991, p. xi). What troubled Mezirow was that psychologists interested in adult learning rarely conversed with each other about this
phenomenon, let alone with educators. This is especially so when considering behaviourists or psychoanalysts who “often find themselves trapped within the framework of particular theories and paradigms” (Mezirow, 1991, p. xi). In addition, those from different disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, linguistics and political science and who also have legitimate interests in adult education, all hold a different frame of reference and each have their own specific language for interpreting the same phenomenon. Hence, according to Mezirow (1991, p. xi), there has been little attempt to synthesise the various theories so adult educators could make use of them.

The crux of this for Mezirow (1991) is that all involved in adult education “have had to fly by the seat of their pants” (1991, p. xi). The outcome of this is that those who are not familiar with the literature have a tendency to apply pedagogical approaches they themselves experienced in school or university. For example “practices that are often dysfunctional with adults and are incompatible with the prevailing consensus among writers in the field of adult education are commonly found in adult education” (Mezirow, 1991, p. ix). I concur, as this has been my experience concerning the practices of many of my colleagues since I began teaching adults in 1998, and has compelled me to pursue this research. Concerning the theory and the practice of teaching adults, much can be learned from writers in the field of adult education as they have a professionally shared orientation based upon the common experience and ideas that are understood relative to one another (Mezirow, 1991).
The above discussion has relevance to my own research context. Brookfield stated, “Learning to think critically is one of the most significant activities of adult life” (1987, p. ix). This statement is borne out by my observation and research into the teaching of adults. In part, my aspiration for this paper is to explore possibilities for the application of adult learning principles to the education of teachers. Moreover, if teacher educators themselves reflect critically on their work and practices then we may be more confident that the pre-service teachers will espouse these attributes, especially in relation to critical reflective practices within the classroom.

Issues associated with the teaching of adults and how they think have much relevance for this research context. Brookfield (1986; 1987; 1995; 1998; 2001; 2002; 2010 and 2012) has been a noteworthy contributor to the field of adult education. Brookfield led the way in a shift of how we think in relation to adult education with his book ‘Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning’ (1986). In his analysis of the current approaches both practical and theoretical Brookfield challenged adult educators to reassess their existing teaching practices. There is a need for educators to develop a critical philosophy of practice so they do not succumb to the philosophical rationale of pragmatism. Importantly, he argued many educators “uncritically assimilate various assumptions, norms, beliefs and values” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 295). There is a need for educators to develop a clear rationale in relation to their practices even if it is disagreed with or cannot be fully implemented in the daily reality of facilitating learning (Brookfield, 1986). If this rationale is not clearly developed, Brookfield asserted, educators become nothing less than “automatons - ciphers through whom are channelled the latest curricular or
methodological fads, irrespective of any consideration of their innate validity” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 295).

Brookfield’s point is that all of us who facilitate adult learning must then incorporate elements of challenge, confrontation and the ability to critically reflect, so critical analysis can occur within the self and within society (Brookfield, 1986; 1994; 2002). Consequently such a rationale builds a belief system that gives order and purpose to the basis of learning from experience. This enables effective practices that assist adult learners to create or re-create their personal, professional, political and social worlds were they have been presented with alternatives that challenge their current ways of thinking, acting and behaving. Without such a rationale educators unthinkingly perpetuate those structures that relate to organizational convenience and confirm learners’ dependency patterns learned in their school years (Brookfield, 1986). Brookfield (2012) has stated that in recent visits to universities he has heard repeatedly of the lack of students’ abilities to critically reflect and analyse. As a result Brookfield has proposed taking a thorough look at the way in which critical thinking can be explained and taught (Brookfield, 2012). When considering teacher education programmes Brookfield’s message is crucial to all in the educational milieu as it is teachers who “are at the heart of the educational process” (Day, 1999, p. 1).

The underlying theme, which is commonly repeated by most of these writers, is the knowledge that as adult educators it is imperative to acknowledge we are also adult learners (Cranton, 1996). If we acknowledge that teachers are indeed at the heart of the
educational process, should we not consider critically how higher educational institutions teach their (under-graduate) teachers? Arguably this should be of significance over and above what we teach. Cranton (1996) offered new perspectives for teachers of adults. For example she identified the need for adult educators to go beyond their expertise in a subject area and begin to learn and develop a deeper understanding about their own practice. Cranton draws on the thinking of Brookfield and Mezirow and the theoretical concepts such as transformative learning theory, self-directed learning and critical reflection. Cranton aims to help adult educators by offering practical strategies and examples of these to realize educator development in these areas. Indeed the process of transformative learning can occur with the critical reflection of one’s own practice which in turn can have an effective change on one’s role as a teacher (Brookfield, 1995; 2010; Mezirow et al. (2009); Zeichner and Liu (2010). This is very relevant to this study because if university institutions do not teach the pre-service teachers in these ways then how are they, the teachers, going to teach their students, in particular, how to be critically reflective human beings?

It is encouraging to realise in the present day that scholars are concerned with the lack of criticality many teachers have in their practice: what I would suggest could be described as a lack of consciousness. For example Black (2005) argued that “students learn to think better when schools teach them how to think” (2005, p. 43). Black expressed dismay at the “feeble attempts to add thinking skills to lessons” (2005, p. 42) and the strong comments such as “frivolous activities” (2005, p. 47) that were responses to her attempt to introduce and offer critical thinking lessons to those teachers. Black stated that with
few exceptions teachers “had muddled notions about critical thinking and little training in developing their students' thinking skills” (2005, p. 42). Black (2005) is not alone pointing out the drawbacks to promoting critical thinking. Authors such as Case (2002), Boxler (2003), and Gong (2005) have all expressed their concern about the lack of understanding of the specific practice and nurturing of thinking critically. This is unfortunate as Black (2005) also highlighted that critical thinking can transform dreary classrooms into dynamic and mentally engaging environments. This is crucial; if teachers are not themselves developing a critically reflective perspective to question their practices in the classroom, how can they in turn foster students’ thinking skills?

Similarly in their article concerning emerging first year teachers and the concept of teachers taking a critical inquiry stance within their classrooms, Fecho, Price and Read (2004) discovered unwillingness on the part of many teachers to bring an inquiry stance to their own practice. As an explanation for this attitude teachers cited too much departmental requirements, testing, and prescribed curriculum. In acknowledgement Fecho et al. (2004) stated that governmental policies at all levels of education have generated “an atmosphere of hegemony among teachers” (Fecho et al., 2004, p. 2).

Nevertheless, Fecho et al. (2004) declared that some teachers too readily undervalue their agency in relation to effecting change. Regrettably what they found “particularly disheartening” was that “an atmosphere of helplessness has infected the ranks of pre-service teachers” (Fecho, et al., 2004, p. 2). In addition, the concept of inquiry was generally viewed by teachers as a student-based activity they teach to their students when
participating in inquiry projects. Fecho et al. (2004) expressed disappointment that these teachers often failed to see that by ignoring the option to embrace a critical inquiry stance they denied themselves the opportunity to become “self-revelatory” (critically reflective) practitioners. This would also bring about a deeper understanding of their students and of their own practice. Moreover it would allow teachers to become emancipated from the system inasmuch that they could become empowered instead of seemingly being “resigned to reifying that system, even though they frequently admit that the system harms many students” (Fecho et al., 2004, p. 2). These comments are similarly and strongly advocated in Freire (1970), Mezirow (1991), Tripp (1993), Brookfield (1995) and Day (1999). Moreover, all of the above scholars have made a comparable statement in their writings, that for students to become good critical thinkers, teachers must be good critical thinkers themselves (Black, 2005).

The above discussion reflects my speculations about whether teachers considered criticality in teaching and learning as an essential component of teacher’s work. Particularly I was interested in university students who were completing their final semester in a teaching degree and about to embark in a teaching career. I was aware that in many university courses, especially teaching degrees, the content literature and the pedagogical discourse required students to actively engage in critical thinking and reflective practice using tools such as journals and/or portfolios as a means of connecting theory to practice. Specifically I would like to draw attention to the concept of ‘praxis’ which has been a conscious and active process of this study, both for me in my position as researcher and interviewer and in particular to the responses from my participants.
From the perspective of ‘praxis’, theory and practice integrate with each other. Neither has precedence and it is through each other that they both develop together (Warhurst, Grundy, Laird and Maxwell, 1998).

Freire (1973) and Brookfield (1986) both strongly advocate praxis as one of the underlying principles of adult education and learning. Central to the ‘praxis’ is the process of action and reflection, which was also recognised by Dewey (1933). At the heart of this educational activity is the need for the learner to engage “in a continuous and alternating process of investigation and exploration, followed by action grounded in this exploration, followed by reflection on this action, followed by further investigation and exploration, followed by further action, and so on” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 15). Teachers and learners both benefit from these practices as the exploration of knowledge, new skills and ideas does not occur in vacuity but are situated in the context of their past, present and future experiences (Brookfield, 1986).

**The Importance of Critical Thinking and the Reflective Practitioner in Teaching and Learning**

Why then are critical thinking and the reflective practitioner so important in teaching and learning, and why do we need teachers and educators to think and act in this way? Brookfield claimed, “We teach to change the world” (1995, p. 1). The significance of this statement is that as teachers and educators what we teach endorses how students will relate and act “towards each other, and toward their environment, with compassion, understanding and fairness” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 1). Thus, for Brookfield, critical
thinking is intrinsically ideological and morally grounded, creating conditions that adhere to the values of justice, compassion and fairness and to democratic classrooms where each person is heard, respected and valued (Brookfield, 1995). Brookfield warns against any thought of teaching being apolitical or innocent either in relation to the cultural and/or psychological complexities of learning or in relation to the complications of power within all human relationships. The inappropriate assumption that we can teach innocently is critiqued strongly in Brookfield’s writing as he asserts this means we always understand explicitly what it is we are doing and the effect that it is having on our students.

Brookfield (1995) claims we are never fully aware of our motives and intentions and neither is it unusual for us to misinterpret how others perceive our actions. Thus, Brookfield stated that one of the most difficult things teachers had to learn was that “the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice” (1995, p. 1). Consequently, adopting an uncritical view of our practice creates a lifetime of frustration, which can provoke feelings and beliefs of pessimism, guilt, lethargy and evidence of our incompetence (Brookfield, 1995). To work against this possibility, Brookfield believes that for teachers to survive and be effective the habit of critical reflection in teaching is crucial if, as he suggests, “the vicious circle of innocence and blame” is to be broken (1995, p. 1). Beginning with Dewey (1933) the aforementioned educational theorists have each drawn attention to and developed their theories around the need for critical thinking to be a vital dimension of learning.
One focus for me in this study was to examine how the participants might interpret reality differently: for example in terms of being aware of taken-for-granted assumptions that inform behaviour, of the participants’ perceptions of their own experiences, and of the emergence of interpretations of reality (Brookfield, 1987). Tripp (1993) suggests the main idea is to achieve a shift away from an unquestioning technically expert approach to teaching, to adopt an agenda that makes teaching a profession by the process of professional judgement through an account and analysis of critical incidents. Tripp noted that while dramatic or obvious events tend to be rare in everyday teaching practices, a greater number of critical incidents occur as uncomplicated and common events in the everyday routine of professional practice. However, incidents that at first appear ‘typical’ rather than ‘critical’ can be seen to be critical through the process of reflection. Importantly, incidents are critical in the sense that they pinpoint underlying structures, trends and motives (Tripp, 1993). Thus, an incident is recognized as critical due to its influence on the teacher’s professional development. As Tripp (1993) stated, technical routines are essential to all teaching but cannot be simply set and followed. They need constant monitoring and change, and it is here that the process of critical incidents analysis is crucial. Consequently, this study has focused primarily on the diagnosis and interpretation of critical incidents in the classrooms.

Dewey’s (1933) idea that critical thinking could only happen when there is a state of doubt adds to the developing conceptual map of critical thinking. Brookfield (1995) claimed that the beliefs, values, myths, explanations and justifications that affect how we think of and perceive the world we live in are deeply embedded in us and in that sense
not subject to doubt. The basis of this thinking and of perceiving the world according to Brookfield comes from dominant ideologies that may be unjust, but are accepted uncritically in everyday situations and practices. These ideologies become apparent in language, social behaviour and cultural forms. As a result they give legitimacy to a number of political structures and educational practices which are then viewed and accepted as the normal way of seeing and doing things. Indeed it has been suggested that (pre-service) teachers enter the profession of teaching with established and embedded beliefs, values, justifications and explanations that can and do impact on their practice as classroom teachers (Ethell & McMeniman, 2002). However if we partake in the process of ideology critique in relation to this everyday reality (in other words, we start to cast doubt on our practices) we are then able to expose any injustices and oppression. Looking at things from a different perspective and challenging the logic enables us to become conscious that things are this way for a reason. Although this constructed reality “protects the interests of the powerful... if normality is constructed, it occurs to us that it can be dismantled and remade by human effort” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 87). Tripp’s (1993) proposal that teachers use critical incidents in their work to develop professional judgement provides a useful starting point for understanding pre-service teachers’ thinking.

An important additional note can be found in Freire (1973) who 40 years ago, while discussing the banking approach to adult education, stated that from the onset the efforts of the educator must coincide along with the efforts of his/her students to engage in critical thinking. It is only by this synchrony between educator and students that the
pursuit for “mutual humanisation”, which includes creativity, transformation and knowledge, can occur (Freire, 1973, p. 62). Freire explained so vividly the process of humanization as being “authentic liberation” and that “liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1973, p. 66). Therefore as Freire (1973) insisted, human beings by way of their existential experiences are “with the world and with others” and are “re-creators” of the world they live in; they are not, as is assumed in the banking concept, spectators (Freire, 1973, p. 62). For this reason we, as well-intentioned teachers and educators, must be conscious not to go down the path of the bank-clerk educator, as that only serves to dehumanise our students. Freire noted, “The banking approach to adult education, for example, will never propose to students that they critically consider reality” (1973, p. 61).

The theoretical concepts of the reflective practitioner and of critical thinking have been espoused for many years now and both of these concepts have been the subject of much academic writing. The fundamental focus of this paper is the critical element of reflective practice. I argue that thinking and learning about teaching must be ‘critical’ in nature, as this is the essence of this dissertation. To be a critical thinker either in practice, in thinking or in learning requires more than the cognitive processes connected to logical reasoning or examining arguments for allegations unconfirmed by empirical evidence (Brookfield, 1987). The core of critical thinking necessitates that we become aware of the assumptions underlying our beliefs and behaviours.
Brookfield (1987) proposed that being aware of our assumptions shows how we have justified our ideas and actions, and more crucially we can then judge the rationality of these justifications. It is more likely that we can take informed actions if we become engaged in critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995). These informed actions validate explanations and provide justification to others and ourselves. And as Dewey (1933) discussed the idea of ‘consequence’, Brookfield has also advised that an informed action has every likelihood of accomplishing the consequences intended (Brookfield, 1995). Therefore when we consider the merits of the critically reflective practitioner especially in consideration of “good teachers” it is to understand that “they perceive themselves as ‘active’ learners, inquirers and advocates of their own practices...critical theoreticians in their own teaching and the structures in which they are located” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 216).

In the following section I explain the fundamental context of how these theories will be interpreted for the purpose of this dissertation. For example in the everyday world of teaching the process of the reflective practitioner is generally linked with the process of critical thinking, with the outcome being to assist teachers to in some way reinterpret their work (Day, 1999). Thus, the crucial aspect of this research is that “the empirical world of teachers is their practice” and therefore warrants examination from a scientific theoretical perspective (Tripp, 1993, p. 146).

The reflective practitioner is not a new concept. John Dewey could be viewed as the father of critical thinking. Incredibly, 100 years ago Dewey challenged the existing
pedagogical techniques such as rote memorisation, repetition, complete attentiveness and compliant passivity, which were considered the most effective methods for developing the mind (Dalton, 2002). For some five or six decades Dewey’s (1933) concept of reflective thinking and his writings concerning the relationship of theory to practice in education have seen continued adaptation by many educational theorists such as Stephen Brookfield, Patricia Cranton, Jack Mezirow and Donald Schon. The work of these scholars could be argued as having significant influence on university teacher education programmes that try to support students of teaching to understand these processes and include them in their discourses and practices (Jarvis, Holford & Griffin, 2003).

The concept of ‘critical thinking’ is a complex one. Moreover, a commitment to foster critical thinking could enable teachers to become more conscious of the effectiveness of critical reflection to develop their practice (Lyons, 2010; Zeichner and Liu, 2010). However, many scholars have their own theories about and paradigms of critical thinking. This is especially so when ‘critical thinking’ can be used interchangeably with the term ‘critical reflection’. In writing this paper I have embraced the concept of critical thinking used by such writers as Brookfield, Cranton, Freire, Knowles, Mezirow, and Schon. In some instances critical thinking is given a different term, such as ‘critical consciousness’ in hooks (1994), ‘critical pedagogy’ in Tripp (1993) or ‘stream of consciousness’ in Dewey (1933). Readers who are familiar with Mezirow’s (1991) transformational learning theory and Cranton’s (2004) perspectives of authenticity in teaching will recognise these concepts in relation to critical thinking. Both Mezirow’s and Cranton’s work comes into play and is incorporated when teacher educators adopt a
critically reflective approach to practice. However, the constraints of this dissertation do not allow in-depth study of Mezirow’s and Cranton’s theories, although the core thrust of their theories will be noted and discussed. Based on the definitions of critical thinking developed by the writers discussed above, I will explain the meaning and use of critical thinking as I have used it in this dissertation. The common element here is the concept of ‘critical’ that distinguishes reflection from critical reflection.

According to Brookfield (1987) critical thinking is a particular way of thinking and acting and thus involves a reflective dimension. It is the development of a consciousness that allows us to look for and/or see any assumptions in the way in which we, or others, think and act. Brookfield suggests that a distinctive feature in the reflective process is the focus on hunting assumptions. By this he argues that assumptions are the taken-for-granted beliefs (Brookfield, 1995) that shape our actions. Many underlying assumptions are implicit, and in becoming critical thinkers not only are we more aware of the how and why of our ideas and actions but we take notice of the underlying concepts concerning these. For example, we begin to realise not much in life is one-dimensional, black or white, or that there are simplistic solutions to many situations and problems. Consequently, when we look at and change any of our assumptions, either about the world or ourselves, this requires “corresponding changes in one’s behaviour and relationships” (Brookfield, 1987, p. 14). Critical thinkers become open to the many diverse and “alternative ways of looking at, and behaving in, the world” (Brookfield, 1987, p. ix). The capacity to think critically is significant to and can affect our lives in many different ways. Although the focus of this study is on critically reflective practices
in the classroom, critical thinkers are also more alert and aware of any biases and misrepresentations in media interpretations and they will actively uphold and value democracy, freedom and diversity (Brookfield, 1987).

Ultimately and importantly ‘critical thinking’ is a positive and productive activity. Inasmuch as it involves a continual questioning of assumptions it is a process not an outcome. Manifestations of critical thinking vary depending on the contexts in which it happens. For example, in some people the indication that this critical process is taking place is almost entirely internal but it is in their writing or talking that external evidence can be seen. Critical thinking in others will manifest externally in a clear and direct manner through their actions. Examples of this are when people will renegotiate elements of their personal relationships, workplace managers change their habitual ways and become more equitable, or citizens put aside political or religious differences to collectively campaign for a safer or better community. Critical thinking can be triggered by positive or negative events and as a result either one can have us reflecting upon our old assumptions or contemplating whether they were indeed accurate. Finally, critical thinking is emotive as well rational. Feeling and emotions are fundamental to the critical thinking process according to Brookfield (1987). For example as we contemplate old assumptions we may ride a wave of various feelings and emotions from resistance, resentment and confusion to joy, release, relief and exhilaration as old assumptions are abandoned and a sense of liberation is experienced. This development is exciting and brings confidence in the realisation that we have the power to change aspects of our lives. Therefore, Brookfield is suggesting that we can and do learn to become critical thinkers,
which in effect, creates a positive and enriching dimension to our experiences in life whether that involves our personal, work or political sphere (Brookfield, 1987).

‘Critical thinking’ or the more widely used phrase ‘critical reflection’ is a schema that has been expounded by many academic education theorists for decades. Dewey (1933) tended to speak of ‘reflective thinking’ and was amongst the first educators to distinguish between different levels of thinking. At the higher-level of thinking he made the distinction between ‘searching and judging’ which he called ‘reflective and critical thought’. Dewey argued that reflective thought begins from a state of doubt, which triggers a mental process to search for some method to ease that doubt. Dewey then further identified reflective thought as a problem-solving strategy (Geertsen, 2003). Critical thinking for Dewey was directly linked to the judgements one makes to solve a problem. However, more complex compounding factors have to be considered. For example in a teaching situation and within this problem-solving framework all judgement must be suspended for a period so as the incident can be explored and studied in context (Geertsen, 2003). Importantly also is the culture in which the incident is embedded, one’s own experiences, beliefs, biases and any habitual responses made, which according to Dewey all impact on the incident (Manternach, 2002). Indeed Creme (1999) highlighted the work of Ronald Barnett's Higher Education: a critical business (1997) in which he is censorious of the “narrowness” of traditionally discipline-based higher education. Creme (1999) stated that Barnett acknowledges that while disciplines do undertake that students “think critically” within the tradition of the stated task, nevertheless it is only within their specific parameters which in effect contribute little but lower order modes of criticism.
The concern for all these educational theorists is that the concept of “critical thinking” should not be seen as just another skill that students can accomplish, but rather is the leitmotif of their education, as Brookfield (1990) has suggested. If reflective and critical thought was a recurring theme in higher education it could enable students to engage holistically with their studies and create in/of themselves critical beings who then have the potential to become transformative and emancipatory human beings (Creme, 1999). Thus learning could be viewed as a holistic process (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1993).

An early example of this is from the work of Dewey in his book ‘How We Think’ (1933). Dewey highlighted the need for reflection in teaching and considered how this could be taught. In his discussion of school conditions concerning “Formal Discipline versus Real Thinking” (1933, p. 53) Dewey argued that thinking is not a separate mental mechanical process occurring in isolation. Rather it is in the training of thought and is a continuing process of thinking. Importantly, it is the synthesis and the extrapolation of things whether they are read about, heard of, observed or remembered. This process can then evoke ideas and suggestions that lead to reflection. Consequently, where a problem or question becomes significant critical thinking can extend the mind to a justifiable conclusion.

According to Mezirow (1998) what underpins critical reflection is the reflection on assumptions. Critical reflection is a process of exploring and becoming more conscious of why we think, feel or act the way we do. Importantly, it is the exposure of tacit assumptions that have shaped prior learning and which can initiate the possibilities to
effect change in one’s established frames of reference. Schon’s (1987) concept of the reflective practitioner focuses on the temporal moments of reflection that happen before, during and after our teaching; this is a conscious and systematic analysis of our actions. Thus, Schon advocates the involvement of reflection both in and on action. Firstly, reflection-in-action may highlight a novel or “surprise” experience that can be useful for subsequent discussion and in review of practice and secondly, reflection-on-action can occur before or after an action and may temporally extend from a few minutes to hours, days or even months. Hence, the possibility of extended reflection is not simply an intellectual pursuit but alerts teachers to their action and practice in the classroom (Manternach, 2002). As a result the process of critical reflection plays a pivotal role in adult education (Brookfield, 1988).

Critical Elements and an Educational Aim for Teacher Education

It could be argued that in the last several hundred years in the socially constructed world of teaching, paradoxically and simultaneously a great deal has changed and a great deal has remained the same (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). This is primarily so when we consider society’s views of education and consequently of schooling. Subsequently, it is from this perspective that teaching and hence teachers are viewed as having a considerable effect on the fundamental determinants of children’s learning, their schooling experiences and inevitably their life chances (Hatton, 1998). Indeed due to the momentous role of education regarding participation and work within society, teaching has become a focal point in many OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries and continues to generate much inquiry and debate (Hatton, 1998).
Hence it would seem that the wheels of change are slow to turn when we consider the theories and concepts offered in teaching and learning in education. For example, Zeichner and Liston in their research more than 20 years ago drew attention to “the historically dominant concern with technical rationality and the instrumental criteria of success” (1987, p. 25) that in teacher education programmes failed to promote the overall personal development of student teachers. The authors revealed that because of these overriding factors they became aware of the need to illustrate an alternative model. Their study described and assessed the elementary student teaching programme at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The programme’s conceptual orientation was for teachers to be willing and able to be reflective “on the origins, purposes and consequences of their actions, as well as on the material, and ideological constraints and encouragements embedded in the classroom, school, and societal contexts in which they worked” (Zeichner and Liston, 1987, p. 25). There are many parallels with this study and my own, inasmuch as Zeichner and Liston (1987) were interested in reflective teaching as a dynamic response with reflective action being the fundamental goal, especially in relation to the assumptions, judgements, and beliefs that can impinge all aspects of teachers’ work (as will be discussed later).

More recently researchers Hatton (1998) and also Bullough and Gitlin (2001) highlighted that until very recently, particularly within Australia and New Zealand, the focus in education has been more on organisational and structural changes. This focus carried with it an assumption that these changes would automatically contribute to the
improvement in the quality of education. This was to the detriment of any focus on teaching and curriculum, which in addition was compounded with an almost total disregard for the interaction between teachers and students in the classrooms (Hatton, 1998). Since the late 1990s the lens has shifted to a focus on teachers’ work (Hatton, 1998; Smyth, 2000). As a result of this change many academic institutions offering teacher education programmes and also government policies concerning teacher education now require potential classroom teachers to show a certain commitment and develop particular attributes and competencies.

For example Kenmore University, the site of the case study, has nine main Graduate Attributes, which are then broken down into 25 sub-attributes, and are interpreted by the individual schools in terms of the specific disciplines and professions. The nine main graduate attributes are: Effective Communication; Critical and Creative Thinking; Independent and Lifelong Learning; Ethics; Social Justice; Global Perspectives; Interdisciplinarity; and an In-depth Knowledge of a Field of Study. These attributes are expected to be embedded in all units and courses at the university, and are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to that all students are expected to aspire to as a result of their university education. Within the School of Education these Graduates Attributes are integrated with the dimensions of “The Competency Framework for Teachers” (Department of Education and Training, government of Western Australia, DETWA, 2004), which at the time this research was conducted aimed at promoting quality teaching in schools. At the time of this research this Framework and overall contents was

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1Department of Education and Training, Western Australia (DETWA, 2004). Teacher standards in Australia are now overseen by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).
part of the curriculum of the teacher education programmes at Kenmore University. It especially gives structure and focus to the student teachers’ school experience and acknowledges the significance of the principles adapted from the Framework to ensure an effective and satisfying placement.

Included in the ‘Competency Framework for Teachers’ (DETWA, 2004) manifesto is an overall commitment to professional reflection, discussion and action. The document provides explicit professional standards to guide teachers in their practice. The Framework was intended as a tool for classroom teachers to reflect on their professional effectiveness, determine and prioritise areas for professional growth, identify professional learning opportunities, and plan their professional and career development. The Framework is comprehensive in structure with a focus on describing three professional elements of teachers’ work: practice, attributes and knowledge: which when put into practice in the classroom work in an interrelated manner. What was of interest to me in “Professional Attributes” under the eight “attribute descriptors” was the inclusion of a “Reflective” component.

Teachers are insightful in analysing their professional practice and can demonstrate evidence-based decision-making. Teachers draw upon their professional knowledge to plan a course of action and determine goals that improve their practice and student learning. They are informed professionals who avail themselves of professional learning opportunities in order to examine critically new and emerging educational trends” (DETWA, 2004, p. 10).

Encompassing these three elements of teachers’ work are several components. Initially, the Framework outlines “Three Phases” concerning teacher competency standards for effective teaching along a continuum of practice. Being dynamic, the broad phases do not
relate to length of service but enable teachers to determine what types of professional learning activities best suits their needs. Within any of the three phases that teachers may be operating at, there are “Five Dimensions of Teachers’ Work” (the other key components) that describe the major professional responsibilities and actions teachers execute in their working lives. These generic characteristics become integrated and work collectively for teachers to attain professional effectiveness in their practice. The concept of professional reflection is considered as being crucial in the Framework for improving teacher standards. Within the category of “Professional Practice” of the five dimensions in this category “Dimension 3- Engaging in Professional Practice” was of interest to me. Across all of the three phases it stated the need for teachers to “reflect critically on professional experiences in order to enhance professional effectiveness” and to “engage in a variety of learning activities that promote critical self-reflection” (DETWA, 2004, p. 12). For instance, in Dimension three, “Engaging in Professional Learning”,

Phase 3 teachers participate in professional learning as well as … supporting the professional learning of colleagues. They engage in ongoing critical reflection to generate and apply new ideas that contribute to the improvement of teaching and leadership practice. They mentor and help establish school-based teaching and learning research projects to enhance all teachers’ learning (DETWA, 2004).

I found the above insertions and statements to be of most interest as they urged teachers to critically reflect on their professional experiences to enhance their teaching practices, which in essence is the investigation of this study. Finally, a further aspect of the Framework emphasises that during the course of their careers teachers are required to be life-long learners and have a commitment to ongoing professional learning. Government policy, then, clearly considers critical thinking and critical reflective practices to be essential elements of a competency framework for teachers. Further, the
complete document integrates both of these issues so comprehensively, thus providing and initiating a link justification for these two concepts to be part of the curriculum in teacher education programmes.

Other researchers have taken up this same crusade towards fostering critically reflective teachers in a globalized age, with interesting results. Tisdell and Taylor (1999/2000) in their research into different educational philosophies suggested that by critically examining our practice, discrepancies between what we say we believe and what we actually do soon become obvious. Similarly a study by Fecho, Price and Read (2004) invited first year teachers to take a critical inquiry stance when reflecting on their teaching practices by submitting e-mails for analysis. Fecho et al. discovered that through this process participants developed additional agency concerning pedagogical enactments in the classroom. It also opened up many questions for their teaching practices, enabled an insight into their students, their own practice and how this all connected with the world around them. Fecho et al. acknowledged that when the teachers opened their practices to self-scrutiny their understanding of what was happening around them developed. They noted how unnerving this process could be, but they warned this could also be so for teachers whose practice has been validated for some time.

Zeichner and Liston (1987) presented a programme that offered an alternative model concerned with teaching student teachers to reflect. They argued that conventional teacher education programmes followed a conventional method that inhibited self-development practices. In brief Zeichner and Liston’s goals were to focus on reflective
teaching, and greater teacher autonomy. They argued for improvement in the quality of theory and practice, which aimed for student teachers to be reflexive and inquiry-oriented in their work. The programme put emphasis on teachers being “both willing and able to reflect on the origins, purposes, and consequences of their actions, as well as on the material and ideological constraints and encouragements embedded in the classroom, school, and societal contexts in which they work” (Zeichner and Liston, 1987, p. 23). This encompassed what Zeichner and Liston saw as the four commonplaces of teaching - the students, the curriculum, the milieu and the teachers. They suggested the preparation of reflective teaching was a primary requirement for all who worked in teacher education programmes. However they did suggest that many schools do not actively encourage the type of practices they advocate. Importantly they stated “it is also clear that changes in the status, recognition, and responsibilities given to teachers must occur before an inquiry-oriented teacher education programme will have a chance of making a lasting impact” (Zeichner and Liston, 1987, p. 44).

An important consideration as discussed earlier is that since teacher education students are themselves adults, the principles of criticality that commentators on adult education (such as Brookfield, Cranton, and Mezirow) see as essential in that work should apply equally to teacher educators in their work with pre-service teachers. Importantly, according to Brookfield (1987), over the years of running workshops on understanding and facilitating adult learning for people such as adult educators and school teachers he has been “startled” by the choice of category that participants have chosen to explain “the most significant and memorable form of learning they have experienced” (Brookfield,
1987, p. 49). For example when thinking about significant learning, participants were offered “four broad categories: learning about oneself, learning that is job-related, learning about one’s society and recreational learning” (Brookfield, 1987, p. 49). Consistently participants chose ‘learning about oneself” as the most significant or memorable experience of learning. Requesting analysis of this learning further, with the proviso of the focus being on “skill acquisition, knowledge gain, behaviour change and insight realisation, participants invariably emphasize the last category” (Brookfield, 1987, p. 49). The outcome of this has seen participants reflecting upon “what has been learned about themselves and about the uncritically internalised assumptions by which they have been living” (Brookfield, 1987:49). More will be explored on this issue when discussing the research data.

Freire’s (1974) notion of human beings existing in time and taking an active role in and with the world and relating to it in a critical and multi-dimensional way fits well with this research, especially in relation to education for critical consciousness. Freire discusses how human beings discover their own temporality, through the act of critical perception, and through the process of reflection on the objective data of their reality. As human beings “they inherit acquired experience, create and re-create, integrate themselves into their context, respond to challenges, discern, transcend and objectify themselves” (Freire, 1974, p. 4). As a consequence, Freire posited “their relations with the world become impregnated with consequence” (Freire, 1974, p. 4).
I would suggest these same factors are central to the context of classroom incidents and of the critical reflective teacher becoming transformative agents of their social reality. Freire (1974) stated that through human beings’ active participation in the creative dimension, they could intervene and change reality. The dichotomy Freire (1974) highlighted between integration with one’s own context and adaptation is an important one. According to Friere (1974) integration is attributable to human beings’ capacity to adapt to reality along with the critical capacity to make choices; they can then transform that reality thus making integration a unique human activity. Human beings who lose the ability to make choices, or are subjected to the choices of others, and whose decisions are no longer their own due to external social forces, are no longer integrated with their context; they have adapted (Freire, 1974). And if human beings are incapable of changing reality they instead become adjusted to their environment. In effect, the process of adaptation is a distinctive behaviour in animals and a demonstration of this by human beings is indicative of their dehumanisation (Freire, 1974). Thus, the essential message from Freire here is that human beings, through the process of critical consciousness and reflective practice, should participate in societal and cultural activity whatever the historical-cultural situation and/or epoch, with the goal of integration, not adaptation.

Many scholars of education are committed to the theory and practice of adult teaching and learning. As discussed earlier, many western countries who offer teacher education programmes in their university institutions also espouse the critically reflective teacher. The Government of Western Australia’s Competency Frame Work for Teachers does indeed promote, advocate and emphasize the necessity of many of the characteristics I
have discussed concerning professional effectiveness in teaching (DETWA, 2004). I suppose the critical question is how do teacher education institutions and governments monitor and/or encourage all pre-service teachers and experienced teachers to engage in critical reflective practice? Therefore, in relation to this research and to educators, policymakers, stakeholders and students alike, it is the ability to choose, to decide, and to be capable of critical analysis of our reality and thereby transform that reality for the improvement of humankind that is of vital importance. We cannot, as Freire suggested, rely on technical contents alone, because if we do we will become “cold technicians” or “technocrats” or at best “good reformers” (1974, p. 161). Throughout Freire’s (1974) work he is challenging educators to be attentive of their own critical consciousness and practice. This must be the aim if we are to achieve both the humanisation of our students as subjects and transformations within our historical and cultural era.

To conclude, an article by Chapman (2005) highlighted the hope that adult educators take up the task and the challenge of theorising in adult education. Chapman suggested rather than wait for theory to come to the world of adult education and in the meantime sit surrounded in comfort with old, well-worn known theories and the easily understood, we must venture out and seek for more novel theories that can be brought back and used so as to make our work more intelligible and better. Hence challenging our students and ourselves to use theory in this way can improve practice and enable our students to demonstrate “they can think, they can theorise, they can critique, because they can make themselves understood and they can make it different” (Chapman, 2005, p. 312). These
particular theoretical and practical considerations underpin this inquiry. In the next chapter, I explain the methodological approaches I used to undertake this inquiry.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Background

The methods, strategies, approaches and techniques of qualitative research “can encompass multiple theoretical concepts” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 6). This study is a qualitative inquiry using a phenomenological and heuristic research process. The phenomenological method is chosen to explore how the participants directly experienced the phenomenon of critical reflection. Ultimately it is the process of transforming these lived experiences into consciousness “both individually and as shared meaning” that underpins the study (Patton, 2002, p. 104). This is especially so in relation to the case study of this specific group of participants from an undergraduate teaching degree, that in its content and approach emphasises critical reflection. Thus I have purposely chosen this group of participants over others. Because my own experiences provide a very significant foundation for the main research the heuristic element of inquiry plays a major role, in that I as researcher and the participants share personal experience(s) and engagement with the phenomenon. It is this combination that brings about the possibility for understanding the essence of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative interviewing techniques were deemed the most advantageous for this study, as the purpose was “to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). This is because it was vital to discover what was in and on the minds of the
participants due to what they had experienced and importantly how this had affected them (Patton, 2002). Thus, one-to-one, open question interviews and focus groups have been used for data gathering (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), to enable a commitment to “a naturalistic setting and to the interpretive understanding of the human experience” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 7). A further factor informing the choice of data collection methods was the vulnerable status of participants as pre-service teachers engaged in their final, long practicum. Classroom observations would have provided evidence of the extent to which the pre-service teachers’ thinking was reflected in their practice. However, given that participants were at the time being regularly observed by their mentor teachers and supervisors from Kenmore University, for the purposes of assessing their suitability to qualify as teachers, it was felt that additional observations for the purposes of this research would have been too intrusive. Thus the focus of the research was to explore participants’ thinking about their practice, while acknowledging that verbally expressing an intention to change is not the same as enacting that change.

Interview questions were standardized, sequenced and explicit to the (common) understanding of all the participants. The clarity of the questions was imperative so as to minimize any disparity in the participants’ understanding of what was asked (Patton, 2002). Unclear questions can make the (participant) interviewee “feel uncomfortable, ignorant, confused or hostile” (Paton, 2002, p. 361). Thus, it is important to ask understandable questions as this facilitates in creating a rapport between the interviewer and the interviewees (Patton, 2002, p. 361). The aforementioned is most significant to the substance and outcome of this study because the questions requested the participants to
explain their thinking, feelings, values, assumptions and their behaviour(s) in relation to what they had experienced. Thus, this sampling strategy has been selected as being thought as the best fit for the purpose of this study. Nevertheless, there are “people who think that the only high-quality samples are random ones” (Patton, 2002, p. 242). However, in regard to research issues, reporting and analysis of any research it has been stated “that there are no perfect designs” (Patton, 2002, p. 242). As a result, and in recognition of the limitations of this study, which does not aim to evaluate practices, it is envisioned that the following discussion of the multiple methods used (or methodological approaches and techniques) can justify what is intended as an objective and rational approach to this qualitative study (Patton, 2002).

A design of this nature necessitates flexibility and openness, and qualitative research allows for these factors. In a single study such as this the use of the above methodological practices, techniques and approaches provides the opportunity for exploration. Such approaches also allow for any emergent and insightful phenomena to arise through the use of open-ended, semi-structured interviews, all of which were the main characteristics of this study, with me as researcher the primary research tool. Also according to Neuman (2003), interpretation is the language of qualitative research and as writer and researcher I will be engaged in interpretive writing. In an effort to strengthen this study I have made use of multiple methods or triangulation that I will discuss in the next section. Triangulation is inherent in qualitative research as a strategy that attempts to reflect the complexity, breadth, richness and depth of the phenomenon under investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).
A further consideration of triangulation in this research is as a means to test for consistency in the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). Richardson (2000) proposes that the central image for qualitative inquiry is the crystal not the triangle, which he claims is “a fixed, rigid, two-dimensional object”. In contrast, “crystals grow, change, alter, but they are not amorphous, they are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions”. Thus, Richardson by metaphorically applying “crystals” and their process of crystallization has suggested that this allows texts to validate themselves and as a result of this “we know more, doubt what we do know, and realise there is always more to know” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934).

Richardson’s (2000) ‘crystal’ metaphor I found appealing, and endeavoured to make use of it in this study. I applied the notion of crystallization in relation to finding connections between the one-to-one interviews and the focus group interviews. In the practice of the ‘crystallization process’ there is much more scope for doubts and biases to surface and for uncovering what we may not have realised or have known previously. Coupled with the use of triangulation it is further assurance of the rigor, complexity, depth and accuracy and credibility of the research findings.

Also of consideration is the practice of a bricoleur (and there are many types: methodological, interpretive, narrative, theoretical and political: all of which to some degree will be integrated into this study) who implements a variety of strategies and
methods that can be used as techniques and tools for the collection and analysis of various empirical data. The changes that result from the *bricoleur’s* method produce a *bricolage*, “a set of representations that are pieced together and fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 4). In support of the *bricoleur* another useful methodological practice in qualitative research is the concept of ‘montage’ as in the assembling of images in filmmaking, which invite the viewers to construct interpretations that build on each other as the scene unfolds (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The qualitative researcher who uses montage, like a quilt maker who stiches, edits and puts pieces of reality together, creates a process that brings psychological and emotional unity to an interpretive experience. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) attest, texts based on analogies like montage and quilt making have many different things happening concurrently such as different voices, different points of view, and different perspectives that simultaneously produce and enact meaning. They are dialogical texts that “presume an active audience as they move from the personal to the political, the local to the historical and to the cultural” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). Thus, the methodological practices and interpretive paradigms discussed above are significant considerations to illuminate, strengthen and validate the phenomenon under investigation in this study.

In this research participants have been chosen based on the principle of purposeful sampling, as this will allow for selecting information-rich cases that yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, 2002). Moreover, the qualitative researcher in the quest for this type of inquiry can, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest, take on multiple roles such as the application of crystallization, *bricolage*
and montage as discussed above (Patton, 2002, p. 93). These methodological practices and perspectives ensure that the practices of the research process and the data gathered encompassed multiple strategies and methods. In effect this was to assist me in my search for validity, rich data, and insightful responses especially concerning critical reflective thinking. In particular, classroom teaching, teachers’ experiences and situations of practice can be complex and ambiguous.

To assist me to form a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences, I analysed them in terms of four main categories relating to belief, cognition, affect and behaviour. These four main categories along with subsequent multi-dimensional themes are from a model adapted from Furr and Carroll (2003), which will be discussed later. Because classroom teaching, teachers’ experiences and situations of practice can be complex and ambiguous, this model along with open-ended questions enabled the analysis to develop with rational clarity and allowed me to tease out deeper issues that might be addressed to bring about change to practise in the classroom (Alpert, 2000).

The Research Field: Kenmore University

While considering which university I was going to approach to find volunteers to participate in my study, Kenmore University attracted me due to the philosophy it promoted and espoused. Kenmore University is a vibrant environment where many diverse disciplines such as media, communication and culture, law, business, education, pharmacy, veterinary and biomedical sciences and environmental science are offered, and at times converge to create some interesting undergraduate and postgraduate
interdisciplinary degrees. In this dissertation every effort has been made to protect the anonymity of the university, the participants and the schools visited by me to interview the participants. Kenmore University is a pseudonym. Aliases have been chosen by the participants or by myself and will be used to protect the identity of the participants. No names will be given for the schools visited by me. They will instead be identified by the participants who taught there and by their location in relation to the main metropolitan campus of Kenmore University.

Kenmore University’s School of Education’s mission statement and the numerous selective and core units on offer in the various teacher training programmes caught my attention. In particular two core units impressed me. *Introduction to Teaching*, a core unit at the beginning of the teaching degree, and *Professional Issues in Teaching* offered at the end of the degree are acknowledged as ‘bookend’ units in the structure of the degree. The focus of both these units is developing critical awareness of the diverse roles and responsibilities of the classroom teacher in Australian society, nurturing the development of the reflective practitioner and establishing a foundation for confronting the issues associated with the professional responsibilities of being a teacher. I was most excited as the content of these units matched my interest in research concerning teaching practices, classroom incidents, and the critically reflective practitioner. Therefore, I decided that these were the students I wanted to participate in my study: final-year students who had been or were enrolled in these two units. Thus, at the start of the research the students were in their last semester and about to undertake their final extended practicum and importantly were about to graduate and become primary or secondary classroom teachers.
Sampling and Sample Size

Sampling is a vital consideration for the success of any type of research and is particularly important in the collection of data in interview and focus group research. In essence this is due to the focus on relatively small size samples that have been most effective qualitative studies (Neuman, 2003). The primary purpose of purposive sampling is not to get statistically representative samples. Rather the aim through discourse and social interaction is to collect specific details of events and/or actions that can illuminate and bring deeper understanding within the specific context of the phenomenon under investigation (Neuman, 2003). This study looks at the issues of critical reflection in the reflective practitioner in relation to (critical) incidents in classrooms. I chose to recruit interested people to participate, since this gave me participants who were already interested in critical reflection. The use of purposive sampling was an appropriate method for my particular research criteria (Neuman, 2003).

Method and Analysis

My approach to data collection for this research inquiry was fundamentally driven from the perspective of recruiting participants that were explicitly interested in pursuing the concept of a critical reflective practice. I hoped such participants would have the predisposition to want to engage and talk about their critical reflective practices. However, the participants were a mix from a random sample from the aforementioned group with a willingness to participate in the study. The data collection process was a two-step approach which consisted firstly of individual, one-on-one interviews (see
Appendix 2) with initially 13 individuals. This was followed up at a later date with focus group interviews (see Appendix 3). From the original 13 participants who had completed the one-on-one interviews, nine then took part in the focus group meetings. I eliminated the data collected from the four participants who had completed the one-on-one interviews but not the focus groups. Of the nine remaining participants, I ended up with three focus groups that comprised of 2, 3, and 4 members in each group respectively. Appendix 4 is an information table that outlines participants’ names (pseudonyms), subject area, teaching levels (e.g. primary/secondary), and locations of schools where the participants’ final teaching practice took place and whether they were public or private schools. The three focus group interviews took place within the university in the final days of the participants’ education degree and were conducted on different days. Both of these procedures were facilitated by me, as researcher, asking the same four predetermined open questions. These questions invited participants to reflect on incidents and teaching experiences in the classrooms.

Due to the qualitative and fluid nature of this study it was important to have a frame of reference to help identify the content of the questions I would put forward to the participants. I found that frame of reference in the writings of David Tripp, and in particular in his book ‘Critical Incidents in Teaching’ (1993) as discussed previously. This book focuses primarily on developing professional judgement within one’s own teaching. While Tripp discusses significant methodological and theoretical issues his main aim is to show how teachers can draw on their own classroom experiences to develop professional judgement. Tripp’s (1993) book is guided by various concrete
practical classroom examples that illustrate the use of critical incidents. According to Tripp (1993) what makes teaching a profession is the exercise of professional judgement and without that it is merely a technically expert occupation using an unquestioning technical approach. Tripp concedes that there are “technical routines essential to all teaching” (1993, p. 10). However, the major agenda for professional judgement is to raise awareness and to promote reflection upon these routines. Fundamentally, for a shift to occur out of an unquestioning, technical way of thinking it is necessary to analyse critical incidents. However small, mundane or typical the incident may seem once the process of questioning, reflection and analysis has begun within the teacher that incident has thus been created as a “critical incident” (Tripp, 1993, p. 25). Consequently reflection on these critical incidents “develops an increasing understanding of and control over professional judgement, and thereby practices” (Tripp, 1993, p. 25).

A further consideration of why critical incidents should be examined is that when a critical incident emerges these issues affect the professional and personal lives of teachers. Also, the emotional character of the teachers has direct implications for their work in the classroom (Furr & Carroll, 2003). For the purpose of this research a critical incident was thus defined as either a negative or a positive experience recognized by the participants as providing a catalyst for change. This definition of a critical incident was presented to the participants before the interview. Then at the interview each participant was given a copy of four open-ended questions (see Appendices 3 and 4) and asked to respond after reflecting on each. After having time to reflect participants were asked to describe both the nature and the significance of any incidents and explain how they
thought these incidents had influenced their development as teachers. The format was consistent with the method used by Tripp (1993).

**Participants and Procedures**

The participants in their final six months of a four-year education degree were selected from students studying a unit entitled *Professional Issues in Teaching*. I explained the focus of my study to a class of 68 students and requested them to volunteer to participate by writing their name and contact details on a piece of paper. Thirteen students volunteered and participated in the first part of the study. It is an interesting observation that just over 19% of the class population came forward leaving a significant 80.9% of soon-to-be classroom teachers unwilling, too busy or uninterested in discussing the concept of the critically reflective practitioner in the classroom. Other possible explanations could be a fear of becoming involved with the research. Or the remaining class population may have assessed that they just did not have the time to give to me due to work, study or family commitments. The research study involved a two-part process. While engaged in completing their school-based placements in the Assistant Teacher Programme, students were invited to participate in one-on-one interviews. After returning to the university and only several weeks before completing their four-year education degree, the students were invited to discuss the same questions in focus groups. Nine participants comprising eight females and one male were able to take part in the final part of the study.
Interview Procedure

It is interesting to note that the concept of ‘interviewing’ has been around in one form or another since the time of the “ancient Egyptians who used the method as a way to conduct population censuses” (Fontana & Fray, 2000, p. 647). In recent years the United States of America has placed remarkable reliance on ‘interviewing’ to the extent that many academics have dubbed it the ‘interviewing society’. Both qualitative and quantitative researchers alike have come to depend on the interview as the primary method for data gathering, regardless of whether the purpose and analysis is a “technocratic deductive approach or a transcendent inductive approach” (Fontana & Fray, 2000, p. 646). Researchers tend to have an intrinsic belief that the interview process produces a narrative experience that is a dependable and truthful description of the respondents’ lives and selves and that any evolved relationship between interviewer and interviewee does not overly create any bias of the account (Fontana & Fray, 2000; Silverman, 2000). In effect interviewing is a viable mechanism for obtaining information today whether about individuals, groups or organisations. Fontana & Fray suggested this is especially so where many western societies are characterised by “individuation, diversity and specialised role relations” (2000, pp. 646-647). Here they advised the interview has become a “universal mode of systematic inquiry” (Fontana & Fray, 2000, pp. 646-647).

In so saying, the interview cannot be thought of as a technical process with standardised procedures. Fontana and Fray recommended that researchers take into account the “contextual, societal and interpersonal” aspects of the interaction (2000, p. x).
Consequently, the significance of the one-to-one interviews in this inquiry is as a means of attaining an insight into the social and culturally specific world as seen and experienced from the perspective of the participants (Silverman, 2000). It may be argued that imposing “a priori” categories as in the model from Furr and Carroll (2003) and used as a tool for analysis in this research to explain behaviour and feelings in relation to the predetermined questions is too structured to ensure in-depth, rich data to emerge (Fontana & Fray, 2000 and Silverman, 2000). But I would suggest the predetermined questions are sufficiently unstructured to allow participants plenty of scope for complex behaviour and feelings to surface. Finally, I would posit that the “cultural stories” concerning the participants’ answers, and the collective nature of these, highlight the authenticity of the shared experiences. It also allows the researcher, as Silverman suggested, to “see the world from the perspective of the subjects” (2000, p. 824). Importantly the design of the study has not been constructed to control people, or to prove anything, and does not intend to make predictions concerning the given social settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

**Focus Groups**

I used both individual interviews and focus groups in order to explore the experiences of the research participants from different perspectives. By using these two different approaches I was hoping to elicit deep, thoughtful and reflective feedback, and indeed the collected data portrays this. I found that when the individual participants later met within the focus groups, the commonalities they shared in discussing the questions and their interactions with one another resulted in rich, lively and insightful responses and
was most valuable for my research. Historically, focus group discussions are not a new technique and can be traced back to social scientists’ use of them in the 1920s in the development of survey questionnaires. In the following sixty years focus groups were used to evaluate people’s perception on any given topic, and were used in market research to understand people’s wants and needs (Fontana & Fray, 2000). Although focus groups did not receive much recognition as a method of inquiry during that period, since the late 1980s they have made an important impact in many disciplines. Feminist and postmodern researchers have largely been responsible for this shift. They have pursued this technique with the argument that through other methods, particular groups and individuals within certain population groups, such as women of colour and the disempowered, had been rendered invisible, with no voice to their feelings and experiences (Madriz, 2000). Drawing on this perspective it seemed to me that focus groups in the context of this inquiry elicited a rare opportunity to enable these pre-service classroom teachers, who otherwise might not have had the opportunity, to share and express their experiences and feelings in a safe and non-judgemental setting.

The advantages of using focus groups as a research method were as follows. Firstly, it was an opportunity for the participants of this study to debrief their final practicum, as they listened to each other, entered into dialogue and expressed their experiences and feelings. Secondly, for the collective cohort it was a safe environment to share their beliefs, opinions and experiences. This sharing of experiences has an empowering effect especially when participants can express similar experiences and feelings (Madriz, 2000, p. 841). This was the case for the participants in my study. Thirdly, it allowed me as
researcher to observe the participants as they interacted with one another and discussed and shared their experiences about the various incidents that had emerged in discussion as being significant. Fundamentally, focus group discourses are “a way of listening to people and learning from them” (Madriz, 2000, p. 835).

Imperative within focus groups is the role of the ‘moderator’, a term Krueger (1994) prefers for the function of the ‘interviewer’. The term ‘interviewer’ Krueger suggests can evoke a more limited notion of a two-way conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. Importantly, unlike in an interview, participants in a focus group may have to rationalise their positions to other members of the group. The focus group discussion should be a more moderating or guiding method of practice with the moderator keeping things moving listening and observing all members within the group. For example the role of the moderator enables the opportunity for multiple interactions amongst all members in the group with the moderator nurturing the flow of conversation to ensure all voices are heard. A focus group that is “carefully planned” can be most agreeable as it allows the participants to “share their ideas and perceptions.” It also influences responses within the group (Patton, 2002, p. 386). Indeed, it soon became apparent that the participants had much in common in this regard. For example all were nearing the end of a course that promoted critical reflection and had just experienced, for an extended period of time, working in and being in control of a classroom. This had potentially enabled the theory and practice of critical thinking in the reflective practitioner to be played out. During the focus group interviews the above factors contributed to a collective, heightened awareness of their struggle with the demands of a new role, especially
concerning pedagogical practices, and of their own identity within a different milieu. The emergent rapport and empathy between participants swiftly became evident as they passionately engaged in discussion and debated with each other.

Consequently, working with a relatively small number of participants from Kenmore University allowed an opportunity for the research to reveal rich in-depth responses. One focus group consisted of two participants, another of four, and the third of three. Due to the many variables that can transpire in focus groups it was ultimately not feasible to proportionally control the sampling. More important was the “interpretive interactionism” (Madriz, 2000, p. 841) - the observing of the shared ideas, opinions and experiences of the individuals in the group(s) - that made the data most valuable for the research study.

**Conduct and Ethics**

The research design and approach to analysis were developed prior to the investigation. A similar questionnaire had been piloted. The one-on-one interviews and focus groups were conducted at a preselected informal meeting place and addressed the predetermined questions as in Appendix 3 and 4 respectively. All conversations and interactions were recorded and then transcribed. Notes were also taken by myself during every meeting and paraphrased back to the participants to ensure the language, interpretation and intention of the data had been correctly documented. All research undertaken for this study conformed to Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics guidelines.
Analysis

I used a four-part ‘cluster’ model adapted from Furr and Carroll (2003) to analyse the participants’ responses from both the one-to-one interviews and the focus group interviews. The model consists of a ‘Belief Cluster’, a ‘Cognitive Cluster’, an ‘Affective Cluster’ and a ‘Behavioural Cluster’. Within these four main categories there are nine sub-categories, which I used to further analyse the participants’ responses about how they thought of themselves in relation to their teaching and classroom experiences. For example, the Belief Cluster consists of (a) existential issues/value conflicts. Incidents occurring in this cluster were those that stimulated participants’ re-evaluation of life and personal values and include existential issues/values conflicts. The Cognitive Cluster consists of (b) cognitive development, (c) perceptions of competency, and (d) professional development. See Figure 1 below.
BELIEF CLUSTER

a) Existential Issues/Values Conflicts
Included incidents that stimulated participants’ re-evaluation of life and personal values and include existential issues/values conflicts.

BEHAVIOURAL CLUSTER
(i) Skill Development
(made up of incidents that changed participants’ level of teaching practices including any event that affected skill development)

COGNITIVE CLUSTER
(b) Cognitive Development
(c) Beliefs about competency
(d) Professional Development
(that facilitated change in cognitive structures, beliefs about competency and professional development)

AFFECTIVE CLUSTER
(e) Perceived Support
(f) Perceived Obstacles
PERSONAL GROWTH
(g) Within the teaching practice
(h) Outside of the teaching practice
/incidents in which the primary effect on participants were affective

Figure 1
The focus here is on that which facilitated change in participants’ cognitive structures, beliefs about competency and professional development. The Affective Cluster consists of (e) perceived support, (f) perceived obstacles, and a sub-heading within this cluster labelled Personal Growth which consists of (g) - within the teaching program, and (h) - outside the teaching program. Here the focus is on incidents in which the primary effect on participants is affective. Finally the Behavioural Cluster consists of (i) skill development. This cluster is made up of incidents that would have changed participants’ level of teaching practices including any event that affected skill development (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Applying this model as a means of analysing the data involved coding participants’ answers according to the four clusters. This model allowed me to develop a diagrammatic representation of the responses in relation to critical incidents in the classrooms.
CHAPTER FOUR

Participants’ Responses

Introduction

The discussion below is, firstly, based on the individual responses to the one-on-one questions about participants’ experiences in their final teaching practicum known as ATP (Assistant Teachers’ Programme). The ATP was the culmination of the participants’ four-year degree in the university’s Bachelor of Education course, which comprised of both primary and secondary pre-teacher students. The second part of this chapter discusses the participants’ responses to questions asked in focus group meetings. A full analysis and discussion of these responses is found in chapters 5 and 6.

The one-on-one individual questions and the focus group questions were open-ended and developed from the concepts already explored in the literature review in chapter two. The questions were developed from the content material of the many authors discussed in the chapter. For example, a key focus was my assumption about the necessity of teachers being critically reflective of their practice in order to identify the values that underlie that practice, and which can and may affect how teachers think and act in their role as classroom teachers. In the first phase of the research I met with each participant separately for a face-to-face interview which took place in the final two weeks of the participants’ ATP (See Appendix 4 for participants’ details). The reason I initially conducted individual interviews (with myself as facilitator with each participant) was to
gather informative responses of depth and detail for the qualitative analysis. It was hoped that this information rich data would bring about a greater understanding of the participants’ experiences in their role as classroom teachers. The rationale to follow up with focus group interviews (again with myself as facilitator) and with very similar questions to the individual questions was to enable participants of similar backgrounds to share their experiences, stimulate conversation and assess the advent of any patterns that emerged. The focus group interviews took place in the participants’ final week(s) at university. As stated previously there were originally 13 participants in the 1-on-1 meetings; however four of the participants did not partake in the focus group meeting which was the second and final meeting regarding the gathering of the data for this study. Consequently, because of this I did not include those four participants in this study at all. Thus this left a total of nine participants in the research.

**Individual Responses**

**Question 1: Think back over the past week(s) in relation to your classroom teaching practices and tell me about an incident(s) that made you say to yourself, “My teaching practice is really going as I thought it should”.

Initially in answer to this question all of the participants commented to some degree on their ability and competence to practice within the classroom. Some of the responses were straightforward enough, however some of the participants’ responses were more complex, inasmuch that the responses signified several issues within the one situation. For example there are issues that were integrated with inclusivity and student diversity within the same classroom, or the authenticity of teaching. A major issue for most participants was behaviour management.
Elaine was based in an outer suburban public primary school. For Elaine, her major successes were associated with making successful decisions about planning based on her past experience. In this example, Elaine shows how she is able to think independently and apply previous knowledge to a new situation.

There has been one series of lessons that I planned - the cooperating teacher wanted me to do narratives with them. I basically took it upon myself, from my previous experiences, to say well - it is no use doing narratives with them over one lesson it really needs to be done over a series of lessons. So I planned it over a series of lessons and it really has gone exactly as I wanted it to go.

Elaine’s lessons on narrative have really gone to plan. Based on what Elaine had done before, she was “able to refine certain aspects and it has worked just as I thought it would.”

Kate, teaching English and SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment) in a regional private senior high school, felt she had been successful when students who don’t usually work do so, and when students who don’t usually submit work do so. Kate also felt successful in “coping with everything, getting through the day without too many hitches, and planning for all classes so that everything is planned and flowing.”

Jacinta, teaching English and SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment) in an outer suburban public senior high school, felt she has been successful when students “produce magnificent work” even though others have complained that they have not understood the task. Jacinta recalled with pride a series of lessons on archaeology.

For example, the Year 8s were doing a study about archaeology and we started with such things as time concepts, what archaeologists do and
how they do it. We went outside to do a dig, and I gave them the instructions and they were very excited about it and some of the students did it fantastically, did exactly as I asked, they produced reports and seemed happy to be doing rather being in the classroom at their desks.

Jon, teaching English and SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment) in an outer suburban public senior high school, recalled a similar experience “when students responded magnificently” to his innovative approach to teaching about government. Jon and his class created an imaginary island where 200 children were stranded with no teachers or adults. The class had to create their own government with “30 of them going to be the Year 10s and the other 170 going to be the Year 9s as their subjects.” The first thing the students was said, “Right the Year 9s are our slaves”. However the class had also studied human rights and Jon was delighted when one of the students…

… turned around to me and said “I don’t really think we should keep the Year 9s as slaves, me and a couple of friends are thinking of leaving the colony and starting up our own little colony with free slaves”.

Jon thought this was fantastic, particularly when more of the students came to him saying, “You know this slave thing? I am not actually keen on it.” For Jon, this was particularly satisfying because some of the students who had picked up on the idea that people have rights were from the group he had earlier thought of as “the ‘other’ because they are not the ones who usually do work or hand anything in or really pay attention in class.” The engagement of these particular students made Jon feel really pleased.

At this stage of the interview process Elaine’s, Kate’s, Jacinta’s and Jon’s responses focused mainly on their beliefs concerning their professional competence. In regard to their teaching practice these four participants were being reflective practitioners in a
technical sense as they took into account how the students responded to the contents of their lessons, and then reflected on the resulting students’ learning outcomes.

However, the critical aspect of practice such as personal scrutiny, challenging assumptions or the transformation that learning can have for students did not seem to be present, except for Jon’s response to some of his students’ comments concerning slavery and human rights.

The remaining participants provided more complex answers to question one that included mention of authenticity, behaviour management and inclusivity in teaching, support from peers or lack of, values, and existential matters such as classroom incidents that stimulated the participants to re-evaluate their life and values as a teacher. Leila’s response seemed particularly rich in this respect.

Leila, who was teaching mathematics in an inner suburban private high school, talked about how she felt after her final evaluation at the end of her 10 weeks in school. Although she had done really well, and was able to feel that she had “achieved everything that I had set out to do” Leila still felt that “there was so much more that I could have done, that I should have done, that I should have predicted, that I should have known (spoken regretfully). Those things I did not get right (deep, deep sigh) were so important, so important (laughs).” Leila then reflected on this experience and offered the following comment.

Teaching is not something that can be taught, you can only experience it I feel ... the finer points of teaching ... (pause) … those were the ones
that were the most difficult things ... that I wish I had done better at. With my other two teaching practices I went in, I observed my cooperating teacher, I learned as much as I could from their style and I tried to emulate it because I knew that would get me the highest marks. But being here for 10 weeks is an entirely different ball game. I mean you cannot rely on someone else’s teaching practice or even their style in the classroom because you really ... students are able to see through you they can see when you are not being genuine. When what you are saying is not or how you are teaching is not coming from the heart.

Leila went on to explain how emulating other teachers got her through the first half of her ATP very successfully, but then “at the 6/7 week mark everything fell apart in the classroom- it really did!” This moment was a big catalyst for change for Leila, as it showed her very forcibly that “ultimately it is not about doing something that worked for somebody else it is finding things that are going to work for you.”

What followed was a couple of very, very difficult weeks but at the end I admit I am proud of the fact that things have come around and that the situation has changed and I go in and the students see me, as me rather than an extension of their teacher. I spent a whole week reflecting on this and my approach and style then changed immensely.

Leila talked a great deal about the importance of reflecting on her practice, and on her struggle to be an authentic teacher rather than a “copy of someone else”. Following this realisation the relationship with the students became “a lot more personal and genuine as well.” The realisation of what had been happening and the impact this had on her relationships with students was like an epiphany.

In a similar way, Eva teaching English and SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment) in an outer suburban public senior high school also talked about the importance of reflection.
Sometimes I think students would have responded better to a particular topic, but they didn’t. I try to reason why but sometimes you have to accept that they (students) are having a bad day. Or I have reflected on what happened in classroom that day and if my lesson was not received well I would think - I will not do it that way again! This is where I feel that what I have heard and read and written about being a “reflective practitioner” is now that I see how really important it is and if I do nothing else I always do my daily reflections. In doing this I find it really beneficial to what I want to do and why I want to do it.

Eva seemed overall content and relaxed with her final ATP in relation to her classroom practices but did express concern about students’ behaviour in the classroom. “Sometimes in the classroom the behaviour is a bit ... off. During my first week one child hit another child (in the classroom) even though this is not typical I do know these things happen.” However at this point in our one-on-one discussion Eva did not seem overly concerned about this, perhaps because it was a single event.

The next two participants, Kara and Tilly, expressed several concerns regarding teaching styles, behaviour management and peer support. Tilly also seemed to have an additional concern with regards to an anomaly regarding lesson plans. Kara teaching English and SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment) in an outer suburban public senior high school had come back to this same school to complete her final ATP thinking it would be very similar to the positive experience she had last time. But, “last time I was only in one department, English, but now I am in two with three different teachers and two different curriculums, and that has added to my stress level.” Kara also felt a bit “disjointed” as it “is two completely different departments and different styles in regards to teaching.” Kara was also having a behaviour management problem with one particular year 10 class, who were not responding to or engaging in her lessons.
Here, my students were saying, “What is the point of studying Society and Environment?” And this is where I was finding I was having most of my problem … I started thinking why is it not working what am I doing wrong? It was behaviour management - the process - and I seemed to have forgotten what I had been doing before, it had totally slipped out of my mind, and I really needed to use that.

Kara then began implementing the behaviour management process she had forgotten to set up, but also began to reflect on how she could “answer the students to why S&E would be beneficial to them” with regard to the world they lived in. “I have introduced and incorporated new learning methods to get them interested such as more IT (information technology) time and use of computers to research of a topic.” Both these practices reduced the negative classroom behaviour and Kara now felt her teaching practice was going as she thought it should.

Tilly who was teaching Art and Media in an outer suburban public senior high school had several issues that were in parts distressing her and making it rather difficult for this final ATP to be a good and positive experience. Tilly’s first response to question one was “I actually had no preconceived ideas, because I know every Art room is run differently.” But it seemed from the morning of day one of her ATP Tilly did feel vulnerable as a consequence of what she was experiencing at the school.

I did the first lesson on the first day of term. I had no opportunity to observe the culture - how the teachers are with the kids. I really had to wing it. I am talking about managing, behavioural management, being friendly to the kids but also controlling the classroom situations you have to deal with. Then at the end of week 3 I got a bombshell, which said, “You’re not friendly to the kids; you do not look like you want to be in there.” But I didn’t really see that what I was doing was any different to what they (cooperating teachers) were doing which is like barking at the kids, basically getting them into line.
A major issue for Tilly was the feeling of a lack of peer support. “How many times do you get told that thing of, don’t smile for the first two weeks, you are not their friend, you are their teacher?” Tilly felt demoralized “I wasn’t aware that I wasn’t smiling, I actually was probably a lot tenser than I thought I was!” Working with four different cooperating teachers who “all have different ways of doing things” made each day difficult for Tilly. “Every day is different and I never know what to expect, I really don’t!” Tilly also felt the stress of trying to please and receive the approval of each cooperating teacher for her lesson plans for the students, “it’s also got to please the co-operating teacher.” This was further impacted by how the activity was received by the students.

Every minute I have to think, I also have to think on my feet (voice animated) in terms of this activity that I have organised today for the kids. Are they engaged, are they interested, are they understanding it? Wow - they are not getting this, I will have to change, ok, and I have to come up with something quick.

Tilly stated that after the first three weeks “I did not feel at all supported, I was getting no positives to balance any of the negatives” but the teachers then started to say, “Oh yes you are starting to relax now” and Tilly began to have more confidence about her classroom practice. But all of these issues were compounded by a difference in opinion between Tilly and her university supervisor on how to write up lesson plans. Tilly did not feel any empathy from her supervisor and she felt this was because she herself comes from an Art background whereas her supervisor came from an English background. This final ATP for Tilly was mostly disappointing and stressful.

My supervisor has also this really pedantic thing about lesson plans - wants everything written down, the headings, introduction, conclusion, main body, room numbers and times. But Kenmore University is saying lesson plans are a crutch, this is what Katy (university lecturer) said at the last meeting. I do need some structure to my lesson plans but I really thought we really would be letting go of those sorts of rigid structures
and we would be a little bit freer but it hasn’t really happened like that at all.

Marlene, teaching English and SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment) in an outer suburban public senior high school, demonstrated a strong confidence in her competency regarding her classroom practice. Marlene’s comments when dealing with multiple issues concerning behaviour management and the inclusivity of different students and their needs in the classroom are most insightful. In answer to question one about whether her thoughts that the teaching experience was going as she thought it should Marlene replied that her supervisor was in class on Monday “and I thought, ‘I will show him what I can do’ - but the kids were worse than they have ever been.” This was a Year 8 class who “have a bad reputation” within the school. But Marlene feels that they generally respond well to her as she says, “I am firm but fair.” Marlene believes this is so due to her application of “lots of extrinsic motivation of a positive and negative kind. They seem to respond well to this because they are so young and boisterous.”

Due to the policy of inclusive schooling Marlene has various students of different ethnicity and special needs all in this one class. On this particular day with her supervisor in attendance Marlene had a rather challenging time as she explains:

There are multiple issues such as ADHD, autism, dyspraxia, hearing loss, vision problems and cerebral palsy, and Indigenous students. At any given time I am unlikely to have any more than 2 aides in the classroom and one student in particular is volatile ADHD and happened to be having a very bad day that day. When the ADHD boy went off and started swearing and slamming doors and things I had his aide deal with that. I managed duty of care with the kids when he came back, I quietly counselled him while keeping an eye on the other kids at the same time and (laughs) it was just wild. But I stayed calm and I kept dealing with it and at the end the 3 kids who had actually stayed on task during the lesson I gave them stickers and things and a bit of praise. I managed to balance it.
Marlene felt she was still able to teach effectively during this lesson because she had “stayed calm and used behaviour management skills I had learned from other prac teachers and on the job, as opposed to stuff we had learned at uni because we hadn’t really learnt that much. We have learnt theory but the application has always been a bit of a tenuous link at Kenmore.” Behaviour management is an issue for Marlene but she has taken it on board and sees this type of environment as a challenge.

This is a major pedagogical deficiency that I have, the behavioural management imbedded in the pedagogy, so I knew if I came back to this school I had built up a good relationship and I really like the kids. I wanted a chance to work in that diverse needs, diverse attitudes kind of challenging environment I find it really stimulating actually.

Table 1
Summary of main points emerging from Question 1 - Individual Responses

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<thead>
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Main points emerging</th>
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| Question 1: Think back over the past week(s) in relation to your classroom teaching practices and tell me about an incident(s) that made you say to yourself, “My teaching practice is really going as I thought it should”. | • Ability and competence to practice. For example, past experience and application of previous knowledge enabled effective and successful teaching practice outcomes in participants’ experience.  
  • Evidence of capacity to critically reflect. For example, existential issues concerning classroom incidents that stimulated thought of one’s own teaching skills and practice  
  • Issues of concern for the participants which impeded their development as a classroom teacher: authenticity of self; inclusivity in teaching; behavioural management and a lack of peer support. |
The second question invited the participants to reflect on a classroom incident that challenged them or made them reassess any assumption they discovered that they held concerning their role as a teacher and/or of the student(s) involved.

**Question 2:** Think back over the past week(s). Identify a specific classroom incident in which you were faced with a situation, which challenged you in some way or made you re-evaluate some assumptions you may have held. Describe what happened and what particular aspects of the incident gave you greater awareness of yourself in your role as a classroom teacher and/or of the student(s) involved?

Elaine, thinking of her public primary school experiences, immediately laughed and responded with “this one’s easy”. There were two main issues for Elaine. The first concerned the orderliness of the classroom. “I have a situation where the classroom I am in is really quite a messy classroom, it is unorganised and it’s just the way my cooperating teacher functions, it’s obvious it’s the way she has always functioned; to me it was a bit of an issue!” Due to the fact that Elaine was only a temporary teacher and only going to be in this classroom for 10 weeks she was concerned with how the students would react if she transformed the space. “I did not know based on my readings ... how I could create an effective learning environment for them, so I spoke to Liz Cooper (pseudonym, university lecturer) and explained the situation to her.” Liz suggested to Elaine to organize lessons as often as possible that would take the students out of the classroom and into a different environment(s).

I thought that makes sense and probably in an ideal world it would have worked. However the kids in the class (they are Year 6) a lot of them (and it could be connected) ... have a lot of problems with disrespect. They have no idea about respect and they really disrespect each other, themselves and everything around them. There was name-calling, dobbing, and silliness that was so disruptive and a major problem in the class.
This is the second issue for Elaine and as she reflected above she is concerned that maybe there is a connection between the disorganized classroom and the disrespect of the students. After much reflection and critical assessment of the situation and the options available to her, Elaine formulated a lesson plan that incorporated these two issues.

I thought I would take them to the Drama room. The plan was to do role-plays on ‘respect’ and role-play different scenarios about ‘respect’ and how we show ‘respect’. It was a great opportunity for them to get out of the classroom and do something different and they were very excited about going into the Drama room. However, when we got there ... they just ran amok, they really just did not, would not follow my instructions. So I just abandoned the lesson ... took them back to the classroom, sat them down, this was all in about the space of 10 minutes, told them ‘I do not want to hear a word from any of you’ they did silent work for about 20 minutes and then we had a big discussion about what went on, who the culprits were, and what punishments should be distributed to them.

The outcome was very disappointing for Elaine and really challenged her ideas about what she had learned about teaching. “What I had learned was that if kids are engaged and interested and excited about something then it should work, it should be a successful lesson, and it wasn’t! I had made the assumption that it would be a success.” On reflection Elaine came to the conclusion that it had all been a bit too much of an excitement for the students as they did not “get out of the classroom a lot and they had not done any Drama or anything like that before”. After Elaine’s discussion with the students the role-play lesson(s) were eventually completed and with great success. Elaine stated, “The students have learned some lessons out of it themselves, I have learned also, and the disruptive behaviour has reduced to about half of what it was before which was the whole plan of having the role plays in the first place”.

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The main issue for Kate focused on her assumptions concerning her students’ knowledge learned from television about the day-to-day issues regarding the world we live in.

My Year 8s are doing Culture and we did a fairly big section on different religions. The issue of Iraq and terrorism came up and the kids didn’t quite have an understanding of it because of some of the comments they made. I was actually surprised as I thought they would have been more informed students. That was probably a big assumption I made.

Kate explained that she has always been a “News junkie” and watched the News several times a day, every day.

But the main assumption for me was I thought these kids would have watched the News; that has been a big assumption ... that I have come across kids who don’t watch the News (spoken with incredulity). But my Year 8s and Year 10s ... nobody watches the News. The big famine in Niger has been on the News and in the newspapers for several weeks, none of the students had heard about it. So this has given me a greater awareness of myself as a teacher. As a result, I got my students as homework to watch the News not the whole programme just enough to bring to class something of interest to them that they had heard reported on the News.

Re-evaluation of these issues due to this classroom incident has increased Kate’s classroom practice more effectiveness.

Jacinta, quietly reflecting, stated, “The socio-economic area of the school I am in is quite low.” Jacinta experienced several incidents that challenged her assumptions about the role of being a teacher. The first incident occurred while Jacinta was taking her form class.

I was at the front of the classroom taking the roll and marking off the absentees, when all of a sudden a bowl of spaghetti Bolognese came flying through the window! It landed on the floor, creating a huge mess and smell. I wasn’t sure what to do but I remained calm. I discovered three students were responsible. I gave them the option to clean it up or there would be repercussions for them, so they cleaned it up. I suppose
that challenged me in regards to me being able to cope with an incident like that.

The second incident concerned an approach to learning, which created a conflict in values between those held by Jacinta and those held by her students.

When students go on to years 11 and 12 they have made the decision that they want to be there. They choose their own subjects therefore they have more of an ethic to learn so I that is an assumption I have. It is a vocational education unit but the students will sit down for one hour, rock in their chair, and be happy to do nothing, and that surprises me! You can go back to them a dozen times and ask ‘do you understand the question?’ or ‘let’s re-evaluate’. One girl in particular said ‘no, I don’t want to be here, I am not going to do any work, I have to be here and I am not going to do anything’. I would give her other options such as go on the computer, research, cut and paste information for her assignment but she still said ‘No’!

Jacinta stated, “For those students I just feel I am babysitting, making sure they do not go on the Internet and look at the wrong sort of sites or wander off around the school or whatever. So that gives me more an awareness of myself in my role as a teacher: that you are not just there as a person who imparts knowledge.” Jacinta also talked about when she was at school that there was an expectation from teachers and of oneself that work handed in to be assessed was completed to the best of your ability.

Now since I was at school it seems that near enough is good enough - you just hand it in, it doesn’t matter what it looks like ... and I don’t understand that. So trying to put my values of a work ethic, studying, being at school and in life using the skills you have learnt is not something they (students) value. So that has made me assess that people have different values. I ... have had to struggle with frustration ... of a different value system.

Now near the end of her pre-service teaching experience Jacinta described how she would do things differently in the future:

Initially at the beginning of this school experience I had this idealistically theoretical approach (incredulous laugh). But now ... what’s practical, what is going to work, what will engage the students, what will
keep them on task. It is still extending them but making it more relevant to them instead of this theoretical approach I always tend to adopt.

Jon explained his experiences at a large public high school as being especially challenging and compounded by the school’s location in a low socio-economic area in the outer suburbs. In response to question two Jon talked about inclusivity, ethnicity and the importance of acknowledgement of different values and the existential issues of others of different ethnicity. Due to the number of Aboriginal students on the roll, the school has employed Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) so that the students if they had a problem could visit an AEO in his/her office. Jon explained that due to a high percentage of students spending time with an AEO and not turning up to classes the school brought out a policy that students “can only visit them in times of extreme need or during their own time ... they are not there as a social club.” Jon went on to explain:

I have a few of kids that are Aboriginal although I cannot see it, they’re very fair ... but Aboriginal. They just don’t bother turning up to class or if they do they are such ahhhh ... distractions to the rest of the class! They will run around, they will play with the taps in the Science block; they will turn on the gas and ... or you try to tell them to stop, but it is a simply case of “f... you, sir”! At first the assumption was that um ... yeah, I can overcome this, I can gain their trust and all that. But now it is getting to the point where literally I do not want them in the class. I know it is terrible but I do not have the ability to control 5 or 6 students (always the same students) and keep the others under control ... I have a total of 33 in the class.

When students are being disruptive in class teachers can send these students to the classroom of a cooperating teacher, known as “buddy class”, or send them to the AEO’s office. They are strategies in place for these students but Jon is reluctant to utilise these options.

I don’t want to send them to “buddy class” every single day because I have done it a couple of times and they just didn’t go! Or I send them
down to the AEO and they don’t take any work with them and Jerry (AEO) will come back and say, ‘Here’s the student, and what were they supposed to be doing?’ I say, ‘I sent work down with them’ and the AEO says, ‘Oh, we never got any work.’

Jon spoke to other teachers about these incidents involving the Aboriginal students and they “suggested working in groups or one-on-one communication because they are reasonably good at that, when they pay attention, even whole group discussions and whole group readings.” However Jon experiences difficulties and adversity when “as soon as something comes along that I need them to work individually ... bang, something happens and ... it’s just ridiculous.” These experiences seem to have caused Jon some anguish when he reflected on his role as a teacher and of the students when he stated:

So my assumptions if I had any were that I never imagined I would have experienced this behaviour and language from any students in the classroom and the total disregard for their education and learning.

Leila, in the last week of her final teaching practice at an inner suburban private senior high school, has had to face certain challenges to the assumptions she had about the teacher’s role. Leila has a Year 10 male student in her maths class who from day one has never applied himself to his work. “Maths is not his strong subject so he does the bare minimum to pass. He is not a rude student or confrontational he just simply ... unless I challenge him and say ‘are you doing your work?’ he is more likely to waste the whole period.” Due to these experiences Leila had made several assumptions about this student.

I have basically made some assumptions about how he applies himself. I made that assumption across all the learning areas and all aspects of his personal life. Then this week when we went to assembly this particular student stood up and played the guitar in front of everyone. It was just astonishing that I have been here for 10 weeks and I did not realise he was a very gifted musician and not someone who did not apply themselves, just because that particular student did not apply himself in my classes. I suppose it is a common assumption that teacher make.
Leila went on to explain that she believed it was conducive for teachers’ learning to get involved within the school milieu and get to know the students themselves.

I have made a tremendous effort to get to know the students. I have conducted numerous surveys, I have spoken to them and I think I have created quite good rapport with them. I have been to music concerts, dance concerts and every opportunity that was presented, to see them in another light. Yet this particular student had slipped by and I was really surprised.

This new awareness of her student enabled Leila to reflect on her own school days.

The role of the teacher is so complex and is such a responsible position to be in because basically ... I remember when I was in high school and certain teachers making comments that I feel were not deserved or they weren’t sufficiently accurate to describe who I was. I still remember how I felt when those comments were made ... (deep sad sigh).

The incident lead to a realization for Leila that caused her to relate the following:

An adult, whether a teacher or not, when relating to a child is always in a position of power. So I am very careful of the comments that I make to students even although I never actually voiced my assumptions even to the point that I never really realized I had those assumptions. But here I was being confronted by them and it was very, very unsettling I did not like that about myself!

Eva related her experiences also at a rather challenging outer suburban public senior high school. Eva shared similar experiences to Jacinta and Jon in relation to her values and beliefs concerning learning and her role as a teacher. Eva was teaching four different classes but with one of these classes the students were not responding to Eva’s lessons or her teaching practices.

This one particular class and the attitude of some of the students was such that I was quite concerned with how I was going to manage that and how I was going to get them on side! It was to do with their behaviour and how they were responding to me and my lessons. I could see I would need to try and work out a way to manage this.
As a result Eva had to re-assess and re-evaluate her usual approach to teaching and the methods she used. After much thought and with some trepidation Eva entered the classroom and “taught them in a completely different way to the way I taught my other students in the other classes. And it worked!” This was a great relief for Eva and she stated:

I am talking here about is re-evaluating assumptions. I have with this class taken on a very different approach concerning my values towards teaching and learning. I let them have their iPods if they were working. I have another class, same year, and same curriculum but with this class it is much more hands on work, more concrete set work and much less academic than my other class. But I had to go slowly with this class, do things a bit different but this is the way I got them engaged without the disruptions and their non-engagement.

Eva conceded that with this class she has taken on a very different approach with regard to her teaching style, but stated, “I feel I have got their respect” even though “it might be a bit unorthodox.” She went on:

I did not think I would resort to ....bribery (spoken with an incredulous chortle). It was like a negotiation - I will let you have that if you do this work for me, and it is working. Something I had to let go over my head was the chatter as it was a bit more than the other classes. I would bring it down but I would not come down hard on them I tended to be a bit more relaxed with them. I now have some of the other students in the class telling the students who are chatting that they should not be doing it.

It would seem that Eva has had to struggle with her inner self/beliefs but shows she is standing by her convictions with this final statement:

I had to re-evaluate some of the things I thought I should or should not do. I had to make that decision it may … not be right by the books or whatever but with this class it is working. I cannot believe I have taken this completely different approach to teaching (with this particular class) but I have continually reflected upon it - and it has been my decision.
Kara had returned for a second time to the same outer suburban public senior high school to complete her final school experience and was confronted both with aspects of authenticity in relation to her teaching practices and with pre-held assumptions about a particular student, due to her experiences with him the first time she had done “teaching practice” at this school. Kara knows this student, “and due to the behaviour from him before I did not think I would get any work out of him this time, he also gets quite angry very quickly.” The first week of Kara’s second teaching practice some student threw a pen across the classroom a hit this student with the pen.

He lost his temper, snapped a ruler, and in a kind of ... in a threatening manner, went as if ... I thought he might stab me with it. Eventually he gave me the ruler, walked out and slammed the door. He ended up coming back in and apologising.

After this incident there was a school holiday and Kara reflected on ways that she could “get this kid on side so as I can help him learn.” After the school break an opportunity occurred in the library that enabled Kara to connect with this student.

He was reading a magazine on motorbikes. So not at the moment but I am looking to get a motorbike and I said to him ... tell me what motorbike I should get? I was giving him examples of what I thought was a good bike and he was saying to me no, no this is a better bike. So since then I have been able to get him more involved.

Kara also explained, “I used to stand over him and wait for him to do his work as he would just always talk and I could not get any work out of him. So I assumed if I did stand and wait he may do some work but he didn’t!” Kara’s cooperating teacher advised her:

‘This student gets intimidated really easily, just tell him what to do and walk away’. So that is what I did, I gave him the pen and paper told what he had to do and I walked away. At the end of the lesson he came up to me and gave me the pen and a complete sheet of paper that is all the work completed.
Nearly at the end of her 10-week prac there has been a positive shift with regard to this student response to his learning, and Kara declared:

I got his first assessment for the year, it was an interview assessment and he did not want to do it in front of the class as it was an oral. I organised for him to do it privately and he did quite well. Oh ... today we had a group activity and he took on the role of the spy, he really took this on board, he went and took down all the recordings from the other groups and came back and reported. This has really changed my view of this particular student.

The above incidents have given Kara a greater awareness of herself as a teacher and in relation to the student involved. As she concluded:

It really challenged my assumptions of this student. As I thought at the beginning if I get any work out of this student ... I will be grateful (spoken with bated breath, very anxious). Now I make activities that he will enjoy and the rest of the class can enjoy. So there has been a big shift in my teaching style and in the activities.

Tilly, teaching in the Art department of a public school, has had to re-evaluate assumptions she held with regards to students’ knowledge and abilities. This is a Year 9 class (13-14 year old students) and Tilly has gained some insights into her teaching practices. On giving instructions to the students Tilly had experienced that:

There are few of them who just do not get it! You can say it as many times as you like or in as many different ways as you like. They might look as if they are listening but they are not actually listening. There are others who need spoon-feeding as they are too timid and frightened to draw, to make a mistake. You have to give them a lot of input, you are not quite doing it for them but you lay the groundwork that they can then build on. I take them through it as individuals in a way that they understand. And it is not until you have actually done that with them that you know they are getting it or not.

Tilly also sees her role as a teacher as someone who:

Must try to get inside their heads (you would call it) and find out what is connected and what is missing. This has been challenging and my assumptions also, so I can never assume that they (students) are going to
get it. My assumption was that these kids would have had a lot more background than they actually had.

Tilly made a final interesting comment with regards to question two. She stated, “I think this incident has happened in almost all my classes. So now I know to check everybody, ask questions and that they have understood and will be able to do it.”

Marlene finished her final teaching practice in the departments of English and SOSE at a public senior high school in the outer suburbs had been challenged by assumptions concerning special needs students and inclusivity in schooling. She began by explaining the needs and behaviour of one particular student.

I requested an interview with Fred’s (student) mother because he had been playing up a bit in class and during the reading lesson he would just hide among the shelves. He is our student with cerebral palsy and he also has auditory processing disorder and some hearing loss. He normally manages to work quite well in the classroom when he doesn’t hide behind his disability. I voiced my concern that he was not performing at the level he is capable of. She was really happy with me because she could see that yes ... I knew what he is capable of and I had taken the time to speak with her. Fred’s mother is fantastic and supportive and has taught me more about his processing disorder. I did read up about it but you just don’t know individually.

A particular incident involving Fred in the classroom gave Marlene a new perspective.

In class the other day I was giving all the kids a tattoo because of their good work and they had been told to come and receive it one at a time in orderly fashion. Fred decided not to heed what I had said so I told him off and said he must wait. I have become aware in this prac of finding that balance between inclusivity and at the same time not pandering to that kind of behaviour because that kind of special distinction is unnecessary.

The issue for Marlene here was that she knew Fred could understand her instructions and follow them but it also made her think.
What challenged me were my assumptions about special needs students and my awareness of myself in the role as a teacher in terms of “inclusivity”. Because I had to be able to make that distinction between catering to his (Fred’s) special needs which are distinct and particular but also to bear in mind that by giving him permission to do whatever he liked in the class and whenever ... when I had made it perfectly clear concerning the procedure of receiving the tattoos - the class respected that and he must also respect that. Otherwise it is setting him up ... to be different.

Marlene feels strongly about the issue of special needs students and inclusivity and concluded by saying:

You don’t really know how it is going to work with special needs students and that some of their needs are the same as the other students, they need to see consistency, and they need to see fairness and you need to show that to all members of the class. I am not saying all kids should be treated the same, I am just saying fairly. So that changed and caused me to re-evaluate my position.

Table 2
Summary of main points emerging from Question 2- Individual Responses

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Main points emerging</th>
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| Question 2: Think back over the past week(s). Identify a specific classroom incident in which you were faced with a situation, which challenged you in some way or made you re-evaluate some assumptions you may have held. Describe what happened and what particular aspects of the incident gave you a greater awareness of yourself in your role as a teacher and/or of the student(s) involved. | - Challenged the participants to re-examine their teaching practices in view of the assumptions they held.  
- Participants demonstrating a greater awareness of their role as a classroom teacher and of the needs of their students because of those assumptions. Major assumptions participants exposed:  
  - Students being respectful of teacher and environment  
  - Students willingness to learn  
  - Students’ prior knowledge and a willingness to engage in their learning  
  - Issues with the ethnicity and inclusivity of students  
  - The importance of the authenticity of self as a teacher. |
The third question invited the participants to reflect on an atypical incident or an incident that had an unexpected effect on them.

**Question 3: Think back over the past week(s). Identify a classroom incident that you would classify as atypical (i.e. the incident was unusual or it could be just an everyday event but it had an unexpected effect on you). Describe what happened and in what way particular aspects of the incident had an effect on you?**

An unexpected incident while teaching primary school students had Elaine confronting the beliefs she held about her own teaching competency. “Last week my cooperating teacher was off sick and there was no-one available for my class so I was on my own all day. I had several whole day lessons prepared. I just was not expecting to be totally on my own-just yet. Elaine recounted that the Deputy Head expressed concern but Elaine assured her she “would be fine, I just was not expecting to be totally on my own-just yet.” But in reality Elaine was not so sure.

I did not know how I would go without the support and back up of my cooperating teacher. It is a really challenging class and lots of behavioural problems but we were fine, we did not need anyone to come in and help. We ended up having a really good day ... they were wonderful. They really worked hard, they didn’t play up, they will never be angels but yeah ... it went well; we got a lot done. So that is what surprised me, with no one else in the class I actually felt really good and I felt really confident.

As Elaine reflected upon the incident it changed her beliefs about her teaching competency.

Really I did not think I would manage knowing the circumstances, I thought I would panic, I did not think I was quite ready to be totally on my own so I surprised myself. So that really helped me to establish that I am more ready than I realised, to be able to go it alone.

Kate teaching between the English and SOSE departments responded almost immediately in answer to this question with an experience that confirmed her beliefs in the
authenticity of her teaching practice. It was week 2 of her final 10-week practice and Kate had explained to her English students that her supervisor (from the university) would be sitting in on the class lesson.

The students were absolutely fantastic the whole entire lesson. The way they worked, the way they interacted, the way they answered questions and the way it affected me. They are really a good bunch of Year 9; they understand me, and what I am going through. It was a very structured lesson we had to do some reading and answered some questions; they worked in silence even though I don’t mind a bit of chatting.

The outcome of this incident was very rewarding for Kate.

This affirmed what I had done from my first prac that it is important to have a good relationship with my students. From day one I made an effort to know their names, I do this, I do that, so it reaffirmed that yes, I could form good relationships with students.

Jacinta, also teaching English and SOSE, highlighted her experience with one female student that challenged her and made her re-evaluate her assumptions. Jacinta had been teaching the student four times a week for four weeks and “every lesson since week one of my ATP (assistant teachers’ programme) she just sat a laughed and laughed.” Jacinta with assistance from her cooperating teacher informed the girl “it was not acceptable behaviour...” and the student was moved from her group within the class and she eventually stopped. But the relationship with the student was still far from amicable.

Ever since then this girl would say to me ‘oh you’re not a teacher, I only like our teacher’. She was always very negative and antagonistic towards me, thwarting my lessons and putting people off. Last week my supervisor came into the class and she was watching the supervisor and she played up probably more so than normal. Then she asked me in front of the class ‘did you get a bad report from your supervisor last week?’ She was really quite off putting you know... to the point where it was very difficult to even go near her!

On the Monday of week 5 Jacinta paraphrased how she addressed the class.
I know a lot of you supported World Vision at the weekend, would you like to tell me what it was like over the weekend? And this girl put her hand up. So I said ok tell me about your experience. So she told everyone in the class.

Since this incident Jacinta has experienced a huge shift in the student’s behaviour.

After that ... she has ... on her statement of intent for her assignment she wrote that she would ask me any questions so that I could help her answer them. And she was nice, “excuse me” she said to me and put her hand up (spoken with incredulity) and that was really unusual. Nothing had happened that I could identify with! The only thing I can think of is that I let her speak about something that was important to her ... the 40 hour Famine, I don’t know if it has been anything else!

Jacinta reflected on the impact the student’s negativity had on her teaching practice and to how she feels now.

You know it (pause) it was so hard ... having her in the class. That is what I said to my cooperating teacher ‘she hates me; I don’t know what to do.’ This made me very hard in the classroom; it made me want to not even ... I like going around and seeing what the kids are doing. I probably stand up more than I sit down. I like to make sure they are on track and making sure it is their own work. Doing the rounds I always felt that I could not even approach her because it was like ... daggers at me. It was like ... until this change... I’ve got a new student (astonished laughter) now, it is so nice and today she even said to me ‘would you help me look in the index?’ and she said ‘thank you.’ So it is worth persevering, never give up on a student (spoken resolutely)! Even today when the kids were mucking around I thought “no, I can handle that now.”

Jon teaching SOSE at an outer suburban public senior high school had a similar experience to that of Jacinta and Kate with regards to a developing constructive relationship with students. Jon presented his Year 9 students with a 6-week topic (that would take them to the end of term) entitled Heroes and Villains. Jon introduced the topic “by defining what a hero or villain was, and what their characteristics were.” Each student then got to choose who they
wanted to be. I then wrote an opening sentence such as “Bill the villain/hero was walking down the street one day when...” Each student writing in character had to finish the story, which would then be read out to the whole class and put up on the classroom wall.

Jon has a group of girls in this class “who do very little or no work in the classroom as all they do is chat, they talk about fashion etc. and I know the rest of the class call them the ‘Barbies’.” This had been the girls’ behaviour towards Jon since he took up his teaching position. Jon explained “When I ask them to do their work they say things like ‘I don’t want to ... you can’t make me’ ” which had been very frustrating for Jon. He had been at a loss as to how to address the situation.

But what surprised me was that these girls really got into the project and wrote a detailed account of their characters. Some of it was really smutty and I had to edit each of their work but their writing was all good, it had a beginning and middle and an end.

The girls were not happy and voiced objections to Jon editing their work but finally conceded when Jon explained “as is, it could not be shared in public, so they eventually accepted this”. Since then there has been a positive shift in relation to the girls’ attitude and behaviour to both Jon and their school work.

Since then they have been really engaged with their work and other work that I have set them and this has been unexpected as I had thought I would never have got any work out of them.

Leila, teaching mathematics at a private senior high school in the inner suburbs, explained how she had to deal with some confronting issues. Since the beginning of her final teaching practice Leila had given her Year 9 maths students “a task that has been
going on all term; it is basically a mathematical dictionary.” Leila feels passionate about this particular exercise:

I find it an invaluable tool and I am surprised it is not used more frequently. It helps children to use mathematical terms in a mathematical concept. So when they speak to you they use mathematical words not English words and then they understand the meaning.

Every second or third lesson Leila would give the students about 10 minutes to update and work on the dictionary.

We have talked about the importance, how to do it, how to construct it. What I expected from them, what I was hoping they would get out of it. Some kids got really, really interested in it and throughout my lessons they would pipe up and say, ‘oh I am going to write this in my dictionary’ and quickly write it down. So I know it has been a good experience for them.

Nearing the end of term Leila collected all the dictionaries to assess and mark them. Upon doing so she found two completed dictionaries with very similar entries that gave her cause for concern.

It was a boy and a girl and I know for a fact they are very close. It was very easy for me to see what had happened. In class I pulled the boy out and I asked him if he wanted to tell me anything about his dictionary ... and he said ‘no’ and I said ‘it looks ... disturbingly similar to someone else’s dictionary.’ At which point he basically spilled the beans and said to me that she had done the dictionary and gave it to him to copy and he just made a few modifications and passed it off as his own.

Leila explained that she and the boy “discussed the issues related to him doing something like that and what he had missed out in ... the learning that was important.” However what confronted Leila was the fact that the incident affected her in unexpected ways.

What was unexpected was the effect that it had on me because I got very, very upset with the girl. It was an issue ... a feminist issue. I really had to think about how I was going to approach the subject with her because my first instinct was to confront her and say ‘this is not acceptable, you
will end you spending the rest of your life doing some man’s work, you know, and he receives all the glory’!

Leila decided to discuss this dilemma with both the students involved, as there was no time for the boy to completely redo this task.

The thing about students, they always seem to know what they are worth. I’ve done self-reflection and self-evaluation and they seem to be always spot on. He said it would be fair to get about 10 out of 18 as he had shown me his original draft of his work on the dictionary. He said it would not be fair for her to lose any of her marks, to which I agreed, as that is about the average that he normally gets and he knew.

To conclude Leila stated, “I was happy with that outcome because I felt so strongly about this especially towards the girl and that I did not stand in front of her and give her a piece of my mind.”

Eva, teaching English and SOSE, also had a similar experience to that of some of the other participants with the reluctance of students to engage in learning within the classroom.

I am thinking of the class where I felt totally inadequate. Where I could not seem to do anything right - I could not seem to get the students to listen or gain control of the class. I just came away feeling totally shattered! Like I thought what is wrong with me - that really had an effect on me. I thought, what have I done, what can I do?

Eva continued to explain the behaviour of many of the students.

There would be shouting across the classroom and throwing things at each other. And some of the language - there seems to be not much respect. This is usually about their (intimate) relationships. I find it difficult that they are so vocal and how open they are and that they bring it into the classroom and I know they want to shock you.
Drawing on her previous experience, her university readings and supervision, Eva expressed her thoughts and vulnerability.

You hear so often that as long as your lesson is interesting you will have all the students engaged. And ... it just is not true! So I tried something else, how about we do this or maybe this. Some students just, just don’t want to do it, they refuse, they are not interested, and they are having a bad day.

Eva conceded, “I felt what can I do, how can I help these children? Even although as much as I thought I was aware, that is when you have to go away and think!”

Kara teaching English and SOSE explained her feelings of defeat when dealing with the following incident:

In the Year 8 class there is the worst amount of bullying I have ever heard, and verbal abuse! One student starts then the next student starts and the next and then they all join in and it is very difficult in this particular class to think ... who do I deal with first? You try and deal with one and all the rest keep talking and it just keeps going.

The class consisted of 22 students, (only 4 of whom are girls) with a mixed ethnicity of “New Zealand (Maori), Filipino and lots of Italians.” Kara also has Italian ethnicity and many friends of different backgrounds. “They tried to get past me by swearing in Italian and they try other languages but I also have a lot of Croatian and Greek friends so I have learnt to understand these swear words. So I say, “No ... You cannot speak like that!” It became apparent that Kara had experienced a difficult time in the classroom:

I think ... the bullying it is ... I go home and I am just ... I feel so emotionally exhausted! I feel so ... there are a few that get picked on so much. They make racist comments and I try to cut it out but I can’t ... it’s silly, picky comments to get a reaction. I feel quite lost. It was unusual for me because I have never seen so much bullying in one classroom.
Kara explained that there are only about 3 students in the class not involved in this behaviour. Also many of the students are on extension programmes leaving her at times with a total of eight to ten students in the classroom but “it is just as bad as having the 22 students.” Kara’s final say on this was the following:

They have an anti-bullying programme here at the school and in a couple of weeks the Year 10s will liaise with the Year 8s so we will see what happens there- hope some good comes out of it!

Tilly, teaching art and media at an outer suburban public senior high school, was also experiencing concern about her perceived teaching competency.

Media is my minor and today when I got into the Media classroom I realized I was incredibly out of my depth, totally and absolutely out of my depth. This was because I have not had experience with computers and videos. Media has other aspects apart from cameras, computers and videos. But the kids have been doing video animations and they had to edit them so they had to put them on the computers and everything.

The equipment was spread out “in four different rooms and the cupboards in each room have all different keys in different places.” Tilly explained:

I really did not know what to do and I did not want to look stupid. My goodness, I thought, what is the Media teacher going to say or think? In terms of what effect it had on me, it was my realisation that I was really out of my depth. I really felt quite sick.

In conclusion, Tilly justified herself.

I am not experienced with everything; there is no way I can be. I do know that I have umpteen years to do PD (Professional Development) so these are skills that I can build on. I had to rationalize it to myself and not freak out.
Marlene taught English and SOSE at an outer suburban public senior high school related
an incident concerning the behaviour of 2 students in her classroom and the powerful
effect it had on her when she later reflected on this incident.

I walked into the classroom and took a look at two of my kids and
thought, oh my god! They were so off their heads, they were sitting in
the back row, their eyes were blood shot, they were giggling like three
year olds and rocking on their chairs and they were so ... high! They
were so clearly out of it and I know that one of the kids was also on
ADHD medication and he told me he had taken it all at once that
morning so it wasn’t just marijuana. This is Year 10s and I had no idea
how to deal with them, no idea!

Marlene called on the assistance of her supporting teacher who then called the Deputy
Principal who came to assess the students in the classroom. However the Deputy saw no
cause for concern.

My teacher (supporting) got really angry because they weren’t taken out.
And they just sat there making stupid jokes about inserting drugs into
orifices the whole lesson under their breadth. I ended up standing
teaching between the two of them. The rest of the students in the class
were strangely quiet and deflated and it was such an uncomfortable and
horrible learning environment, it was just awful.

On reflection Marlene felt very strongly about the outcome of this incident and expressed
how and why she would do things differently in the future.

I would never, ever let that happen again. It was a valuable experience. It
was so unfair, I learnt a lot from that. Even if the Deputy came up and
said “Oh I don’t know if there’s anything up” I would say, “Please, for
the sake of the other students and considering the comments that they
have made, take them out,” and I would have been firm about that. Even
if I got them out on the grounds of inappropriate language, I would not
have them in the classroom. This incident affected me firstly because I
did not know how to deal with this, but the main thing was the unfairness
to the other students - it was not a safe or comfortable environment. Even
for the two students who were doing it ... it was even unfair on them! It
really had such a strong impact on me because I just left them in there.
Table 3
Summary of main points emerging from Question 3- Individual Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Main points emerging</th>
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| Question 3: Think back over the past week(s). Identify a classroom incident that you would classify as ‘atypical’ (i.e. the incident was unusual or it had an unexpected effect on you). Describe what happened and in what way particular aspects of the incident had an effect on you. | • Participants becoming conscious of their ability and competency (or lack of) as a classroom teacher  
• Awareness of teaching approaches and practices - including the need to change these when appropriate  
• Relevance of topics - to engage students in learning  
• Importance of building positive and authentic relationships with students. |

The fourth and final question invited the participants to reflect on an experience or experiences relating to the previous three questions and how if any it would change any aspect of their teaching practice in the future.

**Question 4: In considering the 3 questions above and as a result of your experience in relation to any one of these, would it make you change some aspect of your teaching practice now?**

In answer to question 4 it quickly became apparent that the participants had engaged in critical reflection about their role as a teacher and their teaching practices. There were several participants that highlighted the issue of behaviour management and in particular the practices involved in dealing with negative behaviour in the classroom. Others emphasized the importance of being authentic, while Marlene felt passionate about paying attention to duty of care and fairness in her classroom practices. Jon’s suggestion that his ineffectiveness when dealing with negative behaviour could have been
compounded at a micro and macro level by the different practices of his cooperating teacher, and of all the teachers within the school, was interesting.

Elaine related the most valuable incident had facilitated her teaching practice for the future.

When I think of the drama role-playing incident it was never planned to work out that way but it just happened to work out in such a way that it is something I can really use in the future. The way that it worked out with them (students) through the class discussion we had, voting on their own punishments, and themselves reflecting on what they had done. So if ever anything went wrong like that again I think I would use that same strategy, get them looking at, and the consequences of, their actions. As it really was a good discussion with all students participating (of course some more than others) but they were all active in the discussion and eventually owing up to being the culprits - so it really was amazing.

Kate gained several important insights when she reflected upon changes to her teaching practice now. The first issue Kate discussed was about her professional judgement.

Probably it would be assumptions for me. Early on in this prac I found myself making a lot of assumptions and I still find myself making assumptions. You just assume kids are like you. I went to a school which is very similar in socio-economic way to this. So I made assumptions based on my own schooling and they weren’t always right. My assumptions were mostly about the students’ knowledge. I teach two Year 10 classes which couldn’t be more different. One is a really bright bunch of kids; they’ve got the general knowledge, but this other Year 10 class which I have had a lot of trouble with getting through to them - their general knowledge was... they had none! They never watched the News they just did not know very much. Even just seeing the News flashes between shows no, nothing. I found that quite difficult because I had made so many assumptions about them. And because they were a difficult class I made more assumptions about the whole class, I made assumptions about their abilities.

Kate’s final comments concerned the significance of different teaching strategies and the difference of theory and practice.
After talking to my supervising teacher we worked out, okay, I have to go on this track with them, have activity based lessons even though different to the other Year 10s. Then, yes I could see that there were some kids who were extremely bright in that class. It’s been a lot of fun and I have learned so much more in these ten weeks than I have in the four years I have been doing uni. What I have found that ever since I went on my first Prac I learned so much more in Prac. Usually I am a theory person so that is the thing that surprised me quite a bit. On this prac I have learned how to mark, I have learned how to understand the aspects because no one at uni does that regarding the student outcome statements. Several teachers gave information and also different examples of how to mark and then they would check it. This has been very, very supportive for me, which has made me feel a lot more confident about going out next year.

Jacinta disclosed several issues that will lead to change in her teaching practice now. The first issue Jacinta discussed also involved assumptions.

Thinking back now of the students ... because I have hammered them all the time and not understood where they’ve come from ... you just can’t assume whether they are year 11 or year 8 or this class or that class you cannot assume anything you have to treat each as an individual and then as a class of individuals.

The second issue for Jacinta was the difficulty of taking over an established classroom temporarily. Because she had to follow on from the teacher’s established practices, Jacinta perceived this as a barrier in bringing about the development of her own constructive teaching practices, which also impeded her own professional competency.

Although it is a 10-week prac you are going into an established classroom. Even although I did some introduction activities of getting to know them it doesn’t form the same as when you start at the beginning of the year ... you miss that in the ATP (Assistant Teacher’s Programme). So I didn’t really know where to come from. My cooperating teacher is fantastic, she fills me in with things but you can’t possibly go and have a look at their records and remember the kid to the record that is really difficult.

Jacinta also highlighted the importance of a constructive teacher-student relationship.

Getting to know the kids on a personal basis changes the dynamics in the classroom because instantly if you say their name, have had something to
do with them like on an excursion, it is a different relationship. They are willing then in the classroom to be more focused and they want to please you, they don’t want you to be upset because they know that you are a person they have spoken on a level that they identify with. Yes, I went in “cold turkey” expecting that these kids just wanted to work and learn and this just does not happen - you have got to win them over!

Finally Jacinta also shared a task that she considered invaluable in getting to know each individual student. It is worth sharing here.

At the beginning of this prac on the first day I got each child to do this ‘Y’ chart (it is in a circle and shaped like a ‘Y’ so it is three different portions - like a pie). In the first part I got the students to write what they did on their holidays, and then something that inspires them and the last something you love about the school. Every week I will go through them and just look at them again to remind me of what a student had written, and then I will go back and refer to it. That helps at building a relationship with the student.

Jon focused on several aspects that will change his teaching practice in the future. A significant aspect of Jon’s experience was the issue of behaviour management, but Jon felt that his teaching practices and strategies were being thwarted because he was a pre-service teacher. Jon also highlighted the difference in teaching styles between himself and his cooperating teacher and the other teachers at the school especially concerning the issue of behaviour in the classroom and the school milieu.

One of the things I think I have had a lot of trouble with is the behaviour management. This is term 3 and the students have had a succession of ATP student teachers paraded in front of them and also there are two forms of authority in the classroom. So by default they always go to Miss Jackson (pseudonym, regular classroom teacher).

Jon then discussed very similar views to Jacinta inasmuch that the participant is entering an established classroom.

There is also the issue that this is not my class so things that I would do in my class I have to tone down to suit Miss Jackson’s class. For example there is a lot of stuff she lets them get away with. There cannot
be any acceptance of negative behaviour, simply because I want them to take responsibility for their own actions. In regard to that question behaviour management is a big issue for me. In my class (next year) I am not going to expect a lot of work from them or set much in way of assessments in the first 3 weeks. This is a time to establish rules and the norms of the classroom and get to know each other.

At the macro level of the school milieu regarding different teaching practices of other teachers Jon discussed the difficulties associated with not having any standardised procedures as to behaviour management practices.

But one thing I have found is ... personalities. Each different teacher has got a different personality - their own set of rules, their own this, and their own that. For example students can get away with something in one class but can’t do it in another. And the kids are going ‘well it was fine in that class, why not in yours?’ It would not be so bad if you only had the same class each day like in a primary school and there is only one class and one set of rules to follow and I think that is what the kids are used to. Some of the teachers I have noticed don’t actually set any kind of rules and they just like … yell at people and things like that. There is nothing written; there is nothing that the kids can follow. So that is what it is for me establish the classroom rules!

Leila firstly discussed the significance of authenticity in her role as a teacher.

Teaching is difficult and you cannot experience it through someone else and I feel ... I now feel that it is a harder thing to do than I did 10 weeks ago. So my opinion as to ... basically because when you’re doing it authentically and you are doing it from the heart it is much more an emotional process and anything that involves the emotions is by definition harder to do. I have learned so much and I am surprised how naive I was before I got here. It is not how I would have categorised myself 10 weeks ago because I had a career outside of teaching prior to getting here. Being authentic and being you are so ... important!

Leila considered continuity and becoming involved in the school milieu as other important aspects in relation to the role of the teacher and to teaching practices.

Being part of the school community and being personally involved and also being empathetic towards every aspect of your students’ lives, every aspect. The only way to do this is by knowing the students year after
year. It’s by being stable, in one position for a long time, which is not really how I came to this position, thinking about things like that. Teachers have a great responsibility because of the significance that is usually placed upon them.

Eva also had issues with student behaviour and the management associated with this but has also given thought to individual student’s needs.

I think overall you are always thinking about changing something. You are always thinking ‘how can I do it better?’ You know the day before may have been a bad day for some students but each new day I think of as a fresh day. Every day I go into the classroom with positive thoughts and greet the students with no mention to the day before. One area that comes to mind regarding my teaching practice would be behaviour management. I will, I do continue to reflect on this to change and create strategies to manage behaviour issues in the classroom. Try to become more relaxed with the students in regard to their behaviour and the level of noise in the classroom. I feel it is important to adopt lessons and an appropriate approach that suits individual students’ needs.

Kara commented strongly on the issue of space in the classroom, which seemed to indicate being attributed to negative student behaviour.

One of the classrooms I teach in, where I have the most disruptive class is a very small room for such a big class. What I would like to change would be the confines of that classroom. Change the scenery; take the class outside with their files to work, but it is kind of frowned upon to do this! Even the library would be good but this has to be booked and there is a large demand for the library!

Finally, Tilly and Marlene both said that the most important aspect of change for them, in their role as a teacher, involved their awareness of self and that of their practice. Tilly explained her awareness of self and of her practice in the following terms:

The main aspect is... thinking of me as a presence in the classroom. That is ... an important presence in the classroom rather than someone just wanting to be nice and friends with the kids. It’s really made me feel like I have got to be more of a presence in the classroom. That has been a huge one! To actually have a personality, have a way of relating that is much bigger than I am physically and because I am small it is doubly
important! Use my voice and get those kids to listen to me and really have a presence in the classroom (spoken with great feeling). That has probably been one of the biggest things: creating a person. It is not who I am but who I can be in the classroom. So that’s been a big one.

Marlene’s awareness of herself and that of her teaching practice is shown in the following:

The incidents I have described above and what I have learnt about my teaching prac is that it made me realize that it is all about a fair classroom and a safe classroom and above all those things must be maintained. It is an environment where students can feel comfortable and supported. You have got a relationship with kids but they know the boundaries that are appropriate and inappropriate within class. Another thing I have learnt on this prac is that you cannot be friends with the students. You can have a healthy relationship with them, you can care about them and just little comments like ‘are you sure you are feeling ok today?’ mean so much to them. But that is not being friends with them that is being a caring teacher. I have far more sense of my responsibility now especially to do with my sense of authority. It is not just authority for the sake of power; it is authority for the sake of ensuring safety and ensuring learning and for facilitating the educational process. It is a responsibility.

**Table 4**
Summary of main points emerging from Question 4 - Individual Responses

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<thead>
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Main points emerging</th>
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| Question 4: In considering the 3 questions above and as a result of your experience in relation to any one of these, would it make you change some aspect of your teaching practice now? | • Evidence of critical reflection emerging from the participants in relation to their role as a classroom teacher and their teaching practices and the necessity to change when needed  
• Awareness of negative effects of actual experience on professional competency and judgement in relation to assumptions held previously  
• Dealing effectively with behaviour management issues from students in the classroom  
• Importance of a constructive teacher-student relationship  
• Significance of self as an authentic classroom teacher. |
The above discussion completed the one-on-one questions from the participating individuals. The responses that have surfaced from this phase of the interviewing process have been varied but most insightful. This is because there has been clear evidence from the participants’ responses that they are engaging in reflective practice as a consequence of the incidents they have experienced in their role as a teacher within the classroom. However, although there have been numerous varied responses to a wide range of different situations, it is interesting to discover that generally the same few main themes have emerged. For example whether it was overtly or covertly spoken almost all of the participants spoke of the importance of authenticity and inclusivity in their role as a teacher, and also reflected at the most critical times on their competency and their need for ongoing professional development. The concept of assumptions played a significant role in the participants’ practices and also enabled the participants to discuss the issue of how they had changed in their views of their students’ approach to education and learning and consequently how this affected them. A disturbing factor that has compounded almost all the main themes was the issue of inappropriate student behaviour and the disparate processes and procedures of the management of student behaviour. What I find most interesting with the data regarding these major themes is how strongly these themes connect with key ideas in the literature discussed earlier in this dissertation. But more importantly, the interview data illustrates what we as educators can come to
understand and learn from the rich and detailed responses from pre-service teachers in this key phase of their professional experience.

**Focus Group Responses**

When participants had completed their ATP and had been able to reflect on their experiences I invited them back for a further focus group interview. I conducted three focus group interviews with the nine remaining participants. The others who had completed the first part consisting of the one-on-one interviews did not turn up for their participation in the focus group interviews. The three groups consisted of Jacinta and Kate (group 1), Eva, Kara, Marlene and Tilly (group 2) and Elaine, Jon and Leila (group 3). Outlined below are the responses to the three questions I put to the groups. The first question invited the participants to reflect on any assumptions discovered or held in their role as a teacher.

**Question 1: Think back to your ATP and reflect on any assumptions you may have held or discovered you did hold/or still do in relation to your role as a teacher.**

**Responses to question one from Group 1**

Kate’s biggest assumption she felt was about student knowledge, which created a few challenges for Kate teaching English and SOSE (Studies of the Environment and Society) at a regional private senior high school.

Walking into a Year 10 class and thinking they knew how to rewrite the task, do charts and timelines, they didn’t! For the first few weeks this created problems to the lessons I had planned because they (the students) just did not have these skills or a sound knowledge of these skills!

Jacinta’s “struggles” were linked to how the assumptions she held about teaching English and SOSE were challenged in an outer suburban public senior high school. She was surprised at students’ attitudes towards their learning.
Most students did not value education at all. They would speak about what they wanted to do with their lives but there would be no input into their education! They would take days off and make no effort to catch up or complete assignments before exam days. I spoke to many teachers in an attempt for me to switch on to where they (the students) were at, rather than to where I was at. I did this by going out to the playground and chatting to them. This helped me to get to know the kids and also knowing where they were at; then I could more understand.

Kate joined the discussion at this point and stated, “My supervisor advised me I had got to know the students too well and I would need to back off, which I was not too happy with as I felt it was an important thing to do.” Jacinta interjected, saying “I agree because those kids don’t want to muck up then.” Kate affirmed, “No they don’t, once they have got to know you”. Jacinta declared, “Yes, they want to do the right thing”. On the issue of attendance rates Kate was also struck by the absenteeism of students.

As you were saying Jacinta in one of my Year 10 classes in my last assessment I had six students away; two were in Queensland ... This is the 3rd term of Year 10 they are going into Year 11 next year and they really need to work on their levels. I don’t understand how they are allowed to spend so much time away from school when they need to learn!

Jacinta and Kate both agreed that overall the support they received from their cooperating teachers had exceeded any assumptions they had held. But “the external pressures of the ATP were way too much” Jacinta stated, and Kate fervently agreed. This had to do with “the amount of university theory work they had to complete during their teaching practice!” Jacinta explained.

**Responses to question one from group 2**

The second group consisted of Eva, Kara, Marlene and Tilly all of whom had completed their final teaching practice in senior high schools. They had a dynamic discussion in
reply to question one, particularly on students’ attitudes to learning and their behaviour in the classroom and the effects of these in their role as a teacher.

Eva, teaching English and SOSE at an outer suburban senior high school, was the first to speak and expressed her assumptions and expectations, which were similar to Jacinta’s regarding student attitudes and the prior beliefs they held regarding teaching. Eva expressed how she was surprised at the lack of interest that the students had “most of the time” and how they also “misbehaved a lot of the time too”! Eva continued:

We are continually told that as long as the lessons are interesting and engaging the kids will be on task, but it is not true - there is so much misbehaviour. If they (students in the classroom) were focused on something that was going on outside or in their private lives they would not engage. I found this quite disheartening because I had put a lot of thought and time into the lessons, and my cooperating teachers had said the lessons were fine ... I realised I had to put a lot more hands on activities in place to enable students to engage. It certainly gave me food for thought with regards to my assumptions about how to teach and the extent of the content.

Marlene, also teaching English and SOSE at an outer suburban high school, experienced how disruptive the time of day and other external factors could be for students’ learning.

Last period of the day on a Wednesday I had a class of Year 10s and my cooperating teacher advised that this particular class would not be able to learn anything and not to bother trying! I thought ‘challenge!’ ... I spoke with a friend who suggested playing some meditation music. So for the first 10 minutes I had nap-time. I told the students to relax, close their eyes, or put their heads on the desk. Then for the next 50 mins (as it was a 1 hour period) I would get good productive work from them and this was a bottom streamed class.

Tilly, teaching Art and Media at an inner suburban senior high school, became quite animated and agreed with Marlene and also thought the use of music was a great idea.
We (teachers) may have too high an expectation of the students and the assumption that they can and will be engaged every moment of the day. One thing that kids really need is time just to space out. So that was a really good thing to do, Marlene. I have a boy that I discovered that when I let him listen to his iPod he settled down and started painting, this was a student whom I could not get any work out of before that. I thought wow! What is going on here? It was a turning point. I know many schools have a policy against iPods but it is something I will keep it in mind with regards to the music when I get my own classes next year.

Kara, teaching English and SOSE at an outer suburban senior high school, explained the assumptions she had when she went into her final 10-week teaching practice.

I thought I am going to do all these amazing and fantastic things every single lesson, every single day. And I got there and I did for the first few weeks but then I got so drained as I did not get the responses I expected a lot of the time. It got to the point where I would ask the students about ways to approach different tasks they had to do and they came up with some great ideas. This was good as it took the pressure off me, as I had the assumption that I must be the sole provider for all the different experiences of their (students’) learning.

Eva and Tilly were both interested to know from Kara if this strategy helped with any behavioural problems she had been experiencing in the classroom. Kara replied, “Yes, it helped quite a bit, and I did offer them rewards (such as a party at the end of my teaching practice), depending on how they went work wise.” Eva then interjected when she heard the word “rewards”.

I understand what you are saying about dangling strings like rewards but the behaviour management problems were ... the class teacher said they behaved like that with her all the time and I thought ... my god! This was when I started to give out rewards regarding the use of iPods. I used it as a bit of incentive, bribery ... you do the work for me I will allow you to listen to your iPod. We (Eva and students) developed this compromise: give and take. This is something I did not think I would do ... but it worked!
Marlene suggested to Eva, “It probably strengthened your relationship with the students and established a rapport with them.” Eva agreed, “Yes, I had to develop a rapport; I had to do that to ... the assumptions I had held as to my role as a teacher had been challenged and I had to rethink and readjust.”

Kara agreed with Eva about her assumptions and went on to highlight the problem she had experienced regarding iPods. “Students were wearing and listening to iPods in the classroom and I had been telling the students to put them away.” This had caused a lot of discontent as the students were rebelling against Kara. While Kara had been at this same school earlier in the year on a previous teaching practice, she explained that, “The policy had been so strict regarding students and the use of iPods in the classroom.” When Kara arrived back near the end of the year for her final teaching practice the policy had changed and she voiced how she viewed these changes.

They (school) had slacked off and did not seem to care anymore. I was under the assumption that this policy was still going through. But the teachers were not as regimented as before and the students were getting upset with me as I was telling them to keep their iPods in their bags!

This then brought about an animated discussion on the concept of extrinsic rewards and the assumptions each held regarding their role as a teacher. Interestingly, Tilly suggested that allowing students to listen to iPods was not strictly speaking an extrinsic reward.

I don’t think anyone has said ‘don’t use extrinsic rewards’. I think there has to be a balance and it depends on your motivation for using them and what they are. Letting them play their own music creates an environment for those kids to work. It is less of an extrinsic award like a carrot; it’s more of a negotiated agreement in the classroom.

Eva and Kara agreed that, “At times, what else could you do with a particular class?” Marlene agreed and also suggested:
It seems to give them ownership and they feel empowered within their space. The same as giving them a choice regarding their assessments; how they were going to achieve these outcomes. I did this with my Year 10 class and they really worked at it, and these were kids who did not really like English. But I got several pages of work from them instead of one paragraph!

In relation to Marlene’s response Tilly then revealed her experience:

I did a very similar thing to you Marlene; I gave my students a choice. But I had the class teacher in the room with me and afterwards he said ‘I don’t know why you did it that way, I don’t know about these democratic classrooms ... were you just trying to be their friend or something?’ I felt really put down ... I suppose I just assumed; I had the assumption that he would be there to help me, guide me instead of ... put me down.

Tilly experienced four different cooperating teachers all with different styles and approaches to teaching and this made her feel vulnerable, unsupported and questioning her own competency in her role as a teacher for much for her school practice. Eva and Kara had similar feelings to Tilly but not to the same harrowing extent. Marlene commented “I was so fortunate with my cooperating teacher; she was just so helpful in all areas.” It also helped that Marlene only had one teacher to liaise with during her school experience.

**Responses to question one from group 3**

The third group consisted of Jon, who had taught SOSE at an outer suburban public senior high school; Leila, who had taught Mathematics at an inner suburban private senior high school; and Elaine, who completed her teaching practice at an outer suburban public primary school. All had experienced to varying degrees troubling student attitudes and behaviour in the classroom and discussed how this had impacted on their assumptions and their role as a teacher.
Leila was the first to speak about her assumptions and how these had changed in relation to teaching at an independent private school.

The assumptions that I had made overall were I thought that it would be easier to teach at a private school. I thought that the content (the education) would be at a higher level and the majority of the students would be achieving at a higher level than say at the State schools. I discovered that this was not the case at all. For example they had students who could not or were not academic, whether because of lack of motivation or what! I discovered kids are kids and it did not matter whether their parents paid fifteen thousand dollars a year for their education or not as to how they achieved. And I did not find it easier either with regard to classroom discipline. It was different to my experience in a State school inasmuch that the ‘bullying’ was a lot more subtle, almost underhand in the private school, and it took me a while to pick up what was going on.

Jon interjected and asked Leila “was it more verbal than physical?” Leila replied:

Ah ... the physical was not there in the State schools either where I did previous teaching practices. It was just that these kids (private school students) knew the school had a strict policy on ‘bullying’ and that the policy was going to be enforced but they managed to navigate the policy in a way that many teachers were not aware of what was going on.

Jon, teaching SOSE at very challenging outer suburban public senior high school, offered his experience in relation to Leila’s experience of bullying and to students’ engagement with schooling. The experience led to disillusionment for Jon in his role as a teacher.

The kids where I have just completed my final teaching practice were mainly flashy and showy about their disrespect for their education, the teachers or even bullying. So all the covert kind of things that can or do happen ... happened out there in the open! First week of this term there was a riot at the school that began over a set of girls bullying another girl. It got out of hand ... kids took sides and it was on! In relation to students’ engagement and willingness to learn, in general, most of the kids were there (at school) because their parents dropped them off!

Elaine offered, “Was it because of a custodial service?” Jon replied:

Not so much because of custodial service but the parents saying ‘you are going to school today’. So they turn up (at school), they chat to their
friends, they do exactly what they want to do and will come up with any excuse not to do any (school) work. So if I think about any assumptions I held, it was that teachers should be respected and that kids most of the time would be willing to learn and do their school work!

Elaine completed her final teaching practice at a low socio-economic outer suburban public primary school that had a high concentration of multicultural students. Elaine and spoke about her experiences of her final teaching practice:

I did not make any assumptions because it does not matter what group of children you have; their motivation and abilities are going to be diverse regardless what school they are in, what ethnic background they have, what socio-economic area, it does not affect their intelligence. The class I had were difficult … there was a lot of behavioural issues! I found that by establishing relationships with them from the beginning … it took me most of the term but I managed to get work out of the most unwilling students. I tried to make it interesting with a focus on them and relevant to them. I got to know them during school recess times; we did lots of activities where they were able to talk about themselves and their life experiences.

There is evidence in these comments in response to question one that participants are developing as effective critical thinkers and as reflective practitioners in their everyday professional lives, especially as to what was happening in their classrooms. The overall commonalities and themes that have emerged have been students’ attitudes to learning and behavioural management issues and the ways in which to deal with these. Also of concern for the participants was student knowledge particularly the lack of. It seemed some students whether Year 8 or Year 10 were unable to follow simple, straightforward instructions given to them as to how to approach and complete their learning tasks. Moreover, many students seemed unable to pull up the background knowledge necessary for further learning in the subject.
It is interesting to note that for most of the participants, apart from Marlene and Elaine, the aforementioned common themes that have emerged in the data seem to have compromised the participants’ assumptions about their role as a classroom teacher. There were some incidents that allowed the participants to reflect and this had impacted in a way that seems to have helped them in their professional development. A detailed discussion of these responses will take place in the following chapter.

The second question invited the participants to think back over their final ATP and describe any classroom incidents that illustrated any of the assumptions they spoke about in the first question. These assumptions may have involved themselves in their role as a teacher or/and may have involved the students.

**Question 2: Describe one or more classroom incidents that illustrate any of these assumptions. These incident(s) may involve yourself in your role as a teacher and/or may involve the students.**

**Responses to question two for group 1**

There was a pause from Jacinta and Kate as they both reflected on this question. Eventually Jacinta spoke and said she would like to relate an incident between herself and a Year 11 male student in the computer laboratory.

When students go into the computer labs they are allowed to play their own music (from their own music stereos with ear speakers on) while they do their research. There was one particular student who played this music that was so inappropriate, the language. I could hear the words it was so loud. I told him it was unacceptable and to turn it off. He replied to me ‘no-one else is complaining.’ My feeling was no-one else would complain as he was such as big, huge kid. He really confronted me in the classroom. This student was at school because his parents were making him attend until a promised apprenticeship became available and he felt he could do as he liked! It comes back to values again that I
spoke about before and thankfully my cooperating teacher had similar values to me. But also I came into the class in third term when class rules are already established. It would not have happened if I had been their teacher from the beginning of the school year, they push you, but the rules have been established!

Kate agreed with Jacinta about the different teaching styles and values of different teachers. Kate went on to explain how she and her cooperation teacher in her Year 10 class were very different especially about their assumptions towards teaching.

The students at the beginning would say “Mr Preston (pseudonym) would let us do it that way, why are you making us do it this way?” with regard to certain procedures and what was expected in class, things like that. I explained that I was a different teacher and reminded them there were some things I let them do that Mr Preston would never let them do. So they soon accepted that there has to be give and take. I found bargaining to be a reasonably good tool with these students.

The comment from Kate about the use of “bargaining” with students in the classroom open up a lively discussion about the assumptions held between theory and practice. Jacinta said, “It is all about strategies and I found it really hard to make those connections between theory and practice - many times”. Kate became animated at this point.

Yes, you are not allowed to use sarcasm, not allowed to bargain, not allowed to do this, not allowed to do that! Then I walk into a classroom and within the first 10 minutes I have broken all those theory rules! But I still have a good classroom, you do this for me, I allow you to do this or that! The connections between the theory and the practice don’t always work (spoken very softly).

Jacinta offered, “And also who has written the theory!” Kate stated, “I have learned more on prac than reading any reader … but it (theory) gives you the basics, when you think yes, that is a good idea ... but you don’t go into the classroom and think, that kid is learning in this particular learning style which is back up from this particular author, you just don’t do that!”
Responses to question two from group 2

A significant issue that arose from discussion of Question 1 was the assumption that the entire group held concerning the amount of knowledge that they assumed the students would possess, whether it was Year 8 students or Year 10 students. Eva, Kara, Marlene and Tilly all experienced that their assumption of student knowledge was in many instances way off the mark. Regardless of the subject area, students’ responses indicated that their everyday knowledge was much less than the participants had assumed. This issue seemed compounded with concern that many students tended to portray an immaturity for their years. The group also shared classroom incidents about the assumptions they held and their experiences regarding other teachers’ support. They also discussed different styles of teaching and types of procedures within the schools and classrooms. Tilly in speaking about her Art class explained:

After several weeks of me assuming the Year 9 class would have some elements of drawing and colour it became clearly evident that they did not have that knowledge or skill. But I knew they had been taught this in Year 8. It did not seem to carry over or come through in Year 9!

Kara at the school she attended for her ATP explained that many students were involved with a programme entitled “Integrated Studies” or “Learning to Learn.” Kara explained that the skills learned in this programme did not seem to be transferred to other areas.

The students learn brain-storming skills, T-charts, how they learn, why they learn and different parts of the brain, the inquiring brain, De Bono and the six hats, and all these different bits and pieces. I assumed that the kids would have no problem transferring that knowledge into their English or SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment) classroom studies. They did not want to have a bar of it- that was Integrated Studies in that classroom and this was English in this classroom. I just assumed that the kids would be willing to do it; integrate what they were learning; that it was an everyday thing for them and it would be occurring because they had this programme at the school. I don’t think a lot of the teachers
were picking up on the Integrated Studies programme, as they did not know it themselves so they weren’t integrating it into their classroom. But the teachers who were involved with the programme and transferring it into their classrooms were getting fantastic results.

Kara’s experience then raised the issue of different styles of teaching associated with behaviour management and the lack of standardised procedures in the schools and the classrooms. All agreed procedures differed to a great extent. Eva and Kara agreed that practices lacked consistency. Eva described how one teacher allowed “hats being left on in class, playing their music and things like that, and then another teacher allowed none of these things to happen in the classroom.” “It just leads to confusion,” Kara stated. Tilly asked, “Why do they need the consistency?” Kara explained “Because if they go into one classroom and be told that this is acceptable behaviour and then go into another classroom and be told it is not acceptable behaviour; what are they (students) supposed to accept?” Kara trailed off at this point at which Tilly requested to play “devil’s advocate”.

Maybe they are just learning that life is inconsistent. If we have everything homogenised and across the board, god forbid that we should ever do that, then we will probably be going to move towards Nazi Germany, where everything is regimented! So we need to have that contrast. I am not saying we need to confuse kids but maybe that is something they need to learn that life is inconsistent! It is part of their coping skills and negotiating skills.

Tilly became more animated as others attempted to speak. However Kara stated again, “I think these kids were just getting confused.” Eva concurred.

I agree with Kara; that was my experience also. I felt the kids were getting confused and other teachers I spoke with felt the same way too. And some of the kids just could not cope with that amount of change. Just being in the different classrooms seemed enough without having to deal with all these different rules.
Eva then continued to explain another assumption she held about the knowledge and skills she thought would have already been acquired by the students.

Even up to Year 10s I was quite surprised at how immature some of them were and that you had to go back to basics. They were not adjusting or transferring skills... I had the top Year 10 class and I gave them an inquiry project and they struggled. I made the assumption again they (students) knew how to do it, how to go about it but, my gosh, did I get a shock!

The above discussion had brought about a lull in the group. As Marlene had not participated I asked her if she had any thoughts. She offered these insights into her experiences.

With behaviour my school was very good at a whole school approach with regards to consistency. I had students try it on in my class and I stood my ground and they then knew they were not going to get away with it. Because if kids think they can derail you they will because that’s what they do for fun, I did it myself!

This brought chortles from all the participants. However Marlene had another issue she wished to share with the group, which had similarities with Kara’s experience of the Integrated Studies programme. Marlene stated.

It is interesting making the links between the learning areas and sometimes the reluctance of students to concede. A student in my Year 9 class complained the project they were doing that involved Iraq was a SOSE subject not an English subject. I explained to the girl that subjects do cross over and that she had to be a critically literate person. I did break it down for her and explained what that meant and she then was happy that is was going to help her in her life. It is interesting I can see the valid points made by everyone here in the room and it makes you really think (said with passion) about the future of education and the future of the learning areas whether they really belong as separate units.

Kara agreed. “Yes and it does not really help the way the schools are set up where it becomes ... you either belong to this group or that group. It was very... cliquey.” Eva found that too. “There was not the cohesiveness I thought there would have been between
the teachers – ah, another assumption! (laughs).” Eva attempted to express, without
meaning to offend, that it was apparent that the teachers in her department(s) were not
very responsive to new ideas regards classroom practices.

I felt I was on the edge and I did not want to ruffle anyone. They, the
department also had set ways regards what they wanted to do and were
doing, so they were all very hmmm ... but this helped in other respects;
you know with marking and assessments.

The group apart from Marlene were disappointed with the support they received from
their individual schools and the teachers therein. The general assumption they held was
that they could have been better supported.

The third group consisted of Elaine, Jon and Leila. In response to question two there were
links with question one when the group gave examples of incidents in relation to
assumptions they held or discovered in relation to their role as a teacher.

**Responses to question two from group 3**

Leila was the first to speak and related how she had been rather startled to discover the
assumptions she held about teaching mathematics at a private inner suburban school. She
assumed if anything parents would be supportive of the school procedures and of the
teachers but this was not the case! Leila explained.

Many of the parents were highly educated and I would have to say that
they perceived their education as being higher than that of the teachers.
Frequently they would interfere in the way that the classroom was run,
with the curriculum and with homework; everything was questioned by
the parents.
As Leila mentioned previously she discovered that “kids are just kids, no matter which school they attend”. But what caused her concern was that any incident that involved the students whether it was to do with school work or behaviour issues or bullying, you could not reprimand the student(s) without the parents becoming overly involved such as telephoning the school, requesting meetings and the like.

What I did find was that these kids were a lot more protected than say State school students - with regards to parental involvement. Everything was challenged by the parents, and you had to explain and justify every single thing with regards to their child or children. It was very difficult.

Jon responded to Leila about his experience and assumptions:

My experience from my parents (and my assumption) was that teachers should be respected because they were trying to help you out. But I had kids in that school that just refused. And most of it had to do with behaviour (in the classroom). I feel that was because I was new and did not have the experience and strategies to deal with these kids. Now, I have a good idea of the strategies and know what to do!

Jon highlighting the issue of behaviour in his classrooms gave Elaine cause to explain an incident about one of her students and to her experience:

One student did not do his maths homework and when I asked him why he told me him dad had come home drunk and hit his mum, she had to go to hospital. He and his brother were told not to come out of their room. I usually did not give much homework as I was aware that in that particular school many of the kids did not receive much parental support. But, I think it is a lot easier to manage behavioural issues in a primary school as you are with the same kids all day, every day.

Jon then offered his experience of an incident concerning student behaviour and his “presumed/unconscious” assumption that the school management would support the teachers.

In regard to what you are talking about the only difference at the school I taught at was the teachers actually knew what was going on and banded together. It was very much a case of the teachers in general versus the
management. There are many, many behaviour problems at this school! Recently we had one kid who set fire to another kid, by using a can of antiperspirant deodorant spray! The teachers involved asked for the kid to be suspended for two weeks as this was not the first incident with this kid but the deputy principal would not agree. He just suspended the kid for the remainder of the day, which only had two periods remaining. He (student) was back at school the next day; we cannot rely on the management at this school for support ... it is unbelievable!

The responses from the participants to this second question about their assumptions and the effects of any classroom incidents on them and/or their students revealed a diverse range of issues. Commonalities were a conflict of values in regards to education between the participants’ values and the students’ values, and a consequent lack of parental support for the teachers in relation to their children’s education.

Several significant common themes emerged. Most participants experienced immense differences in the teaching styles practised, especially concerning approaches to behaviour management and the procedures involved. Eva, Jon, Kara and Leila each expressed strongly their concern at the lack of consistency about what was thought to be acceptable behaviour of students in the classroom. They wished for a more standardized agreement between teachers and school management. In contrast, Tilly disagreed as is evident when she played “devil’s advocate”. There was also much discussion about ‘give and take’ and the use of ‘bargaining’ with the students as an effective tool to complete classroom tasks. Also highlighted by some participants was the gap between their assumptions of the amount of knowledge held by the students and their actual lack of knowledge. Recognition of this gave the participants cause for concern and in every case led to a reassessment of their teaching practices. Leading from these discussions Jacinta and Kate emphasized the disparity between the theory of their university course and the
practices of the classroom. Finally all apart from Marlene agreed that they had experienced an overall lack of support from other teachers within their departments and within their respective schools. The effects of these responses and the common themes that have emerged will be discussed in detail in the discussion in chapters 5 and 6.

The third and final question invited the participants to reflect on the significance any incidents they had experienced would have in regard to their future teaching practices.

Question 3: On reflection what significance do you think the incident(s) you experienced will have with regard to your future teaching practices?

Responses to question three from group 1

Jacinta responded promptly when this question was read out.

When I think about incidents or particular incidents that impacted on my teaching practice I now realise the more I reflect and write about the incidents straight away, the more likely I am to change! So I think it is important to have a diary with me at all times so things can be written down. I then can deal with that or any incident differently next time. I want to be able to do that!

Kate had been quietly listening to Jacinta and nodded her head in agreement.

Basically I have learned that when I had incidents and I could sit down and reflect on them I could say - that was pretty stupid or I think about ways to change my behaviour. But I also felt it was so much about give and take: them (the students) and me.

Responses to question three from group 2

In answer to question three there was a long pause and Tilly was the first to respond.

When I think back I have probably done more learning in the last ten weeks of my ATP than I did in my whole time at uni. The theory was really interesting but being in the classroom with actual students -
nothing prepares you for that! The things you have to deal with - the sarcasm, the verbal abuse, the unwillingness to engage ... all we have been speaking about. And all the different incidents that come from that.

This response from Tilly and the anguish she expressed about her experiences in her role as a teacher created a sombre and silent group. Marlene then responded with an incident she had experienced with a particularly difficult Year 9 female student who constantly attempted to undermine and sabotage Marlene in the classroom. Marlene believed it was a power struggle, with the girl playing at being cool, showing off and getting the approval of her peers. Marlene tells us she will try and keep it brief, “because you do not have that much tape!” Everyone laughs and this breaks the dismal silence that had engulfed the group, then Marlene tells her story.

I made plenty of mistakes, I thought about them, and also talked with my cooperating teacher about them. This girl who gave me a lot of grief ... I used sarcasm to level her - and it worked. But it was such a bad choice! I felt um ... I did not go on but I delivered sharp sarcastic comments and the other kids had a bit of a snigger at her expense. She then began to work for me ... but it was not worth it! I ... I did not have the expertise about classroom management that I would have liked to have had. I hope I never do that again! I don’t think I will. I have read more and spoken with more experienced teachers; I have developed strategies to cope with things like that now.

Eva then offered:

As you said, so many mistakes that we make, but it is lack of experience! When you reflect back, without it being a cliché, one thing I have learnt at uni is that you are continually learning. When you think of the reflective practitioner it is true, so next year I will try and work on that! That is really one of my concerns going out to teach next year - that I can make a difference.

All nodded in agreement and Eva quietly expressed “I really hope I find like-minded teachers when I go out next year”. Kara too agreed and stated.

I hope so too because I would get more involved especially with the student and school community, as I also play guitar. I went to the school
jazz concert this last prac and the next day we (students) spoke about the music, it really was good to relate to them and have a joint interest we could share.

The interview closed when Tilly, on a positive note, responded to Kara’s experience. Tilly told the group that she had been involved with making the props for her school’s theatre group play. The response and interaction from the students had been so receptive that the experiences made Tilly declare, “Because of this I will get involved with my school next year for sure, I am really looking forward to that!”

**Responses to question three from group 3**

Jon and Leila had both taught high school students in Years 8 – 10. Elaine was the only participant who taught at primary school level. Within this group and in relation to the third and final question there was a lot of discussion about the role of a teacher. Questions of how to create a teaching environment conducive to learning and how to maintain professional distance were discussed, with the group sharing examples and incidents. Behaviour management and procedures were the significant issues here with regards to students’ classroom behaviour. Jon was the first to respond:

I realised that in the first couple of weeks you had to keep your distance from the students and not become as involved as you would in week six. Because by then you know the kids not only by name but by personalities, likes, dislikes and behaviour habits etc. Try to get as much information on each kid from all other sources, such as other teachers and support staff, and then you better know the kids and their backgrounds. That would help me with how to deal with behaviour management strategies. This has been my experience and what I have learned this teaching practice.

Leila and Elaine were both listening intently and then Leila offered an insight into her experience.
I can concur with that. You have to be very careful with the discipline. If you isolate a student the rest of them get together and they become the enemy against you! It is very easy to get into that situation and difficult to get out of it.

Elaine then expressed to the group her experience of her school practice and how this will impact on her future teaching practices:

I found the more I got to know the kids and formed a relationship with them the easier the behaviour management got. They challenged me less and I was able to stop the misbehaviour before it escalated. I did set the boundaries right from the beginning. I view myself as being there to guide the kids and that they are doing their own learning. I don’t assert my authority in the classroom, getting into power struggles makes things worse. I let them make choices and they know the consequences. This is what I will take with me when I get my own class next year.

This concludes the presentation of key responses to the focus group questions. The common themes that emerged from the three focus groups in conclusion to question three were varied but all the issues had been raised in reply to the previous questions. It is interesting to note that all participants to varying degrees revealed how critically reflective practices were helping to develop their professional judgement as classroom teachers. Eva, Jacinta, Kate and Marlene all expressed the need to be critically reflective if they wanted to make positive changes in their teaching practices. Tilly expressed concern that the theory she had received at university did not support her adequately during her teaching practice, but did concede that developing positive teacher-student relationships were beneficial to her teaching practice.

Kara and Eva hoped to meet like-minded colleagues who would support their teaching styles and Kate also spoke about ‘give and take’ between herself as a teacher and the students in her classroom. Elaine, Jon and Leila all held similar views with regards to
professional distance and boundaries being set and established between themselves and
the students, with behaviour management being a significant and underlying issue with
them.

At this point I would like to offer a synopsis of the key findings that have emerged from
the data in relation to my research question. I was interested to discover the extent to
which pre-service teachers consciously engaged in critical reflection to inform their
practice, especially in relation to their responses to classroom incidents, their capacity to
question their prior assumptions about teaching in light of their experiences, and their
exercise of judgement in the classroom. The data uncovered from the participants’
responses was indeed rich and detailed. The one-on-one interviews followed up later with
the focus group meetings helped to reveal mostly the same common themes, which gave
validity to these findings.

The findings were insightful because the responses from the participants shed light on the
extent to which a process of critical reflection was in turn informing the participants’
teaching practices. Indeed, with most participants this was the case and a change had
occurred. Unfortunately in some incidents for some participants the choices and
judgements they made were not conducive developing good teaching practices. What
follows include some examples of the major themes that most participants discussed,
which had a significant effect on their teaching practices and encompassed all the aspects
involved within my study.
Being authentic in their role as classroom teachers was important to Leila, Kara, Marlene and Kate. For Leila being authentic in her role as a classroom teacher was paramount. The following response shows this: “Teaching is difficult and you cannot experience it through someone else. Students are able to see through you, they can see when you are not being genuine. Because when you’re doing it authentically and you are doing it from the heart it is much more an emotional process and anything that involves the emotions is by definition harder to do. Teaching is not something that can be taught you can only experience it I feel … the finer points of teaching.” Leila’s response illustrated a critical reflection of her practice which was a catalyst for change for Leila and would in effect contribute to inform her practice in a most conducive manner.

Disparity between theory and practice was a major issue for several participants especially Jacinta and Eva. For example, Jacinta stated, “Initially at the beginning of this school experience I had this idealistically theoretical approach (incredulous laugh). But now ... making it more relevant to them instead of this theoretical approach I always tend to adopt.” Eva also had to re-assess and re-evaluate her usual approach to teaching and the methods she used and change these where appropriate to suit the different students’ needs. Eva stated, “I had to re-evaluate some of the things I thought I should or should not do. I had to make that decision it may … not be right by the books or whatever but with this class it is working.” I would suggest for both Jacinta and Eva there was a conscious critical reflection on their practice. Jacinta and Eva do not state they had abandoned theory in the interest of practice but they did make pragmatic changes to suit
their students’ needs so as to engage them in their learning, in what they believed was a more effective way to create positive outcomes.

Most participants had experiences and strong responses regarding students’ attitudes to learning and their (negative) behaviour in the classroom. Important for the participants were the effects of these issues upon their role as a teacher, especially to them achieving constructive teaching practices. What was rather disconcerting was Eva’s responses to the incidents she had experienced regarding this issue. Eva stated, “I did not think I would resort to bribery! It was like a negotiation - I will let you have that ... if you do this work for me, and it is working.” At this stage Eva seemed to have abandoned all previous thoughts and actions concerning her engagement in being critically reflective of her practice. This was a huge compromise for Eva and was more indicative of the role of a technicist rather than of a professional conscious of upholding good teaching practices. Similarly, other participants portrayed technicist attributes concerning incidents they had experienced in the classroom. Issues concerning values, beliefs, assumptions and judgements in relation to their practice and also their teaching styles and professional competence were all issues of concern which affected the participants’ engagement with critical reflection and good practice. For example, so as the students would engage and complete their lessons, Tilly and Kara resorted to allowing the students to listen to their iPods in the classroom, and Kate committed to a bargaining pledge with her students to an end of term party if they completed their classroom work.
Nevertheless, other participants revealed a positive engagement with critical reflection when thinking about their practices. For example, in relation to some students’ non-engagement with their lessons in the classroom, Jacinta stated, “For those students I just feel I am babysitting. So that gives me more an awareness of myself in my role as a teacher: that you are not just there as a person who imparts knowledge.” Similarly, Tilly had to re-evaluate assumptions she held with regards to students’ knowledge and abilities. Tilly states, “My assumption was that these kids would have had a lot more background than they actually had.” Almost at the completion of her final teaching practice Marlene, after the many difficult incidents she had experienced, declared, “I have far more sense of my responsibility now especially to do with my sense of authority. It is authority for the sake of ensuring safety and ensuring learning and for facilitating the educational process. It is a responsibility.” These common themes and more that have emerged and their significance for this research will be discussed in further detail in the following chapters.
CHAPTER FIVE

Dimensions of Critical Reflection: Individual Responses

Research into the reflective practice and critical thinking of teachers is of interest for several reasons. As discussed previously, practising as a critically reflective teacher is widely promoted throughout teacher education programmes and in scholarly literature (see for example Down and Smyth, 2012), and policy documents such as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Australian Professional Standards for Teachers\(^2\) promote ongoing professional learning, of which critical reflection can be considered an essential component. Brookfield is a strong advocate of critical reflection for adult educators, and adheres to the importance of modelling \textit{per se} as being central to his practice. The concept of “modelling” critical reflection has not been discussed so far but it is a worthy consideration especially as pre-service teachers as adult learners are a focus of this dissertation. An explanation of how modelling takes places can be found in Taylor and Jarecke (2009), who cite Brookfield who stated that before he (Brookfield) could expect a student to do something he himself would demonstrate what that was. Modelling can be “invaluable in assisting those (adult learners) in making connections between theory and practice” (Taylor & Jarecke, 2009, p. 287). Thus the modelling of critical thinking by adult educators is invaluable to adult learners, especially in the milieu of education but also in many other disciplines.

\(^2\) This document replaces the “\textit{Competency Framework for Teachers}” (Department of Education and Training, Western Australia, DETWA, 2004), which informed my original study.
Tripp’s (1993) book *Critical Incidents in Teaching* exemplifies the practice of modelling. Although he does not speak explicitly about ‘modelling’, the numerous classroom examples and Tripp’s guidance and collaboration with teachers in their line of work suggests a modelling approach. The book is based on various classroom incidents and shows how, when these are experienced and diagnostically analysed by teachers, they can become critical incidents that teachers are able to draw on for future practice. Importantly, Tripp reminds the reader several times that this book is first and foremost a practical guide. It is concerned with the development of professionalism in teaching where teachers want to improve their practice and share their expertise and knowledge with others (Tripp, 1993). Within the book Tripp does raise important theoretical and methodological issues concerning research and teaching. But it was the practical aspect of the book consisting of the many examples and explanations of classroom incidents that drew me to use Tripp’s book to inform my study: for example when developing the questions put to the participants regarding their experiences of classroom incidents.

Secondly, for teachers, their engagement with critical reflection would be expected to bring about ‘transformative’ change that would benefit their students and their classroom practices (Mezirow, 2009). Transformative learning is significant to this study as “its focus is on adult learners, and its primary audience is adult educators” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 21). A further consideration is that a recent discussion by Brookfield and Holst (2010) highlighted the “holy trinity” of contemporary adult education: transformative learning, self-directed learning and critical reflection (Brookfield & Holst, 2010, p. 31). This
framing sits well with the analysis and discussion of this research because of the many examples that have emerged where participants’ assumptions have been challenged by particular classroom incidents and the process has led in turn to changed practices. In many instances these incidents took the participants by surprise, becoming for participants something Mezirow called “disorienting dilemmas” (2009, cited in Brookfield & Holst, 2010, p. 32). This challenging of assumptions can be viewed as the first stage in transformative learning, “happening both as a result of intentional critical reflection and as something we are catapulted into by events” (Brookfield & Holst, 2010, p. 33).

Brookfield (2009), discussing Mezirow’s transformational theory, suggested that critical thinking is fundamental to transformative learning. “Mezirow believes that adult learning occurs in four ways - elaborating existing frames of reference, learning frames of reference, transforming points of view, and transforming habits of mind - and names critical reflection as a component of all of these” (Brookfield, 2009, p. 125). Transformative learning has been defined by Mezirow as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more exclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 22). This description of transformative learning seemed central to my study of pre-service teachers because this is what I wanted to explore. I hoped that the results of the study would help me understand the effect on classroom practice of engagement in a critically reflective manner in learning that was potentially transformative. I was interested to know whether pre-service
teachers really thought like this, and whether this thinking led to change or transformation of practice.

This study sought to explore whether indeed the pre-service teachers had adopted and were engaged in critically reflective practices during the course of their work, and if so whether this engagement had any capacity to bring about change. But there are some dynamics to consider regarding the transformative learning process, as Mezirow pointed out. “How one categorises experiences, beliefs, people, events and the self, involves structures of assumptions and expectations on which our thoughts, feelings, and habits are based” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 22). As explained in Chapter 2 the model I used as the tool for analysis seemed apt as a means to explore the components of transformative learning that Mezirow includes in the above quotation. This model assisted in explaining how we think and act, and was adapted from Furr and Carroll (2003). I choose this model firstly because their research, as did mine, analysed research participants’ narrative accounts of how they responded to critical incidents in their work – in Furr and Carroll’s case the participants were working as counsellors. Furr and Carroll’s initial analysis of data used a five-step process developed by Giorgi (1985), which fitted the narrative nature of the participants’ responses and utilized a psychological phenomenological approach as described in Appendix 1.

The first three steps of Furr and Carroll’s (2003) procedure were to assemble a series of key critical incidents, then to code each critical incident and finally to categorize them into grouped codes with similar meanings. Furr and Carroll (2003) then “constructed nine
categories” to analyse data into which the critical incidents were classified (p. 483). These nine categories consisted of (a) existential issues/value conflicts; (b) cognitive development; (c) beliefs about competency; (d) professional development; (e) perceived support; (f) perceived obstacles; (g) and (h) (under a sub-heading pertaining to Personal Growth: (g) within the teaching practice and (h) outside the teaching practice) and finally (i) skill development (Furr & Carroll, 2003, p. 483). The last two steps of the five-step process involved the application of Beck’s (1993) model to analyse the data collected (see Appendix 2). This theoretical model best explained how critical incidents influenced, in Furr and Carroll’s case, counsellor development or, in my case, teacher development.

Furr and Carroll’s final step was to group the nine categories into four broad themes (clusters) in accordance with the Beck model “that describes the relationship among beliefs, cognitions, affect and behaviour” (Furr & Carroll, 2003, p. 483).

The first of Furr and Carroll’s four clusters, the Belief Cluster, included incidents that stimulated participants’ re-evaluation of life and personal values, and included existential issues/value conflicts. The second, the Cognitive Cluster, included incidents that facilitated change in cognitive structures, beliefs about competency and professional development. The Affective Cluster related to “incidents in which the primary effects on participants were affective”. This cluster included the affective dimensions of perceived support, perceived obstacles, personal growth (within the work practice), and personal growth (outside the work practice). The final cluster was the Behavioural Cluster, made up of incidents that changed participants’ behaviours and practices, including any event that affected skill development (Furr & Carroll, 2003, p. 483).
The four large clusters were developed from Beck’s discussion of cognitive therapy (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Beck’s original article (1993) highlights several issues applicable to my study, such as how to focus on and understand better the thinking behind the overt symptom or behaviour. Beck suggested that when analysing why people act the way they do, we have to accept what people say about what they think and do “at face value” (Beck, 1993, p. 346). In cognitive therapy a focus is on people’s cognitions “and on the premises, assumptions, and attitudes underlying these cognitions” (Beck, 1993, p. 347). Cognitive therapy also focuses on constructs that are accessible to introspection, that is, can be reflected on. Thus a systematic study of self-reported introspective data from my participants’ responses to incidents in the classroom, mapped against Furr & Carroll’s (Appendix 3 and 4) theoretical model, can as Beck (1993) suggested help us understand the thought processes behind people’s behaviour. The above discussion best explains the lenses I have applied to the data I analysed to understand how incidents become critical and influence change in teachers’ practice. In my analysis, because there is an overall interplay between the critical incidents and the nine different categories, the term ‘dimensions’ best describes the complex elements at play when participants reflect on critical incidents. Thus from this point forward I have opted to use the word ‘dimensions’ instead of ‘clusters’ to capture this complexity.

To begin this discussion of the results I would like to highlight that from the onset the underlying intention of most of the participants, particularly in relation to their classroom practices, was to be ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ in their relationships with their students. Cranton and Carusetta (2004) highlighted that “critical reflection or critical participation
in life is central to transformative learning. And this is also a good way of understanding authenticity - we need to know who we are and what we believe and then act on that” (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 8). Brookfield (1995) discussed the importance of creating a culture of reflection and practice but he also spoke of taking “our meanings and agendas from others” so that “teaching becomes the implementation of other people’s ideas” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 265). Cranton and Carusetta (2004) also discussed that “when people’s actions are controlled by others and their performance is repetitive and ritualistic they are inauthentic” (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 8).

I think what Cranton and Carusetta (2004) and Brookfield (1995) were saying was that we have to be *bona fide* teachers with authenticity as our foundation, to become better teachers. As Palmer (1998) suggested, while it is difficult to find similarities among good teachers, one common trait is a “strong sense of personal identity [which] infuses their work” (p. 10). Understanding this can lead us on the path of becoming critically reflective teachers. For Brookfield (1995), ‘authentic’ teachers teach with a sense of excitement and purpose; they “learn from the past but live in the present with an eye on the future. There is a continual checking of assumptions, a continual viewing of practice through different lenses, and a continual rethinking of what works, and why” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 265). In effect I think Brookfield was warning teachers to know themselves, be true to themselves and to be authentic in what they do. If teachers reject the idea of authenticity, then they will inevitably become “increasingly disengaged and disenchanted” with teaching going “through the motions” but knowing that “they are someone else’s motions not our own” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 265).
Tripp (1993), thinking has contributed significantly to my study, also voiced similar views to those of Brookfield (1995) when he related an incident that became for him epiphanic in relation to teachers and incidents in their teaching. The incident led him to realise that “I learned to improve and change my practice, not through the adoption of particular findings of ‘educational’ research but through a close, personal, informed and critical examination of particular instances of my own practice” (Tripp, 1993, p. xv). Subsequently, as the practical implications were Tripp’s primary concern, he initiated a programme of action research that made him decide “to try to learn how to work with teachers’ experiences in a practical and scholarly fashion through the documentation and analysis of critical incidents in their practice” (Tripp, 1993, p. xv). Tripp’s disclosure above is very similar to Brookfield’s (1995) writings in relation to being authentic in one’s own practices. A desire for authenticity seems apparent in Tripp’s own self-analysis and in his approach to working with teachers in the field.

Furr and Carroll’s (2003) theoretical model enabled me to analyse the range and nature of the participants’ thinking. Participants when interviewed voiced all too readily their experiences, thoughts and feelings, which reflected the discussion of the authors above. The participants all tended to be experiencing in voicing, with differing degrees of complexity and intensity, what it was like for them to be a critically reflective practitioner. What is of interest, opening a Pandora’s Box of complex responses, was question two (see Appendix 2) which requested the participants to share any experience(s) that challenged or made them re-examine any assumptions they held or discovered they held in relation to being a classroom teacher. A diverse range of issues
raised by the participants included value conflicts, the limitations of students’ knowledge and their approach to learning, and the importance of building positive relationships with students. The most overwhelming challenge for all participants, and which impinged most strongly on their responses and practices, was the issue of disruptive student behaviour, its management, its policies and its associated practices. The ambiguous nature of the behaviour management practices of other teaching colleagues was also confounded by the lack of standardisation of practices within and between the different schools. The parameters of this paper cannot include a detailed discussion about disruptive student behaviour in the classroom or the management of this, however due to the widespread and pervasive nature of this issue comment will be made later.

The underlying aim of the following discussion is show how the practice of critical reflection may be understood in terms of the four broad types of thought processes that Furr and Carroll (2003) delineate: processes associated with belief, processes of cognition, affective processes and behavioural processes. I will organise the discussion under the four headings that describe these thought processes, beginning with Belief processes, then Cognitive, moving on to the Affective, and finally Behavioural processes to summarise the responses that fall under each one. In order to organize the discussion of the results I will begin with various responses from the individual participants, beginning with question one and working through to question four, then go on to the responses from the three questions put to the focus groups beginning with Group 1, question one and so forth, and then group the responses according to the four processes.
Due to the limitations of this dissertation not all the participants or all their responses can be discussed. Therefore I have cited what are powerful extracts that best illustrate the participants’ experiences in relation to all the questions and that relate well to Furr and Carroll’s (2003) theoretical model. In the interest of continuity and fluidity I have restated the questions put to the participants at the beginning of each of the main sections in the chapter.

**Question 1: Participants were asked “to recall an incident(s) that made them think whether their final practice was going as the thought it should?”**

The following individual responses represent the most significant of the participants’ experiences.

**Responses to question one that relate to the belief dimension.**

In their answers to question one it became evident that the participants had experienced various kinds of existential issues and value conflicts associated with their re-evaluation of their life and personal values. Leila’s belief that she ought to emulate other teachers in her own practice made her aware that she was not being authentic and also that her students knew she wasn’t being that either. Leila became aware that she was not being authentic in her classroom practices and she also became aware her students knew she was not being genuine either. What Leila spoke of and experienced portrayed all the signs of what Brookfield (1995) stated above about (not) being authentic in your classroom practices with your students, such as replicating other people’s work and ideas and of going through the motions we know are not our own but someone else’s. By continually checking and viewing her practice and critically thinking about what was working and
what was not, enabled Leila to re-evaluate these beliefs about teaching which led her to be more authentic in her teaching (Brookfield, 1995).

The issue of student behaviour and the management of this within the classroom are worth a mention at this stage. Student behaviour had led several participants to question their personal beliefs and values and challenged some of the participants’ existential position regarding how they thought about students. Eva stated, “Sometimes the classroom behaviour is a bit off”. Kara was struggling in class with the negative behaviour of her year 10 students as she had forgotten “the process” of behaviour management and as she stated “I really needed to use that”. At the beginning of her final teaching practice Tilly felt she had been thrown in at the deep end and initially felt acutely vulnerable. Behaviour management and the behaviour of various teachers towards the students were some issues that challenged Tilly, who stated, “I really had to wing it. I am talking about managing, behavioural management, being friendly to the kids but also controlling the classroom - situations you have to deal with”. Tilly’s experience of teaching the first lesson on the first day of a new term created no opportunity for her to observe the culture of the school. As a result of this the beliefs and core values Tilly held about her role as a classroom teacher and how she thought and acted in relation to this came into conflict with those of the teachers, whom Tilly had observed “barking at the kids, basically getting them into line” and the negative behaviour of the students. Eva’s, Kara’s and Tilly’s narratives portray a lack of support from the school system which, especially when striving to “settle into an authentic teaching role” and “[g]iven the
culture of teaching found in many schools that promote teacher isolation,” they may not get (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 196).

Marlene also had a challenging time coping with behaviour management issues especially when an ADHD student started using inappropriate language and slamming doors at her in class. But nevertheless Marlene felt she was able to teach effectively as she stated, “I stayed calm and used behaviour management skills learned from other teachers on the job.” This was not what Marlene had learned at university, “because we had not really learnt that much.” But Marlene’s response does indicate her belief in the value of learning from colleagues, as her university course had not given her the tools or an adequate level of knowledge to turn to. In all cases, participants’ lack of knowledge about appropriate strategies created a barrier to them developing effective teaching practices (Palmer, 1998; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). All of the above participants experienced incidents that conflicted with their beliefs and core values in relation to teaching, and challenged them to re-evaluate these to accommodate their dilemmas (Brookfield, 1995; Ethell & McMeniman, 2002).

*Responses to question one that relate to the cognitive dimension.*

The cognitive dimension has three components: cognitive development, beliefs about competency, and professional development. Leila, while reflecting on question one and thinking about how her teaching practice had gone, revealed particular negative beliefs about her competency. Leila felt that she could and should have done so much more, and that she should have known about and predicted some of the incidents that she had to deal
with. Leila could have become “disenchanted and disengaged,” as Brookfield (1995, p. 265) discussed above concerning authenticity in teaching. However Leila’s engagement in critical reflection on her own practice, where she continually re-assessed and then by cognitive processes transformed how she thought and how she acted, enabled her to be more authentic in her teaching (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). It also gave her renewed excitement and purpose (Tripp, 1993; Brookfield, 1995; Mezirow, 2009). Reflection on the incidents also had a transformative effect on Leila’s learning and facilitated change in her cognitive structures, beliefs about her competency and inevitably her professional development. But this was also an existential issue for Leila, relating to how she saw herself with respect to the world she was in, and thus is integrally linked back to her beliefs.

In relation to their classroom experiences Eva’s, Kara’s, Marlene’s and Tilly’s responses varied concerning the nature of the change occurring within their cognitive structures, their perceptions about their competency and their professional development, which are all components that make up the cognitive dimension. Eva did speak about the importance of being a “reflective practitioner” and stated, “If my lesson was not received well I would think - I will not do it that way again!” Kara reflected on her teaching practice and began implementing her forgotten behaviour management processes and also reassessed her teaching practices. Kara stated, “I have introduced and incorporated new learning methods to get them (students) interested.” It was then that Kara began to receive more positive results from her students. The comments that Tilly received from her cooperating teacher(s) such as “you’re not friendly to the kids; you do not look like
you want to be in there” demoralized Tilly. But Tilly was able to analyse this by stating her understanding that “you are not their friend, you are their teacher. I wasn’t aware that I wasn’t smiling, I actually was probably a lot tenser than I thought I was!” In contrast, Marlene accepted the issue of behaviour management as a challenge (“this is a major pedagogical deficiency that I have,” she stated) and through her experience with the ADHD student was able to facilitate a positive change in her classroom and also extend her competence. Although their experiences were different the narratives from the four participants above indicate that they are developing a sense of what they are doing and why they are doing it, which is imperative to facilitating an effective change to their competencies as teachers (Zeichner & Liu, 2010).

Furthermore the above responses from Eva, Kara, Marlene and Tilly about their classroom experiences indicated that they had pinpointed ‘critical incidents’, a process involving two stages as discussed by Tripp (1993). The ‘incidents’ occurred firstly because they had been observed and noted. The phenomenon then became ‘critical’ due to the nature of the analysis of what happened and why in the particular social context of the classroom. As a result of this process the learning from the ‘critical incident’ can be utilised for future practice (Tripp, 1993). Although three of the participants were initially challenged, their critical reflections did facilitate change in their cognitive structures, which enabled positive perceptions of their competency and professional development to emerge. Tilly on the other hand was struggling with her beliefs about her competency and professional development due to her attempt to try to please and gain the approval of four different cooperating teachers who, as she explained, “all have different ways of doing
things”. But Tilly was still able to critically reflect and presented a strong sense of self as a classroom teacher. For example Tilly explained “every minute I have to think... I am having to think on my feet.” Tilly related how she vigilantly observed the students in relation to them being engaged, interested and comprehending any given activity, and recognised that sometimes she needed to change her practices. As she said, “Wow they are not getting this, I will have to change and I have to come up with something quick.” The above discussion also substantiates the argument that being able to critically reflect and engage in rational discourse illustrates a mature level of cognitive function that enables transformative learning to occur (Mezirow, 2003; 2004).

**Responses to question one that relate to the affective dimension.**

This dimension focuses on perceived support, perceived obstacles, and personal growth. Leila responded to question one stating that she felt she had done well and had “achieved what she had set out to do”. However Leila expressed some anguish about her final teaching practice as this seemed to have been a major obstacle for her. Leila spoke with regret of things she “should have done, should have predicted and should have known”. These things Leila related to as the “finer points of teaching”. This distress seems to have come from attempting to emulate her cooperating teachers instead of focusing on developing her authentic self within her teaching practice. As Leila said, “Teaching is not something that can be taught you can only experience it, students are able to see through you, or how you are teaching is not coming from the heart!” It could be argued that at this stage Leila did indeed become somewhat “disenchanted” but never “disengaged” (Brookfield, 1995) and this was due to her ability to engage in critically reflective
practice. From an affective point of view these feelings and thoughts that Leila experienced arose when she was faced by obstacles, but they also attributed to the development of more positive feelings and to her own personal growth.

In reply to question one Tilly stated that she “did not feel at all supported” and was “getting no positives to balance any of the negatives.” This was compounded by working with four different cooperating teachers who, as Tilly stated, “all have different ways of doing things.” The lack of any positive affirmation seemed to have negated any personal growth Tilly felt was happening during her teaching practice. Marlene on the other hand appreciated the support from other teachers on the matter of behaviour management. She tended to view any obstacles such as “kids who have a bad reputation within the school” as a challenge that had to be overcome. Marlene perceived these obstacles as challenges that had a primary effect on her personal growth as a teacher and led to the expression of positive feelings. As Marlene stated, “I find it really stimulating actually!” Tilly’s and Marlene’s experiences and their perceptions of them are indeed dissimilar but their experiences relate to the ways that certain hegemonic practices within many school systems can affect how they feel about perceived support or obstacles within the personal growth of their teaching practice and to the effectiveness of their teaching in the classroom. For example, Fecho et al. (2004) discussed teachers’ use of reflective inquiry upon their practice and how this can enable a greater and more useful understanding of their students. But Fecho et al. also cited how some teachers (and some pre-service teachers) who had embraced reflective inquiry of their practice felt frustrated because of perceived barriers to such work, which they felt existed in many schools. It became a
struggle for those first year teachers who wished to embrace such a concept, but were
overwhelmed with a feeling of “swimming upstream against all the standardized tests,
prescribed curriculum, and departmental requirements” (Fecho et al., 2004, p. 2).

It is important to recognise the role of emotions within the concept of the critically
reflective practitioner. The concept of learning from experience as espoused by
Brookfield (1993) is interesting because of his suggestion of how the “visceral experience
of learning reframes teaching” (Brookfield, 1993, p. 23). Brookfield argued that “as a
teacher, one of the most useful, and most ignored, sources of insight into your own
practice is your own autobiography as a learner” (Brookfield, 1993, p. 23). Brookfield argued that most of the writing about critical reflection and reflective practice is cerebral.
Because of the appeal of this type of writing, there is “a real possibility that [critical
reflection and reflective practice] are often considered at a cognitive, intellectual level,
without having the influence on practice that the emotionality of direct experience
provides” (Brookfield, 1993, p. 23). Drawing on this thought it could be suggested that
teacher educators ought to consciously adopt Brookfield’s suggestion and share their
feelings and direct experiences with their students, so as they (the student teachers or
graduate teachers) could have the tools to draw on in times of need.

The discussion above touches on the significant difference between andragogy and
pedagogy. Teachers of adults may be in a better position to share their emotions with
their adult students than teachers teaching children. For example, “Andragogy is the art
and science of helping adults learn” (Henschke, 1997/1998, p. 2). Pedagogy by contrast is
the art and science of teaching children. For Knowles, “Andragogy meant emphasizing and exemplifying congruence between theory and practice in adult education — in other words, treat adults as adults in the classroom or any other learning context” (Henschke, 1997/1998, p. 2). Knowles was a powerful advocate of the idea that adult educators had a duty to operate from “a distinctive body of knowledge, theory and experience” and he was always willing to share this with his students (Knowles, 1989, p. 46).

**Responses to question one that relate to the behavioural dimension.**

This has only one category: skill development. This is made up of incidents that changed participants’ levels of skill in their teaching practices and included any event that affected skill development. In her response to question one, the ramifications of authenticity that surrounded Leila’s teaching experience were shown to be strongly influential in her skill development. In her previous two shorter teaching practices Leila had observed her cooperating teacher, studied and learned her style and had emulated it. But during her final 10-week practice Leila realised that simply basing one’s own teaching style on someone else’s was a barrier to skill development, and Leila was as a result unable to make any progress. Thus, her objective was to make changes in her teaching practices in a more constructive manner. As Leila said, “You cannot rely on someone else’s teaching practice or even their style in the classroom.” The realisation of “not being genuine” led Leila to develop her own authenticity and to achieve a positive change in her teaching practices, which ultimately affected her skill development in positive ways. Leila’s responses demonstrated how her engagement with critical reflection on the existential issues she evaluated on a daily basis led to her becoming a more effective teacher. It is also a good
example of the close connection between all the clusters in Furr and Carroll’s model (2003), which allows us to see how the belief, cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions together have a role in developing effectiveness as a critically reflective practitioner.

On the issue of behaviour management it is evident that Marlene’s experience with the incident involving the ADHD student where she stated, “I quietly counselled him while keeping an eye on the other kids … and … stayed calm and kept dealing with it,” created a positive change in her teaching practices and skill development. The narratives of both Leila and Marlene suggest clear examples of the notion of ‘praxis’. Praxis is the combination of action and reflection which involves the use of theoretical perspectives, evidence that is obtained from scrupulous research and enquiry and posited as a fundamental principle of adult learning by both Brookfield (1986) and Freire, (1973) and indeed by Dewey in 1933. Behaviourally I would suggest that engaging in praxis enabled both Leila and Marlene to achieve a positive change in their level of practice and this created the opportunity that affected their skill development in significant ways. Moreover, praxis can be observed in the responses of Eva, Kara and Tilly in relation to cognitive processes, further showing links between the sets of processes and demonstrating the value of applying this model to understand the research data. This completes the discussion concerning question one.

**Question 2:** Participants were requested to “Think back over the past week(s). Identify a specific classroom incident in which you were faced with a situation, which challenged you in some way or made you re-evaluate some assumptions you may have held. Describe what happened and what particular aspects of the incident
gave you greater awareness of yourself in your role as a classroom teacher and/or of the student(s) involved?

The responses to question two generated in-depth, rich insights from all the participants concerning their greater awareness of themselves in their role as a teacher (Fontana & Fray, 2000). The participants’ narratives, prompted by the concept of ‘assumptions’ held or only just discovered, was most enlightening both to the study and also to the participants themselves as complex reflections and feelings surfaced (Silverman, 2000). The most prominent issue to surface in almost all of the participants’ narratives involved their assumptions about their role as a classroom teacher and how reflection on this gave them a greater awareness of themselves in this role, and in some instances greater awareness of the students also. These assumptions included the extent of students’ knowledge, their attitude to learning and their ability to learn, the importance of inclusivity and the exercise of power. Inappropriate behaviour from students was a recurring problem for all participants, and we will look at how their assumptions created issues of conflict for them. Below are some of the most powerful narratives that highlight what the participants experienced.

**Responses to question two that relate to the belief dimension.**

Most of the participants experienced incidents that challenged their beliefs about their role as a classroom teacher and led them to re-examine the assumptions they held or discovered they held. This created value conflicts that stimulated them to re-evaluate life and their personal values. For example, Elaine’s beliefs were challenged when the experience of working in her cooperating teacher’s classroom made explicit her belief that a messy classroom created an ineffective learning environment for her students. For
the first time Elaine became aware of her belief that the disruptive behaviours of the students could be connected with the disordered state of the classroom. Elaine also recognised that this was an issue of respect for both teacher(s) and students because Elaine’s beliefs created a values conflict between her values and the cooperating teacher’s values in regards to the set-up of the classroom. Furthermore, Elaine began to grasp that some of these particular Year 6 students had “no idea about respect, they disrespected each other, themselves and everything around them.”

To address these issues Elaine formulated a role-play lesson on respect, to be implemented in the Drama room. The complete experience was very disappointing for Elaine. She had to abandon the lesson before it had begun and return the students to their classroom due to their inability to heed instructions and behave appropriately. This incident challenged and conflicted with Elaine’s beliefs and the assumptions she held on what she had learned about teaching. Elaine had expressed a belief that, “If kids are engaged and interested and excited about something then it should work, it should be a successful lesson and it wasn’t! I had made the assumption that it would be a success.” This caused Elaine to re-evaluate these issues but it also gave her a greater awareness of herself as a teacher. This will be discussed further to show the interplay of the dimensions in how we think and act.

Question two is fundamentally about assumptions. A dominant issue emerging from the participants’ responses was that of inappropriate student behaviour and the management of this. Eva, Jacinta and Jon were the most distressed about this issue, particularly as to
how it affected them not only in terms of their beliefs but in relation to cognition, affect and behaviour too. For example Jacinta related her experiences of Year 11 and 12 students’ approaches to learning, and the feeling that she was just babysitting these students went against her beliefs about the motivation of senior school students. This really challenged Jacinta and made her more aware of her role as a teacher. As she said, “You are not just there as a person who imparts knowledge.” Because of this experience, compounded with students handing in work that appeared to reflect their belief that “near enough is good enough” rather than matching her expectation that work completed for assessment would be done to the best ability of the individual, Jacinta began to re-evaluate her personal values. “People have different values. I have had to struggle with frustration ... of [working with] a different value system.” As a result Jacinta now applies a more practical approach to her teaching rather than “an idealistically theoretical approach.” Brookfield (1995) spoke of the value of learning to know ourselves, and how we tend to summon the values we have learned earlier in life in relation to our obligations to others and the wider society, and Jacinta’s responses are indicative of this. Jacinta’s initial approach to teaching could also be viewed as a direct response to how she had learned from a “complex web of formative memories and experiences” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 49). Furthermore it reminds us, “The influences that shape teachers’ lives and that move teachers’ actions are rarely found in research studies, policy reform proposals or institutional mission statements” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 49).

An interesting aspect of Jacinta’s experiences and also of those of Jon and Eva is that the phenomena they described have many similarities. For example, Jon explained at length
his experiences of working from the assumption that he could overcome the repeated unacceptable behaviour of the five or six Aboriginal students in his classroom. The behaviour of these students towards Jon included disengagement and a lack of interest in learning, disruption in the classroom, disrespect and offensive language. Jon explained how he had attempted to gain their trust and how after six weeks he had decided that he did not want these students in his class. This had caused Jon certain anguish and frustration especially because his beliefs were challenged so fundamentally. As he said, “I never imagined I would have experienced from any students in the classroom this total disregard for their education and learning.” It was evident that Jon could understand and was able to reflect upon his experiences, but his beliefs based on the incidents he had experienced were conflicting with his established values. But as far as being critically reflective, maybe, because Jon was indeed a pre-service teacher he lacked the experience and/or the knowledge to step back and see the bigger picture of the marginalisation of Aboriginal Australians. If Jon had been able to he could have recognised that the assumptions he was holding and which were reinforcing his thoughts and actions were in fact framing his practice (Brookfield, 2010). This was unfortunate for Jon because an input from his peers concerning practical knowledge on this issue could have benefited him and may have enabled him to create a more effective learning environment (Pellegrino, 2010).

Eva experienced similar inappropriate behaviour from one particular class. Eva decided to take a very different approach to teaching in an effort to engage the class in the lessons she presented and alleviate the multiple disruptions in the classroom. The attitude of these
students towards learning challenged Eva to the core and made her re-assess and re-evaluate the values, beliefs and assumptions she held about what she believed was her role as a teacher. Eva began allowing these students to listen to their iPods while and only if they worked and allowed them to chatter between themselves. Again, Eva’s beliefs were challenged. She stated, “I did not think I would resort to ... bribery.” But this approach had been working for Eva with this particular class and consequently she was standing by her decision. Eva, in her responses in the individual interview, portrayed a high level of consciousness of the need for professionalism in her role as a classroom teacher. Thus, it was very disheartening to listen to Eva’s responses during the later focus group session. Eva no longer seemed to be thinking critically about her experiences, and especially about her practice in this particular incident. As with Jon, Eva’s decision to take the easy way out undermined her attempts to develop good teaching practices (Brookfield, 2010). Unfortunately, this would support what several authors stated that the school culture milieu tended to promote “teacher isolation” (Bullough and Giltin, 2001, p. 196). Compounded with a lack of support and mentoring (for pre-service and unexperienced teachers) isolation is of no help in creating a conducive teaching and learning environment (Pellegrino, 2010).

The responses of these three participants (and to a degree the responses of all of the participants in this study) are evidence of how assumptions they held about students’ attitudes to learning “give meaning and purpose to what we do and who we are” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 2). What is of interest, and raises more questions than I can answer in this dissertation, are the choices the participants made concerning the beliefs and
values they held (Brookfield, 1995; Dirks, Mezirow and Cranton, 2006). Because of their experiences these personal beliefs and values stimulated not only the emergence of new beliefs and values but also a re-evaluation of their teaching practices in their role as a classroom teacher (Brown, 2002).

Responses to question two that relate to the cognitive dimension.

In contemplating the three components of the cognitive dimension: cognitive development, beliefs about competency, and professional development: it would seem that the choices made by Jacinta and Eva facilitated change in their cognitive structures, beliefs about their competency and their professional development. For example both Jacinta and Eva experienced negativity and non-cooperation from some of their students in response to their teaching approach, style and lesson content, which became a catalyst for change. On the other hand Jon, who shared very similar experiences to Jacinta and Eva, would not in any radical way change his teaching style or approach. This is interesting because it highlights Schon’s notion about the relationship between professionals’ beliefs and actions, and how these “actions did not always reflect their (professionals’) stated beliefs” (Coro, 2003, p. 94). Thus it could be said that Jacinta and Eva too easily gave up their beliefs about what constituted appropriate practices whereas Jon would not give up or reassess his beliefs, which in turn led to practices that excluded the Aboriginal students (Ethell & McMeniman, 2002). Despite the different choices made by the participants and the outcomes of these choices it can be argued that all three participants were engaged to different degrees in the process of being a critically reflective practitioner. For example Jon’s decision-making was based on his belief that it
was important not to waver from delivering what he believed to be a high standard and quality education to his students (Coro, 2003; Cranton, 1996; Brookfield, 1995). Even although the decision of Jon’s was to the detriment of the Aboriginal students, he could not or would not see a way to accommodate these students. In contrast Jacinta and Eva had critically reflected but had consciously opted to relinquish their strongly held personal beliefs about teaching by adapting to the existing culture of the classrooms where they taught. Both instances exemplify an everyday principle, “That teacher beliefs influence decision making and thus classroom teaching practice” (Ethell & McMeniman, 2002, p. 216). Also to note is that again we are seeing the interplay between belief and cognition. Additionally, the incidents described by the participants in their responses to question two became critical because they showed a diagnostic interpretation of the incidents, which is crucial in the development of their professional judgement (Tripp, 1993). By definition the participants were also engaged in the process of transformative learning. Mezirow in his analysis of this rational process of learning stated that, “Many contexts involve practical reasoning — reason directed toward action rather than figuring how the facts stand — determining how to figure out what to do and how to do it” (Dirkx, et. al., 2006, p. 125). Jacinta’s, Eva’s, and Jon’s responses to their experiences relate to this. Transformative learning has all to do with change. Importantly, it is the individuals’ previous experience that is the fundamental medium in which thinking and action takes place and this has the makings to have a significant influence on practice (Taylor, 2009). For example if learners are challenged “to assess their value system and worldview” they can be “subsequently changed by the experience” (Taylor, 2009, p. 3). Interestingly, Taylor stated that “participants with recent experiences of critical incidents in their lives
seemed more predisposed to change” (2009, p. 12). Thus it could be said that the transformational change experienced by Jacinta and Eva was negative. They responded to the problem of their students’ negative behaviour by taking the easiest way out to get to the end of the lesson, and this was not conducive to developing good teaching practices. However, Jon’s responses to the disengagement and disruptive behaviour of the Aboriginal students in his classroom also did not portray a positive transformational change to his teaching practice; it was, if anything, significantly impeded (Taylor, 2009).

**Responses to question two that relate to the affective dimension.**

The affective dimension focused on perceived support, perceived obstacles and personal growth during the teaching practice. In their answers to question two Jacinta, Eva and Jon showed they were considerably affected by the non-engagement and the disruptive behaviour of some of their students. Jacinta and Eva did perceive that their teaching style and approach were obstacles to effective teaching but did not speak about support from any peers or colleagues as such. As a result Jacinta and Eva spoke of having experienced several emotional inner struggles such as feelings of frustration, helplessness, disappointment and failure. However they both opted to change their teaching style and re-frame their theoretical stance so as to engage their students. It is interesting to note that humanistic learning theorists believe learning is grounded in experience that involves “both the cognitive and affective processes that lead to pervasive changes” (Brown, 2002, p. 2). Jon also perceived his students’ behaviour as an obstacle to effective teaching practices and also felt poorly supported by his colleagues. However Jon expressed
strongly how he felt. Jon was adamant that the students had to meet his standards and he would not change his beliefs about what it was important for his students to learn. This is significant because it highlights the different consciousness of the individual and as a result how individuals ultimately think and act (Dewey, 1933). It also draws attention to the subjectivity about our sense of self and about the meaning adult learners bestow upon their lived experiences (Dirkx, et. al., 2006).

Responses to question two that relate to the behavioural dimension.

This dimension has only one category: skill development. In regard to question two Jacinta, Eva and Jon found their skill levels were challenged by their experiences, which did bring to the surface some assumptions they held about how students would relate to them as teachers. It would seem these incidents changed the participants’ level of teaching effectiveness and affected their skill development; whether for better or worse is not the focus here but this problem will be revisited in the conclusion. The point is that each of the three participants brought a sense of self into their teaching and in their attempts to find the best way of teaching, and this is all part of becoming authentic. We also “learn about teaching through experience and reflection on experience” (Cranton & Carussetta, 2004, p. 6). Thus the skill development and behaviour of each participant was affected. But when we look at the responses from the participants concerning question two it is evident that again there is a connection between the other three dimensions: belief, cognitive and affective: that link and make up how individuals think and act.
Question three invited participants to relate an incident that was ‘atypical’ or was unusual to such a degree that it had an unexpected effect on them. Apart from Kate, responses from the participants exposed some rather harrowing experiences and some I could identify with and had experienced myself. An insight from adult education is that “the most common thread throughout the literature is that learning is complex, multi-dimensional, and appears to be inextricably connected to the learner’s experiences” (Brown, 2002, p. 229). I empathized with all of the participants and appreciated their candour in sharing what they had experienced and how they felt. Initially the effect on the participants as they related their stories tended to be a feeling of helplessness and powerlessness as they questioned how they could overcome such negativity from their students. Comment on this will be made in the conclusion. However, the participants’ experiences and responses portrayed various dimensions of being a critically reflective classroom teacher. Reflective practitioners are basically gaining knowledge through an analysis of their practice and Schon (1987) called this “knowledge-in-action”. Likewise the description “practical theory” has also been used (Zeichner & Liu, 2010). The participants’ narratives also highlighted a consciousness about “knowing” (Lyons, 2010, p. 26). By this I mean the concept that the participants had or were developing a sense of “the self as a knower” by means of the process of consciously engaging in reflective inquiry on some problem or other so they could better understand (Lyons, 2010, p.26). This also endorses the perspective that “the process of understanding and improving one’s own teaching must start from reflection upon one’s own experience, and that the sort of wisdom derived entirely from the experience of others is insufficient” (Zeichner & Liu, 2010, p.69). In effect this could enable classroom teachers to create an effective
learning environment in which the students would respond in a positive manner. Responses to question three showed that not all participants had experienced positive outcomes in the classroom. But every incident had an unexpected effect that participants critically reflected upon. I would now like to discuss several of the more powerful examples that demonstrated this.

Question 3: Participants were asked to “Think back over the past week(s). Identify a classroom incident that you would classify as atypical (i.e. the incident was unusual or it could be just an everyday event but it had an unexpected effect on you). Describe what happened and in what way particular aspects of the incident had an effect on you?

Responses to question three that relate to the belief dimension.

Eva’s, Kara’s and Marlene’s individual narratives showed the incidents they had experienced were vexing, led them to question their beliefs, and gave cause for them to re-evaluate these. For example while discussing a particular class that shouted and threw things at each other across the classroom Eva explained that this “really had an effect on me, there seems to be not much respect.” Similarly, Kara experienced bullying and verbal abuse in the classroom between many of her students, “the worst amount I have ever heard.” Once Marlene, on walking into her classroom, took a look at two of her male students who were rocking in their chairs and speaking offensively and realised, “They were so high ... they were so clearly out of it.” This incident had a powerful effect on Marlene because it challenged her belief that it was a ‘given’ in schools that in order for learning to take place the learning environment has to be safe. She felt the students should have been removed from the classroom but were not. Marlene stated, “It was such an uncomfortable and horrible learning environment; it was just awful, it was so unfair.”
Marlene did receive peer input, in the form of an intervention from a senior colleague, but the outcome of this she believed did not assist her in creating an effective learning environment (Pellegrino, 2010).

All three of the participants’ narratives focused on the distress each of them felt in attempting to uphold their personal beliefs and highlighted the effect this had on them. Beck (1993) spoke about the value of “self-reports” concerning an individual’s experiences and how this provides “introspective data” and explains how these can influence an individual’s beliefs systems (Beck, 1993, p. 345). On the concept of critical reflection, Boxler (2004) examined “the problem of teaching for criticality in day-to-day classroom situations” (Boxler, 2004, p. 211). Boxler points out that the self is a “product of social conditioning, that one exists in relationship with society” and understands that through one’s life and actions this contributes to “the construction of society” (Boxler, 2004, p. 212). It is also important to understand those relationships “in terms of personal values, meanings, and emotional impacts” (Boxler, 2004, p. 212). Again we are seeing evidence of the interconnectedness of the four different dimensions: Belief, Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural, in participants’ critically reflective practices.

**Responses to question three that relate to the cognitive dimension.**

While contemplating the experiences and narratives of the participants above, their responses once again exemplify the concept of ‘knowing’ as discussed above by Brown (2002), Lyons (2010), and Zeichner and Liu (2010) and highlight the impact of this in
relation to participants’ cognitive development, beliefs about competency and their professional development. As a consequence of the incidents they experienced, Eva, Kara and Marlene have all engaged consciously in reflective inquiry to understand and address their problems and have thus gained knowledge through their efforts to understand (Lyons, 2010; Zeichner & Liu, 2010). For example Eva experienced unacceptable behaviour, offensive language and a disengagement from her students even though she attempted to engage the students in different ways. Eva stated, “I tried something else — how about we do this or maybe this. Some students just don’t want to do it, they refuse, they are not interested and they are having a bad day.” This also impacted on Eva’s belief about her competency. “I felt totally inadequate, I could not seem to get the students to listen or gain control of the class.” It would seem at this stage that Eva’s professional learning did not lead to any change in her beliefs about her competency. Nevertheless her experience could be viewed as a resource for learning as defined by Knowles (1984) in his “andragogy” theory of teaching adults. For example because of the expectations Eva had such as assuming that the students would be willing to engage in their learning. But consequently what she had experienced had brought about an effect which ultimately motivated her to reinterpret her understandings about how she should practice (Knowles, 1984). But it could be suggested there was a change to Eva’s cognitive structures as her final comment suggested, “As much as I thought I was aware, this is when you have to go away and think,” which indicates that Eva was experiencing a transformation through critical self-reflection (Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Brown, 2002).
Kara experienced a similar incident to Eva in that she was aware that the inappropriate language and bullying had to be stopped so it would not escalate out of control. But as she stated, “It is very difficult to think who I deal with first. You try and deal with one and all the rest keep talking and it just keeps going.” Kara’s beliefs in her own competency were also crushed. She explained, “They make racist comments and I try to cut it out but I can’t. I feel quite lost.” From a professional development perspective it seemed Kara was struggling alone with the issue of bullying but she was aware of an anti-bullying programme beginning soon at the school and she expressed hope about this. “So we will see what happens there — hope some good comes out of it.”

With regard to the incident Marlene experienced when the two boys in her class were high on marijuana and ADHD medication, it seems apparent from Marlene’s account that her cognitive structures did change. For example Marlene was acutely aware of the ramifications of leaving the boys in the classroom with the other students. “I ended up teaching between the two of them. The rest of the class were strangely quiet and deflated,” Marlene explained. This response would suggest that she did have a strong belief in her own competency due to her praxis, shown in her description of the way she made sense of the incident (Mezirow and Associates, 2000). It would also suggest that this incident did facilitate a positive change in Marlene’s professional development, as she stated, “I would never, ever let that happen again. I learnt a lot from that; I would not have them in the classroom.”
These responses reflect the notion that the world of teaching can be viewed as being socially constructed because of our perception of the world we live in and how this view tends to create the values and beliefs we hold in our relationship with society. Thus what we understand and what we construct can determine our worldview (Tripp, 1993; Boxler 2004). The participants’ responses indicated their engagement as critically reflective practitioners because of the different ways they were challenged to view their existing practices (Brookfield, 1995; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Also all three participants experienced classroom incidents which, because of their interpretation and significance, became ‘critical incidents’ which informed the participants’ professional judgements (Tripp, 1993).

**Responses to question three that relate to the affective dimension.**

The incidents described by Eva, Kara and Marlene depict how all three experienced emotional turmoil. For example neither Eva nor Kara speaks of receiving or being offered assistance, there is no perception of support given or offered to them. Eva felt totally overwhelmed when the students in her classroom would not engage in any type of learning, showed no respect for her and were difficult to control. Eva perceived this as a considerable obstacle and stated, “I just came away feeling totally shattered. I thought what have I done, what can I do? That really had an effect on me.” The bullying and offensive language experienced by Kara in one particular classroom was a definite obstacle to effective teaching. Kara was feeling extremely vulnerable when she stated, “The bullying it is ... I go home and I am just ... I feel so emotionally exhausted!” Eva’s and Kara’s accounts of the incidents they experienced illustrate that both have struggled
emotionally which seems to have impacted on their ability to teach effectively. Even though personal experiences are absolutely context-bound, Brookfield (1993) has posited that “our experiences as learners provide us with a powerful lens through which we can view our own practices as educators in a more formalized and purposeful way” (p. 21).

I would suggest that it was something akin to what Brookfield (1993) referred to that helped Marlene feel empathy for other students in the class when she was confronted with two drug-affected male students. Marlene also felt emotionally perturbed and stated, “This incident affected me firstly because I did not know how to deal with this.” She called on the assistance of her supporting teacher (and was supported) who in turn called in the Deputy Principal to assess the two year 10 male students. Because of the intolerable state, behaviour and language of the two male students both Marlene and her supporting teacher hoped that they would be removed from the classroom. But when the Deputy Principal saw no cause for concern Marlene stated, “My teacher (supporting) got really angry because they were not taken out. It was just awful.” We can see that Marlene perceived this as an obstacle to other students’ learning when she stated, “It was not a safe or comfortable environment even for the two students who were doing it.”

These separate classroom experiences, which involved both affective and cognitive processes, have given Eva, Kara and Marlene a self-knowledge that can promote their personal growth and lead to change (Brown, 2002). It also illustrates the humanistic theory that learning is connected with experience which also can ultimately lead to change (Brown, 2002; Boxler, 2004).
Responses to question three that relate to the behavioural dimension.

Question three focuses on any incidents that changed participants’ level of teaching practices especially any that affected their skill development. The incidents experienced by Eva, Kara and Marlene have in various ways affected their skill development (Brookfield, 1991; Brown, 2002; Boxler, 2004). It seems clear in their narratives above that their sense of abilities and their capacity to deal with the particular circumstances they experienced were challenged. For example the responses from Eva and Kara indicated a sense of disillusionment about their level of teaching practices and it seems apparent that the incidents they had experienced had affected their skill development, whereas Marlene was positive about what she would do in the future. Nevertheless, with regard to understanding and striving to improve their own teaching practices all three participants portrayed how they actively engaged in a critically reflective manner in understanding their own experiences (Brookfield, 2010; Zeichner & Liu, 2010).

Question 4: Involved participants to reflect on the “3 questions above and as a result of your experience in relation to any one of these, would it make you change some aspect of your teaching practice now?”

Question four was the final question put to the individual participants. This question was to encourage a summary response from the collective preceding three questions. For example in consideration of the participants’ experiences of these they were invited to reflect if these experiences would make them change any aspect of their teaching practice now. The most significant issue was their concerns about inappropriate student behaviour and behavioural management practices. However for all of them the aforementioned issues led to a self-critique of other factors concerning their role as classroom teachers. For example, student autonomy, assumptions held and discovered by the participants,
teacher authenticity and the responsibility of being a teacher were major themes to emerge. Some of these issues came as a surprise to the participants and by the narrative critiques of their experiences it appeared that these revelations would affect how their teaching practices would change in the future change in the future. Furthermore, ‘assumptions’ is the underpinning aspect in most of the issues that the participants have revealed. This is because “assumptions are the understandings we hold about how the world works, or ought to work, which are embedded in language and represented in action” (Brookfield, 2010, p. 217). No matter what the issue — student abilities and needs, awareness of self and relationship with students, authenticity and behaviour management — the participants engaged in reflection to address the incident which became critical to them and revealed a discrepancy between their assumptions and their perspectives (Brookfield, 2010). As most of the aforementioned issues have been discussed above I will therefore examine the more compelling narratives.

**Responses to question four that relate to the belief dimension.**

While thinking about what if any aspect of her teaching practice she would now change on reflection Kate answered, “Probably it would be assumptions for me.” Kate stated she held the belief that “kids are like you,” which she discovered was not always true. Researchers Ethell and McMenimam (2002) commented that because teaching is a complex, social practice it therefore “must be guided by fundamental beliefs and theories” (p. 216). As a result of this premise the researchers stated that, “It is commonly accepted that teachers’ beliefs influence decision making and thus classroom teaching practice” (Ethell & McMenimam, 2002, p. 216). In such a way, Kate’s experiences
conflicted with the assumption she held which made her re-evaluate her life and personal values. This tended to be the situation with all the other participants when they reflected upon an aspect of change to their teaching practices. Each in a different way had conflict with different issues that caused a re-evaluation of their life and personal values.

For example Jon held the assumption that within the school there would be standardised procedures about behaviour management practices and was greatly perplexed when he realized there were none. Jon discovered, “Each teacher has got their own set of rules, their own this, and their own that. There is nothing written; there is nothing for the kids to follow.” Thus for Jon, “Behaviour management is a big issue for me. In my class [next year] in the first three weeks, is the time to establish rules and the norms of the classroom and get to know the students.” The inconsistencies and dissonance concerning behaviour management practices conflicted with Jon’s beliefs and values which had influenced a “conceptual change” in him and his “subsequent teaching practice” (Ethell & McMenimam, 2002, p. 217). This could also be said of Marlene. She held assumptions that because of the negative and inappropriate behaviour of two of her students in the classroom that her superior would remove them from the classroom, but he did not. Marlene was most adamant about the beliefs she now held, when she stated, “It made me realise that it is all about a fair and safe classroom, and above all, those things must be maintained.”

Tilly still seemed to be struggling to understand and find her sense of self as a teacher. This was due to her belief and her assumption that she does not have a presence in the
classroom. In reply to question four Tilly announced, “[I want to be] an important presence, rather than someone just wanting to be nice and friends with the kids.” Tilly declared, “That has been a huge one!” It has been suggested that “perspectives on teaching are an expression of personal beliefs and values” (Cranton & Carussetta, 2004, p. 6). This usually occurs through painstaking reflection and seems to fit as to where Tilly was at, as her reflections on critical incidents provoked a re-evaluation of her life and personal values (Cranton & Carussetta, 2004).

**Responses to question four that relate to the cognitive dimension.**

The cognitive dimension focuses on incidents that facilitate change in cognitive structures, beliefs about competency and professional development. Research by Ethell and McMenimam (2002) discovered that the beliefs held by their research participants about teachers and teaching developed as a consequence of their own school experiences. This echoes Kate’s response on the matter of assumptions when she states, “My assumptions were mostly about the students’ knowledge” which were “based on my own schooling and weren’t always right.” This is the discrepancy that was discussed by Brookfield (2010) regarding assumptions and perspectives, which must first be identified before they can be “assessed or challenged” (Brookfield, 2010, p. 217). Kylie after talking with her supervising teacher became aware that she had to take a different approach in her teaching so as to effectively engage some of her students. As she testified, “Then, yes, I could see that there were some kids who were extremely bright in that class.” Similarly Jon came to a decision about his beliefs that would effect change and enhance his competency and professional development in the future when he made
his statement about the need to “establish the rules and the norms of the classroom and get to know the students” right from the start.

Marlene too showed she felt strongly when thinking of her experiences and how in the future these would facilitate change about her beliefs in her competency and professional development when she commented, “I have far more sense of my responsibility now especially to do with my sense of authority. Not for the sake of power but for ensuring safety and ensuring learning and for facilitating the educational process.” Thus Kate, Jon and Marlene from a cognitive perspective have consciously and critically assessed their underlying assumptions and have changed or modified their modes of thinking to facilitate positive outcomes in their future as classroom teachers (Beck, 1993). The same could be said of Tilly because she had been striving to overcome her beliefs about her competency due to her small stature and soft voice. She stated, “To actually have a personality, have a way of relating that is much bigger than I am physically, is doubly important.” This is a huge issue for Tilly, to the point that it has become critical as she cognitively attempts to overcome it so as she can facilitate change in her beliefs about her competency and professional abilities. It is interesting because Tilly is critically questioning, attempting to validate and to understand, all of which is conducive to becoming authentic and, as with the others, has also engaged in transformative learning as she had been making meaning out if her experiences through critical self-examination (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).
Responses to question four that relate to the affective dimension.

The experiences recounted in the participants’ narratives above concerning their cognitive development, competency beliefs and professional development are not without affective attributes compounding and contributing to how they think and act. This is particularly so in relation to feelings about perceived support and/or obstacles and also to the participants’ personal growth within their teaching practices. The assumptions Kate made about some of her students’ abilities based on her own schooling experiences did contribute to her feeling that this was an obstacle in her teaching practice, as she affirmed, “I found that quite difficult because I had made so many assumptions about them.” But by talking and receiving support from her supervising teacher Kate felt more confident. By identifying and questioning her assumptions in practice, Kate was able to understand the emotional impact these assumptions about the students had upon her which “contributed to her life and actions” (Boxler, 2004, p. 212). In contrast, on the issue of behaviour management, Jon did not feel supported by the other teachers because of the different teaching styles involved, but this nonetheless contributed to his understanding of the situation due to the emotional impact on him (Boxler, 2004). Jon felt behaviour management was an immense obstacle to his teaching practice and because of this Jon felt frustrated and constrained. “There cannot be any acceptance of negative behaviour; I want them [students] to take responsibility for their own actions.” Jon was under no illusions as he related to me that next year things would be very different from the outset in his classrooms. This experience and the intense feelings it generated within Jon have at a visceral level been very influential on how he will change this aspect of his teaching practice in the future (Brookfield, 1993).
Marlene too did not feel she received the appropriate support from her superior on the issue of the two students who seemed under the influence of drugs while in her classroom. “The incidents I have described above, I felt were so unfair and made me feel so angry,” Marlene declared. She felt this issue was a huge obstacle to her teaching practice within the classroom. This was due to the fact that Marlene had put trust in her senior colleagues to make good judgements, and as a result of what she had experienced she did not feel supported herself nor did she feel that the other students in the classroom had been supported. As Marlene affirmed, “It is an environment where students should feel comfortable and supported.” The insight that Marlene showed into her belief and awareness that all students should feel comfortable and supported reveals the importance of the visceral nature of her experiences which according to Brookfield (1993) is “one of the most useful and most ignored sources” of insight into one’s own practice (p. 23). Tilly spoke with great feeling also about how she felt about her “sense of self” and “her relationship” with her students in the classroom when she avowed she was in future going to “use my voice and get those kids to listen to me and really have a presence in the classroom.” Tilly’s revelations show how she felt inadequate about her teaching practices, which in turn left her feeling quite vulnerable and anxious with regards to this issue. For Brookfield (1993) the visceral nature of what Tilly described while critically reflecting about her experiences is just as important, if not more so, than responses at the cerebral level because at the visceral level this can have a more powerful effect, which can lead to a marked change in actions (Zembylas, 2003).
Responses to question four that relate to the behavioural dimension.

This final dimension focuses on any incidents that changed participants’ level of teaching practices (the meaning of “level” is in relation to the participants’ self-efficacy) including any event that affected skill development (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Kate, Jon, Marlene and Tilly, when they reflected upon the preceding three questions about their experiences and how this would result in changes to any aspect of their teaching practice now, were quite definite. The incidents they experienced were all different but it was the assumptions they held that had affected their skill development in both positive and negative ways. Critical reflection and self-analysis of their own teaching practices have caused them to have confidence in their own choices to further develop their level of teaching practices (Brookfield, 1995). For example because Kate was open to her own errors within her practice, particularly concerning some of her students, Kate changed her approach to teaching and as a result she could see positive outcomes (Brookfield, 1995).

Both Jon’s and Marlene’s skill development was affected by their powerlessness to change their classroom situations. On the issue of behaviour management Jon felt unable to develop his skill in this area because as he pointed out “there are two forms of authority in the classroom and by default they always go to Miss Jackson.” Marlene’s situation involved the incident of the two students affected by drugs who were not removed from her classroom because she had no authority to remove them. At the time Marlene felt that this event had impacted negatively on her skill development because, like Jon, she felt ineffective as the classroom teacher because the students were aware that in reality she did not have any legitimate authority in the classroom or over them.
Marlene stated rather passionately, “Consequently, this was not beneficial to my teaching practice”. But both Marlene and Jon were conscious that the outcomes of these incidents were due to the implementation of other people’s ideas, not their own (Brookfield, 1995). Both Jon and Marlene showed that they were being critically reflective teachers because of “their continual rethinking of what works and why” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 265).

Marlene was also aware that her skill development would change her level of teaching practice as she had come to realise that being a teacher is not about being friends with your students. It is considered that teaching is crucially about possessing awareness of the nature of the relationship between teacher and students such as caring, sharing and helping students learn (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Marlene’s statement would uphold this when she suggested, “You have got a relationship with students but they know the boundaries that are appropriate and inappropriate within the class.” Tilly also became aware of the risk involved in “someone just wanting to be nice and friends with the kids” but instead recognised that it was possible to “create a person, it is not who I am but who I can be in the classroom.” This issue has really vexed Tilly but this may ultimately be resolved because as Cranton and Carusetta (2004) have stated, “a sense of self is integral to authenticity is obvious, our deepest calling is to grow into our authentic self, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be” (p. 21).

This completes the discussion of the narratives from the individual participants in relation to the four questions. There were several significant issues that emerged from the rich detailed responses of the participants. These issues included: the importance of
authenticity, the need for teachers to practice inclusivity, the significance of students’ abilities (or lack of) for participants’ teaching and the students’ learning, the extent of the teacher’s responsibility and the complexity of the teaching role and the prevailing issue of student behaviour and behaviour management practices, which challenged all of the participants in some way. But what is noteworthy is that most of these issues could be traced back to the underpinning assumptions held by the participants. From this perspective we see that through critical reflection participants have been able to explore and challenge the assumptions they held in relation to a specific problem within their practice. Brookfield (2010) has stated, “These assumptions have framed their perception of these problems and the responses typically generated to deal with them” (p. 215). Also it seems imperative that the need for reflective practice becomes a goal for teacher education. Why? Because the “process of understanding and improving one’s own teaching must start from reflection upon one’s own experience, and that the sort of wisdom derived entirely from the experience of others is insufficient” (Zeichner & Liu, 2010, p. 69). In the following chapter we turn to the second part of this discussion, which consists of an analysis of the experiences of the participants who were selected to form the three focus groups.
The three focus group interviews were held over five days. These interviews occurred four weeks after the participants’ practicum was over. This was consciously intended on my part, as I wanted to gauge whether people’s understandings had changed once the practicum was over. Participants were contacted and given the choice of a day and time, their choice then decided the number and the particular participants in each group. Initially there were thirteen participants who completed the one-on-one interview questions but for various reasons four participants were unable to attend the focus group interviews, thus I completed the study with nine participants. This randomly determined the three groups, which consisted of Kate and Jacinta (Group 1), Eva, Kara, Marlene and Tilly (Group 2) and Elaine, Jon and Leila (Group 3). As a result there was no conscious manipulation of the groups and neither was there any particular familiarity between each participant. The main idea of the group interviews was to get the shared responses and commonalities of the participants and to tease out any themes that were significantly different from those that emerged from the individual responses. It was found that many of the issues that were of concern to the participants during the individual interviews were again confirmed and discussed in the focus groups. In particular, the experience of having one’s assumptions challenged was again a key theme of these discussions. However, what was not expected was that disruptive classroom behaviour from students and the limitations of the policies for the management of such behaviour continued to trouble participants. These issues had a compounded effect on other incidents that the
participants experienced, which as a result has influenced their practices and professional judgement. Due to the limitations of this dissertation I cannot expand greatly here on some of those issues. Thus for the purpose of this final discussion I will discuss the three groups (1, 2 and 3) collectively rather than as separate groups in answer to the responses to each of the questions based on the model as adapted from Furr and Carroll (2003).

**Question 1:** Think back to your ATP and reflect on any assumptions you may have held or discovered you did hold/or still do in relation to your role as a teacher.

*Responses from question one from groups 1, 2, and 3 that relate to the belief dimension.*

The Belief dimension focused on existential issues and values conflicts in which incidents stimulated the participants to re-evaluate life and personal values. The overwhelming response from most participants across the three groups was the discovery that many of their students portrayed a lack of knowledge, a lack of skills to learn, a lack of interest in their education and learning, and in many cases a lack of respect for the teachers. This really shook their assumptions that were based on their personal values and the beliefs they held about education and their role as teachers (Ethell & McMeniman, 2002). It was also indicative of how the personal nature of teachers’ beliefs influences many aspects of their teaching (Brookfield, 1993; Ethell & McMeniman, 2002).

The focus group discussions allowed the participants to interact with each other and to reflect on their personal beliefs and values which provided them to learn about their perspectives on teaching (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). For example Jacinta and Kate (Group 1) also discussed absenteeism, particularly in relation to Year 10 students, and
how there was no effort or concern from the students to catch up or to complete their classroom work. Jacinta felt, “Most students did not value education at all.” This was the general consensus from most of the participants in all of the groups and triggered some lively discussion as to why this was so.

Group 2 became very animated in discussion, and developed a consensus that this phenomenon could be attributed to most students being completely absorbed in what was happening outside the classroom and/or in their personal lives. Eva (from Group 2) stated, “We are continually told that as long as the lessons are interesting and engaging the kids will be on task, but it is not true, there is so much misbehaviour”. This paper is not about the issues of disruptive student behaviour or about behaviour management; however both were being continually raised in participants’ narratives. In many instances there has been a negative effect on participants’ teaching practices because of this. Therefore, I would like to intervene here and make comment because both issues are insidious in nature and do have quite a significant impact on my research about classroom incidents and the critically reflective teacher.

There was a common shared experience, emerging from the participants’ discussions in all three focus groups, of times when a group of students within a classroom would make a collective effort to disengage from their learning and totally ignore and disregard their teacher(s). In other words on a daily and constant basis all the participants experienced disruptive student behaviour which they believed had a serious and negative impact on their teaching practice. It has been suggested that there are many variables that can
influence the occurrence of disruptive behaviour, and while “teachers cannot ensure that students behave appropriately, however effective classroom management can increase the likelihood of students engaging and learning in the classroom” (Johansen, Little and Akin-Little, 2011, p. 3). But Johansen et al. (2011) reported that a number of teachers believed that, “positive behavioural interventions do not work” even though research says otherwise (p. 3). In addition, teachers interviewed for this study believed that the level of formal training they had received in behavioural management was minimal in preparation for the realities of managing a classroom (Johansen et al., 2011). At this stage I would suggest that this notion would have been the perception of all of the participants in my study because their beliefs have been grounded in their present experiences (Pellegrino, 2010; Johansen et al., 2011). The next part of the discussion will explore the issue of classroom management in more detail, which I will elaborate on using my own data.

Tilly (Group 2) showed how her beliefs were changing when she said, “We (teachers) may have too high an expectation of the students and the assumption that they can and will be engaged every moment of the day.” Tina’s response was very similar to that found in the research of Bullough and Gitlin (2001), who suggested that beginning teachers do begin to appreciate the complexity of teaching. But also, “knowledge of this complexity must be joined by greater sophistication in knowing how to respond to it” (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 194). However, Tilly’s statement was the catalyst for the group to highlight the positive effects of extrinsic rewards given to students such allowing them to listen to iPods, or having an end of term party in return for the completion of school work. Eva and Tilly (Group 2) had come to believe in the value of
extrinsic rewards mainly as a way to manage classroom behavioural problems. Group 2, except for Marlene and to a degree Kara, seemed to be striving to justify adopting teaching practices that would make their “teaching lives easier” but which in effect would “work against their (the teachers’) own best long-term interests” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 8). Thus the values conflicts they had experienced had stimulated them to re-evaluate their life and personal values and adjust them accordingly (Furr & Carroll, 2003). This could be contributed to the “distinctly personal nature of teachers’ beliefs” that influence their practices and which result directly from their experiences (Ethal & McMeniman, 2002).

All of the participants in every group to some degree had experienced a conflict between their values and beliefs concerning students’ attitudes to their learning and the reality of the classroom. This confirmed the participants’ belief that setting the classroom ethos regarding boundaries and expectations from the beginning was most important, along with establishing and building a positive relationship with the students. It has been suggested by several theorists that creating foundations such as this, especially for novice teachers, is an effective way of developing professional practice that enables the process of transformational learning (Mezirow and Associates, 2000; Ethal & McMeniman, 2002; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

Responses to question one from groups 1, 2, and 3 that relate to the cognitive dimension.

The cognitive dimension included cognitive development and beliefs about competency and professional development, and focused on incidents that facilitated change in these
structures. When we consider the participants’ experiences of the issue of students’ lack of interest in learning it is evident that all of the elements that make up the cognitive dimension were significant for many of the participants. When discussing allowing students to listen to their iPods in the classroom, it would seem Eva and Tilly (Group 2) had attempted to downplay the significance of the change in their thinking when Eva stated, “This is something I did not think I would do ... but it worked!” And Tilly declared, “It’s more of a negotiated agreement in the classroom.” Except for Marlene, all agreed. “What else could you do with a particular class?” Thus, most in this focus group appeared to have been less critically reflective about their changed practices. Their discourse tended to portray a technician’s response towards their teaching. For example the way they were more concerned with “moving their pupils through the lessons in a smooth and orderly fashion” (Zeichner & Liu, 2010, p. 68) rather than thinking about the ramifications of why and what they were doing and how this may “encourage and discourage certain kinds of practice” (Zeichner & Liu, 2010, p. 68) suggests a step away from reflecting on the ‘bigger picture’ of their practices as teachers.

Marlene (Group 2) introduced a more critical approach to the issue of rewards when she suggested that offering the students the intrinsic rewards of “choice regarding their assessments and how they would achieve these outcomes,” resulting in “ownership and empowerment” for students, worked well for Marlene. She found that as a result the students began to “manage several pages of work, instead of one paragraph.” Marlene’s analysis of her decision-making enabled the others to “explore the assumptions that had framed their perception to their specific problems” (Brookfield, 2010, p. 215),
particularly when thinking of the issue of allowing students to listen to iPods and such like in the classroom. Marlene’s decision-making process portrayed reflective teaching in action and highlighted her developing professional judgement, and these reflections in turn strengthened Marlene’s beliefs in her competency and her practice (Tripp, 1993; Brookfield, 2010; Zeichner & Liu, 2010).

**Responses to question one from groups 1, 2, and 3 that relate to the affective dimension.**

In connection to the affective dimension, which involved perceived support and/or obstacles and personal growth, there were several powerful snippets from the discussions that depicted how some of the participants were affected by an incident(s) they had experienced in their role as a teacher (Ethell & McMeniman, 2002). For example in Group 2, in response to Marlene’s use of intrinsic rewards, Tilly stated “I did a similar thing to you Marlene; I gave my students a choice.” Tilly then described how she had been reprimanded by the classroom teacher who had said, “I don’t know why you did it that way. I don’t know about these democratic classrooms.” Thus Tilly felt no support. “I felt really put down ... I had the assumption that he would be there to help me, guide me, instead of ...” It would seem this type of response is not unknown. Bullough and Gitlin (2001) speak at length about the pessimism and scepticism and the negative attitudes of some cooperating teachers toward pre-service teachers. Similarly, Brookfield (1993) spoke about the risks of ignoring the visceral nature of our experiences and how the emotionality of these influences our practice, which can in turn lead to “markedly
changed actions” (Brookfield, 1993, p. 23). Thus, the primary effect of this experience of lack of support on Tilly’s personal growth was negative.

Similarly Kara (from Group 2) felt disappointed when on her return to the same school the previously well-established policy of no iPods in the classrooms had all but disappeared. This unofficial change of policy was a major issue for Kara as it left her feeling unsupported. She claimed, “They [the school] had slacked off and did not seem to care anymore. I was under the assumption that this policy was still going through but no-one was observing it.” This created a struggle between Kara and the students and distressed her. As Kara explained, “the students were getting upset with me as I was telling them to keep their iPods in their bags!” The lack of support Kara experienced had an emotional impact on her that appeared to have hindered her personal growth during her teaching practice (Brookfield, 1993; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Boxler, 2004).

Responses to question one from groups 1, 2, and 3 that relate to the behavioural dimension.

Participants’ experiences, discussed in relation to the belief, cognitive and affective dimensions, have all impinged on the behaviour of the participants in their roles as teachers. Many participants seemed to have been out of their depth when dealing with these issues and as a result often succumbed to some questionable practices, which as a result affected their skill development. For example in Group 1 Kate and Jacinta spoke of how they were challenged with regards to students’ lack of knowledge and lack of interest in learning, and believed that getting to know their students better would be more
effective to their teaching practices. Jacinta had discussed this issue with “many teachers” in an effort to understand “where the students were at.” Kate responded, “My supervisor advised me I had got to know the students too well and I would need to back off.” Although Kate felt that this was a negative response from her supervisor, nevertheless to engage with other teachers in open and honest examinations of teaching is a good way to strive for a change to work situations (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

In Group 2 Eva and Tilly both spoke of how they had compromised their teaching practices by allowing students to listen to their iPods, whereas Kara struggled to uphold the no iPods in classroom policy. This type of behaviour could be seen as a typical technical approach to teaching with no thought or reason behind judgments and no consideration of the greater implications that may encourage particular types of practices (Tripp, 1993; Zeichner & Liu, 2010). Leila and Jon (Group 3) spoke about their behaviours in response to the bullying they observed in their classrooms. Lena coming from a co-ed private school spoke of the “subtle, underhand aspect of bullying” she experienced there, “where the students managed to navigate the strict bullying policy.” In contrast Jon’s experiences were of the students from a public co-ed school, where “all the covert things that can and do happen ... happened out there in the open. These included disrespect for their education, the teachers and even bullying.” Each of their experiences was different but both Leila and Jon were overwhelmed by the difficulty of dealing with these issues where their level of teaching and skill development had been found limiting. This was unfortunate for Leila and Jon but not uncommon for beginning teachers as they
struggle to establish authority in the classroom and in the school milieu (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). Nevertheless, Jon and Leila have shown by their responses a criticality about their practice wherein they have explored and examined what they had experienced and changed their teaching practice as a consequence (Boxler, 2004). At this stage the responses of the participants above indicate disillusionment and feelings of discouragement about their role as a teacher. However, “A key to overcoming discouragement is to reach out to other teachers and become actively engaged in building a professional community,” which can lead to effective change in their practical capabilities (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 195).

**Question 2: Describe one or more classroom incidents that illustrate any of these assumptions. These incident(s) may involve yourself in your role as a teacher and/or may involve the students.**

Initially the narratives from most of the participants in answer to question two were very similar in content to the answers to question one. However, as the discussions within the individual groups became more animated they went deeper to reveal more diverse issues in regards to their teaching experiences (Brookfield, 1993). What was interesting was the signs of resistance to the taken for granted assumptions about what constitutes good classroom practice! Thus I will highlight this aspect in discussing question two.

**Responses to question two from groups 1, 2, and 3 that relate to the belief dimension.**

Jacinta and Kate (Group 1) entered into a lively discussion on the varied assumptions about teaching held by different teachers, and the discussion then progressed to the assumptions about the relationship of theory to practice. The discussion exposed the
beliefs and values held by both participants. Jacinta stated, “It is all about strategies and I found it really hard to make those connections between theory and practice- many times.” Kate responded, “Connections between theory and practice don’t always work,” and Jacinta offered, “and also who has written the theory?” Although Kate maintained she had “learned more on prac than reading any reader,” she did concede that “theory gives you the basics.” This is disturbing, yet reinforces the idea that, “Beginner teachers often do not think their teacher education has had much of an impact on their learning” (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 198). However, a major part of teaching is based on developing professional judgment, which “is always based on theory, whether it is a teacher’s ‘theory-in-use’ or their ‘espoused theory’ ” (Tripp, 1993, p. 146). As this paper is fundamentally about how teachers engage with the theory and practice of their profession it is important to note that as Tripp (1993) stated, “the basic of scientific theory is the empirical world, and the empirical world of teachers is their practice” (p. 146). Tripp also advised that for the professional judgment of teachers to be scientific, “then one must have theories of practice” (1993, p. 146). But he also warned that, “unfortunately, in teaching, all too often theory and practice is dichotomised” (Tripp, 1993, p. 146). Suffice to say here, “theory and practice are also dichotomised by well-organised social barriers such as those between the people concerned, between school teachers and university academics” (Tripp, 1993, p. 146). Consequently the discussion above shows how the beginning teachers were struggling with these dichotomies. It is helpful to understand that according to Tripp (1993) it is the institutionalised manner of these social barriers “particularly in differing interests and work practices” (p. 146) that affects practice. Thus, rather than the focus being on changing “the conceptual gaps
between theory and practice, different theories and different practices,” Tripp has found that work on the social barriers to be “more immediately tractable and amenable” (1993, p. 146). As a result dealing with these social barriers seems to eliminate these conceptual dichotomies between theoreticians and practitioners (Tripp, 1993).

The participants in Group 2, Eva, Kara, Marlene and Tilly, covered many aspects when discussing question two about their assumptions. Overall this group’s beliefs about student knowledge, peer support, approaches to teaching, which also included a discussion about theory and practice and classroom procedures, were fundamentally challenged to some degree. As these issues were discussed the conversation became very lively, particularly when Kara explained to the group the programme of “Integrated Studies” which was being delivered across the school to enable students to develop skills, as in “Learning to Learn” as it was otherwise known. But according to Kara the students could/would not integrate these skills into her English class. Kara also believed that, while “the teachers involved with the programme and transferring it into their classrooms were getting fantastic results,” not all teachers were “picking up on the programme.” Kara’s conversation indicated her firm beliefs about the value of the “Learning to Learn” programme, which again highlights the issue of the connections between theory and practice. One hypothesis is that what is frequently identified as “a gap between the application of a theory and practice” is actually “a gap between different theories, between the theory of researchers and the theory of teachers” (Tripp, 1993, p. 147). Thus to rectify this disparity it could be suggested that theoreticians must begin with teachers’ classroom experiences (Tripp, 1993).
The group discussion continued with Eva and Kara agreeing passionately that their beliefs about particular programmes, different teaching styles and standardized procedures, especially in relation to behaviour within a whole school system, were challenged by the lack of consistency of practice among teachers. This caused conflict, and forced them to re-evaluate the values they held. Eva speaking of student behaviour in the classroom stated, “One teacher allows hats to stay on and the playing of music and things like that, while another teacher will not allow these things to happen.” Kara believed, “It just leads to confusion.” Tilly challenged Kara and questioned, “Why do they need the consistency?” Tilly continued, “Maybe that is something they (students) need to learn that life is inconsistent! It is part of their coping skills and negotiating skills.” The others tended to disagree with Tilly and the discussion progressed on to their beliefs about student behaviour and the different classroom rules associated with this. Each participant’s response seemed firmly based in the beliefs they held, which reinforces the idea that “beliefs draw their power from previous episodes or experiences and have a strong affective and evaluative component” (Ethell & McMeniman, 2002, p. 217).

Marlene, who until then had been quiet, stated, “If kids think they can derail you they will, they do it for fun, and I did it myself!” This statement highlights the connections between of all the dimensions in Furr and Carroll’s model in terms of the effect these can have on individuals. For example Marlene’s statement about her previous experience revealed how what one believes can lead to change and influence one’s thinking and action in any given situation. However Marlene was more interested in another issue and
offered her beliefs about the integration of learning and knowledge between different subjects such as English and SOSE (Studies of Society and Environment). A student of Marlene’s objected to a project on Iraq being part of English and not SOSE. Marlene explained, “I explained to her subjects do cross over and that she had to be a critically literate person.” Marlene’s comment draws attention to her engagement with the criticalities of her teaching practice, to reflective inquiry and to developing a perspective towards knowing (Boxler, 2004; Lyons, 2010). The self-as-knower relates to “how we know, how we learn, and asks us to be attentive to our own awareness, to become conscious of ourselves as knowers” (Lyons, 2010, p. 26). For example by connecting ways of knowing with reflective inquiry Marlene has consciously engaged with her own ideas of knowledge to investigate the problem so as she can better understand (Lyons, 2010). Marlene’s comments led to an animated discussion for all of Group 2, who then began to critically question their beliefs about the school culture by looking at the bigger picture of education and school organisation. This reflective discussion also revealed that teachers do have their own theories and that new knowledge can be gained from teachers’ experiences, which “can contribute to the development of a common knowledge base about good teaching practices” (Zeichner & Lui, 2010, p.69).

**Responses to question two from groups 1, 2, and 3 that relate to the cognitive dimension.**

The focal point of the cognitive dimension is any experience that may facilitate change in cognitive structures, beliefs about competency and professional development. Jacinta’s and Kate’s (Group 1) declarations about the difficulty in making connections between
theory and practice disclose how they were thinking: “Theories don’t always work” (Kate) and “Who has written the theory?” (Jacinta): are examples. Both of the participants’ responses demonstrate how their experiences have led to shifts in their thinking. The dialogue between Jacinta and Kate illustrates the gap between the theorising of researchers and that of classroom teachers. The problem according to Tripp (1993) is that teaching and learning theories have been created somewhere else, such as in psychology or sociology instead of in teaching. But if as Tripp suggests we were to work the other way round, “When one becomes involved in theorising teachers’ experiences, this gap always disappears” (Tripp, 1993, p. 146).

Several participants in Group 2 such as Eva, Kara and Tilly described experiences similar to those of the participants in Group 1 with regards to the cognitive dimension, for example the issues concerning lack of student knowledge, the lack of peer support, and the different approaches to teaching and classroom procedures in particular and the assumptions they held about these. Kara on the issue of “Integrated Studies” stated, “I just assumed that the kids would be willing to do it; integrate what they were learning, transferring that knowledge into their English or SOSE classroom studies.” Kara’s comment demonstrated her professionalism, because she had critically reflected on the nature and function of the problem; her judgement had not been made on a casual or intuitive basis, she had methodically thought through the phenomenon she was dealing with, which allowed her to form a specific hypothesis that went beyond the practical (Tripp, 1993).
The same could be said of Marlene’s cognitive and professional development. She demonstrated a “congruence between values and actions” when she spoke of the links between the different learning areas and how she had explained this connection to a reluctant student in her classroom (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 19). Marlene added, “It makes you really think about the future of education and the future of the learning areas whether they really belong as separate units.” Marlene’s and Kara’s critical perspective on these specific problems illustrated that they are looking at the bigger picture of education, the school organisation and the integration of learning and knowledge (Tripp, 1993; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Brookfield, 2010). Both Kara and Marlene, by thinking of why they were doing what they were doing, give us an idea of how through critical reflection their professional judgement is shaped (Tripp, 1993; Taylor, 2009; Zeichner & Liu, 2010).

*Responses to question two from groups 1, 2 and 3 that relate to the affective dimension.*

The affective dimension is made up of any incidents in which the primary effect was affective. Kate’s and Jacinta’s discussions about how theory and practice related in the classroom included a lot of affective reactions. Kate became animated and stated, “You are not allowed to bargain, you are not allowed to do this, not allowed to do that! Within the first 10 minutes I have broken all those theory rules.” But Kate maintained she, “Still had a good classroom. You do this for me, I allow you to do this or that!” Kate’s responses were said with much feeling and resonate with the writings of Bullough and Gitlin (2001) who referred continually to the effects of how ‘feelings’ such as feeling
defensive, frustrated and unhappy tended to influence teachers’ practice and cause disillusionment about their practice and limit their personal growth.

To varying degrees all the participants in Group 2 experienced incidents where the primary effect on them was affective. For example on the issue of different classroom management procedures the discussion got somewhat heated with raised voices and quite a bit of distress heard in the participants’ voices. Eva and Kara felt very strongly that the disparity of acceptable classroom behaviour between different classrooms was too great for the students to manage and led to confusion. Kara stated, “If they go into one classroom and be told that this is acceptable behaviour and then go into another classroom and be told it is not acceptable behaviour; what are they (students) supposed to accept?” Kara’s response indicates her feelings of bewilderment and despondency because of the lack of standardised practices which had they been in place she felt could alleviate her distress.

Interestingly Tilly, who had previously described with great feeling her experiences with unacceptable student behaviour, would not accept the others’ opinion about the need for common practices, and was very animated in her response. Tilly announced, “If we have everything homogenised across the board, God forbid we should ever do that, then we will probably be going to move towards Nazi Germany, where everything is regimented.” And so the heated discussion went on with Tilly fervently insisting, “I am not saying we need to confuse the kids but maybe that is something they need to learn that life is inconsistent!” Tilly’s reaction demonstrated much feeling to the point of being almost
angry and definitely indignant. Interestingly, here is classic evidence of how Tilly’s cognitive belief system is strongly connected to her feelings and thus provides further evidence of the links between the different dimensions in Furr and Carroll’s (2003) model. Thus, Tilly’s assumptions may affect her teaching practice because they are shaped by her emotional response. Also because she holds such complex contradictions this could be detrimental to her personal growth, especially with effect to her reflective professional judgment (Beck, 1993; Brookfield, 1993; Yorks and Kasl, 2002). Kara and Eva did not agree with Tilly. Eva stated, “I agree with Kara; that was my experience also. I felt the kids were getting confused and other teachers I spoke with felt the same way too.” Like Tilly, but for different reasons, strong belief systems were revealed in Eva’s and Kara’s response showing how their direct experiences have led to particular emotional responses (Brookfield, 1993; Boxler, 2004).

The group conversations continued with an enthusiastic discussion about assumptions on other aspects related to teaching. When Marlene entered the discussion she led the topic back to the issue of “Integrated Studies,” which she had strong feelings about especially concerning learning areas being separate units and “whether they really belonged as separate units.” Marlene’s assumption here shows how her thinking in this matter was hard to separate from how she felt, because she spoke with much passion, and which highlights the affective dimension of learning (Yorks & Kasl, 2002; Brookfield, 2010). The effect of Marlene’s statement brought several varied and emotive responses from the others in the group. Kara responded rather nervously, “Yes, it [each department] was very ... cliquey.” Eva was visibly affected in her demeanour as she agreed with Kara, “There
was not the cohesiveness I thought there would have been between the teachers, let alone the departments … ah! Another assumption!” In regards to discussing or introducing new ideas concerning teaching practices Eva concluded, “I felt I was on the edge and I did not want to ruffle anyone.” Yet again we cannot underestimate the role that the affective dimension plays in learning, especially in connection with direct experiences (Yorks & Kasl, 2002; Brookfield, 2010). The participants’ responses indicated the tension they were feeling, suggesting that they viewed the issues discussed as obstacles both in their teaching practice and in their personal growth (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001).

Leila (Group 3) had always held the assumption that parents of children attending a private school would support the teachers and the school procedures. “But this was not the case!” Leila experienced constant interference from the parents of her students, as did most of the teachers at the school. She felt that she could not reprimand any student without the parent(s) becoming overly involved. Leila stated, “Everything was challenged; the curriculum, homework — this also included behaviour issues and/or bullying. You had to explain and justify every single thing with regards to their children — it was very difficult.” This issue had a strong emotive effect on Leila. She declared, “It is something I would never have expected. It left me feeling ...” At this point Leila trailed off without completing her sentence, but her body language and facial expression portrayed her despair. The emotional impact appeared overwhelming to Leila and seemed to impede her professional growth and her journey to becoming an effective teacher at this point in time (Yorks & Kasl, 2002; Brookfield, 2010).
Jon (Group 3) in turn despaired about the lack of respect shown by the students and about their unacceptable classroom behaviour, which gave him much grief. Jon acknowledged, “I feel that was because I was new and I did not have the experience and strategies to deal with these kids.” Jon’s assumption revealed that although he was despondent he was able to assess the situation in a critically reflective manner, which empowered him to be able to act with intent because of what he knows and what he believes (Tripp, 1993; Mezirow and Associates, 2000; Brookfield, 2010). But the most significant emotional impact on Jon was connected with the lack of support from the school management for dealing with student behavioural problems, and this seemed to have the worst effect on Jon in regard to perceived obstacles within his teaching practice. “It was very much a case of the teachers in general versus the management,” Jon stated. He felt much anguish especially when he related his narrative about “one kid who set fire to another kid, it was not his first incident.” Jon continued, “When the teachers requested a two week suspension the deputy principal did not agree, he suspended the student for the remainder of that day.” Jon, with much feeling of astonishment, anguish and abandonment, declared, “He was back at school the next day; we cannot rely on the management at this school for support... it is unbelievable!” This critical incident had a profound effect on Jon and above all was a visceral experience for him that would most likely impact on his future practice, as Brookfield (1993) and Yorks & Kasl (2002) have discussed.

In answer to Jon’s comment about student behaviour, Elaine (Group 3) explained how she became aware that some of her students did not receive much parental support, particularly with regards to homework. She discovered this when she questioned her
student about why he had not done his maths homework. This effect of this experience on Elaine was shown in her sad voice was sad and her deflated demeanour. As if in her own defence Elaine stated, “I did not give much homework.” But Elaine then brightened, and finished her narrative on a more positive note. “I think it is a lot easier to manage behavioural issues in a primary school as you are with the same kids all day, every day.” Although Elaine was somewhat saddened by her experiences her dialogue gave an insight into how she was not obviously affected by her experiences to date and was optimistic that in the future she would strive to teach effectively in the classroom.

**Responses to question two from group 1, 2 and 3 that relate to the behavioural dimension.**

The behavioural dimension relates to incidents that changed participants’ teaching practices, including any event that affected skill development. Question two asked the focus group participants to illustrate the assumptions they had already spoken of, in relation to any incidents they had experienced. This authenticated the responses to question one about any assumptions the participants may have held. These assumptions when revealed highlighted a common thread across numerous issues and are indicative that the behaviours of all participants to varying degrees had been affected.

For example Jacinta and Kate (Group 1) discussed the diverse values and teaching styles of different teachers. On the issue of acceptable classroom behaviour Kate, while explaining how her assumptions differed from those of her cooperating teacher in regards to their year 10 class, affirmed, “I found bargaining to be a reasonably good tool with
these students.” Kate’s statement of her practice revealed an uncritical striving for technical competency and short-term solutions. She did not seem to give much thought to the consequences of her choices, which could not only hinder good teaching practices in the long run but also affect the development of skills associated with effective teaching practices (Boxler, 2004; Zeichner & Liu, 2010). This led to another discussion about theory and practice. Jacinta stated, “I found it really hard to make those connections between theory and practice - many times.” In reply, Kate stated, “The connections between theory and practice don’t always work.” The dialogue between the two participants of Group 1 indicates that both had rejected the need to explore the possible theoretical explanations for what they had observed in practice. Maybe, as their dialogue suggested, both had been overwhelmed by the numerous and varied demands placed upon them (Zeichner & Liu, 2010). But it could also be because they viewed the research as “originating in the ivory tower and judged irrelevant to the concerns of teachers and disrespectful of teachers’ knowledge” (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 179). Thus it has been proposed that “beginning teachers need help to gain and maintain perspective on their development” (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p.198).

The incidents experienced and discussed by the participants in Group 2 also uncovered various assumptions regarding their students’ knowledge and skills, which initially affected their own skill development. From their assumptions these participants had made certain decisions with regards to their students’ abilities to successfully complete planned lessons. However, the participants’ responses indicated that they had to learn to be responsive to the immediate and real needs of their students and as a result they had to
readjust their teaching approach. Tilly, teaching Year 9 students about the elements of drawing and colour, stated, “I knew they had been taught this in Year 8, but it became clearly evident that it did not carry over or come through in Year 9.” Kara, while explaining the topic of “Integrated Studies, declared, “I assumed the kids would have no problem transferring that knowledge into their English or SOSE studies, but they did not want to have a bar of it.” Eva had a similar experience involving an inquiry project she had given to her top Year 10 students. Eva stated, “I was surprised at how immature some of them were and that you had to go back to basics. I made the assumption they knew how to do it, how to go about it, but my gosh did I get a shock!” As novice teachers these experiences seemed to have impeded their skill development, at least temporarily. However, these responses indicate an engagement with the mechanics of reflective practice because of their focus on uncovering assumptions in their practice. This enabled them to develop explanations of their situations that made it possible to solve any problems, which in turn might guide their actions more effectively in the future (Brookfield, 2010).

Compounding the participants’ difficulties was the ever-present dilemma of classroom behaviour management and the (in)consistencies of policies and procedures relating to managing student behaviour. Kara’s and Eva’s skill development seemed the most affected in relation to this, as exemplified by their responses indicating that they were struggling to overcome the lack of standardization of policies and procedures to manage classroom behaviour. On the issue of acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour in different classrooms with different teachers Kara asked, “What are they (the students)
supposed to accept?” Eva agreed too and stated, “I agree, that was my experience also, the kids were getting confused.” The impression I got from Kara’s and Eva’s impassioned responses was that their teaching practices were significantly affected by the lack of consistency within the schools on this matter. Unfortunately neither of the participants seemed to have developed the skill needed to overcome their dilemmas and teach in ways that were, for them, more effective. It is another example of beginning teachers’ pressing need for help to maintain their professional development (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001).

Later in this discussion Marlene reintroduced the subject of Integrated Studies and questioned the school practice of separating the learning units. I feel it is important to comment on this because of the significant shift in the group’s discourse that was led by Marlene, and because of the intensity of the group’s engagement with this topic. It also showed that Marlene was not a passive learner but was taking a proactive stance about the complexities of her professional role as a teacher (Brookfield, 2010). Marlene suggested, “It makes you really think about the future of education and the future of the learning areas and whether they really belong as separate units.” Kara agreed, “Yes and it does not help the way the schools are set up where it becomes ... you belong to this group or that group.” Eva responded, “They, the department, also had set ways regards what they wanted to do and were doing, so they were all very - hmmm......” Thus there is evidence that each participant had begun to engage in a transformative learning process, characterised by a new awareness of the underlying structural factors that impact on classroom teaching, and which “enhances one’s disposition and insight for making
meaning through transforming awareness — an objective of adult education” (Dirkx, et. al., 2006, p. 124).

Group 3 considered similar assumptions to Group 2, with a commonality of issues involving aspects of school policies and procedures. There were several incidents that affected their skill development. Leila, teaching at a prominent private school, held the assumption that the “parents of the students would be supportive of the school’s procedures and of the teachers.” But Leila discovered that in almost all incidents regarding her students, her judgement and decisions were challenged by the parents. Leila confirmed, “Frequently they [parents] would interfere in the way the classroom was run; curriculum, homework; everything was questioned.” These experiences challenged Leila’s assumption that parents would treat her as a professional capable of making sound judgements, and undermined her skill development. Jon’s response also gave insight into his underlying assumptions, which were different to Leila’s but illustrated he also had been similarly affected. He responded to the group by explaining, “My experience from parents, and my assumption, was that teachers should be respected by parents because they were trying to help you out.” Jon continued, “But I had kids in that school that just refused. And most of it had to do with behaviour in the classroom.” Jon explained that he had a “presumed/unconscious” assumption that the school management would support the teachers on the issue of unacceptable behaviour from the students. Jon’s final comment on this was, “You know every day we are not really supported.” As a result, because Leila and Jon found their experiences to be deeply and personally negative, it is
possible that their learning was non-transformative to the point that it may have impeded their skill development (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Dirkx, et. al., 2006).

**Question 3: On reflection what significance do you think the incident(s) you experienced will have with regard to your future teaching?**

This was the final question put to the participants in the focus groups. The participants’ responses were most insightful because of their critically reflective narratives which were meaningful, open, honest, thoughtful and, interestingly, positive about their future roles as teachers (Dirkx, et. al., 2006; Brookfield, 2010). Here, the optimism and the level of critical reflection on their practice were surprising because most of the participants’ responses to question two indicated much angst about the various aspects of their teaching. What came through with all the participants’ discussions across all focus groups was the quality of interpretation of the various critical incidents that had occurred. This approach revealed that their examination of their teaching practices had influenced their teaching efficacy and the development of their professional judgement (Tripp, 1993; Brookfield & Holst, 2010). I will now examine the most noteworthy responses from the participants.

**Responses to question 3 from groups 1, 2 and 3 that relate to the belief dimension.**

The belief dimension focused on existential issues and values conflicts in which incidents stimulated the participants to re-evaluate life and personal values. Across all groups the participants’ responses showed they were reflective about their teaching practice to date, with most stating quite strongly their belief that getting to know and understand their students was the most constructive approach to teaching and learning for both teacher and...
student. This demonstrates how the beliefs held by teachers can influence the decisions made in relation to their classroom practice (Ethell & McMenimam, 2002). Most participants held the belief that they had made plenty of mistakes. But they were also positive about their experiences, which had stirred them to re-evaluate aspects of their teaching. Jacinta (Group 1) spoke of her belief now that she thought it was “important to have a diary with me at all times so things can be written down.” Eva (Group 2) stated, “When you think of the reflective practitioner it is true, so next year I will try and work on that!” Both Jacinta’s and Eva’s responses were perceptive indeed with regards to their re-evaluation of their professional life as a teacher. The responses above are good examples of what has been suggested by several authors, that the personal beliefs and values held by teachers inform their perspectives on teaching (Tripp, 1993; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Brookfield, 2010).

Two more participants’ held powerful beliefs that are worth mentioning because they highlighted different aspects of their teaching. Tilly (Group 2) reflecting on her final pre-service teaching experience held the belief that, “When I think back I have probably done more learning in the last ten weeks of my ATP than I did in my whole time at uni!” Tilly’s comment depicts her fundamental beliefs about what kind of learning is valuable to her as a prospective teacher. Tilly seems to have been unable to apply her learning experiences from her four-year teacher education programme to assist her. Tilly’s perspective is in line with suggestions that beginning teachers do not believe their teacher education had much influence to their learning as teachers (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Zeichner & Liu, 2010). Marlene (Group 2) reflecting on an incident that she had
experienced explained about how, “This girl who gave me a lot of grief ... I used sarcasm to level her — and it worked.” But Marlene now holds the belief that “It was such as bad choice!” Tilly’s and Marlene’s comments, although very different, reflect what researchers have stated about how beliefs and values underpin perspectives about teaching and also stimulate a re-evaluation of life and personal values (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Brookfield, 2010). The discussion between Leila, Jon and Elaine (Group 3) uncovered their similar beliefs about the imperative to keep a professional distance and set boundaries in the classroom until their professionalism and identity as a teacher had been established. They also believed that the development of a positive and trusting relationship with their students could have an impact on their becoming effective in their teaching practices. Such beliefs have been proposed by several authors as a way to develop authenticity and a perspective towards knowing and the ability to become a critically reflective practitioner (Boxler, 2004; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Brookfield, 2010).

**Responses to question three from groups 1, 2 and 3 that relate to the cognitive dimension.**

A good example of how Furr and Carroll’s (2003) model helps us see the links between the dimensions is in the responses of the following participants. Jacinta’s (Group 1) and Eva’s (Group 2) acknowledgments in the belief dimension above indicate that their beliefs will facilitate change in their cognitive structures as well as their beliefs about their competency and professional development, which are the characteristics of the cognitive dimension. There is evidence of the participants’ cognitive development for
example with statements from Jacinta (Group 1) who affirmed, “I now realise the more I reflect and write about the incidents straight away the more I am likely to change.” This reveals the beginning of a process of transformative learning because Jacinta’s understanding is that in order to be an effective teacher she will need to reflect and write in order to change and grow (Tripp, 1993; Mezirow, 2009; Brookfield, 2010).

However Tilly (Group 2), while comparing her time at university with her ten week practical teaching experience, reasoned, “The theory was really interesting but being in a classroom with actual students - nothing prepares you for that!” This shows how Tilly’s thinking had been challenged by her practical experience, and how it has led to the development of a new understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. For beginning teachers there are first “naive conceptions of teaching, and particularly about students’ and teachers’ work,” often followed by a “loss of innocence” as teachers begin to grasp the complexities of teaching (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 194). In the first two years, teachers can be inundated by the numerous and diverse demands of teaching. As has been foreshadowed, there is a need to assist beginning teachers in becoming more conscious of their professional development and of how to begin directing it (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). This would seem critically imperative so as to enable beginning teachers to develop professional judgement especially in response to the complexities and criticalities of teaching, and which could consequently inspire them to become effective classroom teachers (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Brookfield, 2010).
Eva, also in Group 2, demonstrated the importance of the integration of theory and practice when she said, “When you reflect back, without it being a cliché, one thing I have learnt at uni is that you are continually learning.” This is interesting because it shows the disparity between Tilly’s and Eva’s thinking about where their learning has taken place, and about the different kinds of learning that can facilitate change to their competency and professional development. Marlene (Group 2) was very aware of her mistakes especially concerning the student who continually attempted to defy and disrupt her lessons. In dealing with the student Marlene used sarcasm and said, “She then began to work for me.” Marlene explained, “I did not have the expertise about classroom management that I would like to have had. I have read more now and spoken with more experienced teachers … and … I have developed strategies to cope with things like that now.” Marlene’s explanation of this incident resonates with Tripp’s (1993) suggestion about how in relation to theory and practice, when listening to teachers’ experiences the gap between classroom teachers and university theorists ceases to exist.

**Responses to question three that relate to the affective dimension.**

It was evident that all participants had been emotionally affected in some way by the incidents they had experienced in their role as classroom teachers. For example Jacinta and Kate (Group 1) were often pensive and emotional when they spoke about key incidents. Leila, Jon and Elaine (Group 3) all expressed varying degrees of emotion in their speech. Leila of all the participants was the one who showed the widest range of emotions in her answers. Leila portrayed anxiety, authenticity, joy, introspection, and
great sadness but there was also courage, passion, deep reflection, wisdom, resilience and hope. But at the end of the focus group discourse Leila seemed most emotionally affected by the discussions, which clearly “positions affect as a central feature of learning” (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 189). I make this statement because Leila was most reflective and expressive of her feelings and emotions in relation to the incidents that she had experienced as a classroom teacher. Leila stated herself that because of these incidents “the very different emotions I have experienced and become aware of, in this final teaching prac, has impacted and at times impeded my effectiveness as a teacher.” Jon seemed frustrated, isolated, incredulous but also hopeful. Jon responded by stating, “You are right I have felt those things myself. And it can get you down, but I feel good about going out next year.” Elaine seemed pragmatic most of the time in relation to her experiences of classroom incidents, being reflective about these. However, Elaine’s comments and expressions at times did portray some emotional content. Elaine closed this section of the discussion by stating “presently it is not easy, we have to report and work within the parameters of others but once we have our own classes next year I feel we will be fine.” The participants’ discussions tend to emphasize the importance of the affective dimension of learning and its role in adult education and learning, which according to York & Kasl (2002) has remained under-theorized in much of the literature. I now highlight the more emotional responses that emerged as participants discussed the incidents that would affect their future teaching practices.

Tilly (Group 2) seemed the most anguished of all the participants, when she spoke about her teaching experience and dealing with the behaviour of her students. Tilly was
particularly distressed by “the sarcasm, verbal abuse, unwillingness to engage and all the different incidents that come from that.” Tilly’s account of her teaching experience and her apparent distress revealed the role of emotions on direct experiences, which must have had some detrimental effect on her teaching practice (Brookfield, 1993; Boxler, 2004). Tilly had expressed on several occasions how she felt distraught in different classroom situations, especially because of the students’ negative behaviour towards her. This had caused Tilly at times feel

… out of my depth, not getting anywhere, going backwards, hopeless. It really affected me … to the extent that sometimes in the classroom I could not think, I felt like crying, sometime I was not sure what to do next, how to pull the lesson back and get on track again. I felt frustrated. I had such high hopes, looking forward so much to teaching. But I am not going to give up.

It was also noticeable how Tilly’s comments had a very real and deep effect on the other three participants. Their pained facial expressions and empathetic agreement created a glum and silent group. After what seemed like some time Marlene broke the silence when she expressed how she wanted to share an incident and would “try and keep it brief, because you do not have that much tape.” Everyone laughed and the dismal silence dispersed. Marlene then, with some distress, spoke of how she had “levelled” a student, who was in a game of student-versus-teacher in one-upmanship, with sarcasm. “I delivered sharp sarcastic comments and the other kids had a bit of a snigger at her expense.” Marlene then with some angst declared, “I hope I never do that again, I don’t think I will!” It was evident that Marlene had been affected emotionally and that she had developed a new critical understanding of teaching and of the consequences of her own practice (Brookfield, 1993; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Boxler, 2004). The expression of
emotion underpinned many of the participants’ responses, and this reinforces the point that we cannot underestimate the role of affect in learning whether in relation to beliefs, cognition or behaviour (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; York & Kasl, 2002; Brookfield, 2010).

**Responses to question three from groups 1, 2 and 3 that relate to the behavioural dimension.**

The elements in the behavioural dimension are made up of incidents that changed the participants’ level of teaching practices including any event that affected skill development. The responses were indicative of the incidents the participants had experienced and the consequences of these for change in their teaching practices and skill development. Each participant had made mistakes in their teaching practices, which had impinged on their skill development (Brookfield, 2010). The commonality in all of the narratives revealed how participants now viewed their actions because of what they had experienced. All gave various examples of how they perceived the future of their teaching practices, of which I will discuss a few. With this final question it is still notable that the responses constantly revealed how all the four clusters identified in Furr and Carroll’s (2003) model were fundamentally linked.

Jacinta and Kate (Group 1) on reflection discussed how “particular incidents” had impacted on their teaching practices. Theirs are good examples of the fundamental connection between the belief, cognitive, affective and behavioural clusters of the Furr and Carroll’s (2003) model. Jacinta discussed the importance of having a diary at hand, “So things can be written down, I then can deal with that or any incident differently next
time. I want to be able to do that.” Kate in response spoke about various incidents she had experienced and how she had behaved, concluding that on reflection of her actions she had learned, “That was pretty stupid” or, “I started to think about ways to change my behaviour.” Jacinta’s and Kate’s discussions revealed the attributes of a critical reflective practitioner, the development of their professional judgement and that transformative learning had occurred (Tripp, 1993; Mezirow, 2009; Brookfield, 2010). Indeed both of the participants’ narratives reveal a growth in their skill development due to their thinking being grounded in their present experiences, which will enable them to better cope with future situations (Pellegrino, 2010).

Tilly’s (Group 2) skill development and teaching practice were most affected by negative student behaviour. Nonetheless after a poignant and informative discussion, at the end of the interview Tilly spoke of her passion for theatre production in school and of her pleasure in the positive input from the students who had been involved. This experience made Tilly declare, “Because of this I will get involved with my school next year for sure, I am really looking forward to that!” Kara also expressed her hope of becoming “more involved especially with the student and school community, as I also play guitar.” Kara related how on her last day of ‘prac’ she had gone to the school jazz concert and afterwards, “we spoke about the music, it really was good to relate to them and have a joint interest we could share.” It was encouraging to listen to Tilly’s and Kara’s narratives as it revealed that they were continuing to rethink the complexities of teaching, what was working and why, and as a result would be more effective in helping their students to learn (Brookfield, 1995; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).
Eva (Group 2) expressed the need of support because of the “many mistakes that we make, but it is lack of experience” and quietly expressed “I really hope I find like-minded teachers when I go out next year,” at which Kara fervently nodded and agreed with stating, “I hope so too.” As Bullough and Gitlin (2001) suggest, the support of more experienced teachers is most conducive to the professional development of novice teachers. It could also suggest that Eva and Kara were beginning to develop a stronger sense of their teacher identities because their responses suggest that they are developing a sense of their teaching selves by critically reflecting and questioning their role, which would be beneficial to their later work as teachers (Palmer, 1998; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Jon (Group 3) also felt the need of ongoing support because he had experienced many different incidences of negative student behaviour that had affected his skill development. Jon believed that getting to know the students and procuring information from different sources about them, such as from his peers and school support staff, would be beneficial to him (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Fundamentally Jon believed that this would “Help me with how to deal with behaviour management strategies.” He concluded by stating, “This has been my experience and what I have learned this teaching practice.” Jon had realized that because of his lack of skill and the strategies needed to deal with these issues, having the support and the knowledge to deal with such issues would effect change in his teaching practice (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

Marlene (Group 2) seemed the most critically reflective practitioner and in this sense the most exemplary individual of all the participants because of how she responded to the
incidents and of how she understood her experiences (Dewey, 1933; Brookfield, 1995). Marlene portrayed a strong sense of purpose about how she would effect change in her teaching practices in the future. This was because she continued to think and reflect, which enabled her to see how the “context in which she taught encouraged and discouraged certain kinds of practice” (Zeichner & Liu, 2010, p. 68). Marlene’s explanation of the power struggle with her student and her sarcastic retort to the student is a good example of the workings, not only of the behavioural dimension but also of the three preceding dimensions (belief, cognitive and affective) based on Furr and Carroll’s (2003) model. Marlene had analysed that she did not have “the expertise about classroom behavioural management that I would have liked to have had.” But now because of the critical reflection on her behaviour and the development of her professional judgement Marlene was most certain that she would never repeated this type of practice again as she had become more aware of the different possibilities available to her and had moved forward from a more technicist approach to teaching (Tripp, 1993; Brookfield, 2010; Zeichner & Liu, 2010). Thus it seems evident that the participants’ skill development had been affected by their experiences. Nevertheless due to the critically reflective manner in which the participants had dealt with the incidents they had experienced and the process of transformative learning which had occurred for most of them, it is likely that their experiences would influence their future actions to bring about effective change to the level of their teaching practices (Dirkx, et. al., 2006; Brookfield, 2010).

This completes the analysis of the discussions of the three focus groups. Several issues that emerged from the in-depth focus group discussions reflect the individual responses to
the one-on-one interview questions, in particular issues such as ways to be authentic in the classroom, the difficulties of supporting students with diverse abilities, and the complex responsibilities and roles of the teacher. The discussions about theory and practice raised some insightful perceptions of how beginning teachers think. Overall the most dominant factor was the significant role that assumptions played in shaping participants’ perspectives and approaches to teaching and consequently their practices (Brookfield, 2010). The other major factor that challenged and affected participants, and in many instances hindered their teaching practice, was the widespread issue of disruptive student behaviour and the management policies and practices developed in schools to deal with this issue. The exposure of the role of assumptions in shaping teachers’ practices and of the significance of disruptive student behaviour are particularly important because of the serious implications and influences both can have for teachers’ work, pre-service teacher education and the school system (Brookfield, 2010; Johansen et al., 2011).

It was encouraging to collect evidence that all participants to some degree were developing professionalism in their teaching because they wanted to improve their own practice (Tripp, 1993). One of the key findings to emerge from this study was the extent to which participants reflected on incidents that happened in their classrooms. They became more conscious of their beliefs, cognitions, affective responses and behaviours, and of the varied ways these were brought out in their classroom practices (Brookfield, 1995; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). For example most of the discussions within all of the groups indicated that each participant’s thinking became critical in response to the
incidents they had experienced. In many instances the participants’ learning had become transformative; in other words it had the potential to bring about change in their thinking and acting in their future roles as teachers (Dewey, 1933; Mezirow, 2009). Furthermore, from this perspective the participants’ reflective self-analysis highlighted the development of authentic practices as they discovered what it meant to be real and authentic in their relationships with their students and how from this premise they could become better teachers (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

In addition the recurring connectedness between the four clusters: Belief, Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural in Furr and Carroll’s (2003) model: and how they are intrinsically linked in a person’s thinking and practice was an important finding. The research showed that these processes can lead to increased understanding of how individuals think and practise, and underpin the understanding that learning is “complex, multidimensional, and appears to be inextricably connected to the learner’s experiences” (Brown, 2002, p. 2). Hence, reflecting on one’s own experiences enables understanding of and an improvement in one’s own teaching, which is why it is essential that the role of reflective practice be wholly integrated into teacher education (Brookfield, 2010; Zeichner & Liu, 2010). To espouse this process would ensure that teachers become critically reflective, which in turn might facilitate in the development of critically reflective students, to the benefit of both the individual and the society at large.

Finally, the finding that disruptive student behaviour has a serious impact on teachers’ work, especially in relation to the negative impact it had on the choices teachers made in
their practice, has uncovered more questions than I can answer in this study. Nevertheless, the critical analysis of classroom incidents involving students can shed light on and help teachers to understand the broader factors that are at play here. Important to Zeichner and Liu (2010) is the concept of the reflective teacher and the knowledge that is derived from this which consequently brings about good teaching practices. But good teaching can only be achieved when individual teachers reflect about their own experiences and through the process of this understanding improve their own teaching. Beck (1993) discussed ‘introspection’, a detailed self-examination of one’s own feelings, thoughts and motives. Thus, experiences when reflected upon can lead to different ways of thinking which can in turn trigger different ways of doing. I cannot state as significantly or as concisely as Brookfield (2010) when he affirmed “the chief form of learning that practitioners undertake is reflective learning; learning to reflect in and on the problems they face in the field every day” (Brookfield, 2010, p. 215). By the process of this reflective practice on their experiences, teachers are able to perceive the specific problems and take informed action (Brookfield, 2010). Thus, the revelation of the negative effect that disruptive student behaviour can have on teachers and students has opened a window of opportunity for a reflective dialogue between classroom teachers, university researchers and all stakeholders involved in the education milieu.

To conclude this chapter I would like to draw on the above research data to portray how a critically reflective pre-service teacher might act in response to an incident they experienced.
Portrait of a Critically Reflective Practitioner

I would like to use Marlene, one of the participants, as a model to demonstrate the concept of the critically reflective practitioner (CRP) by exploring two incidents that she experienced. Off-task behaviour from some of her students, and disruption in the form of constant background noise from a single student were just two phenomena that Marlene experienced and had to deal with in a particular classroom.

Having observed that students in the class were often off-task and that the standard of their work was unsatisfactory, Marlene decided to conduct an open democratic discussion with her students in this class about these issues. Marlene believed that because of this practice the choices that the students made enabled them to take ownership of their learning, and that this empowered the students and resulted in these students achieving and working more effectively. Another incident Marlene experienced in the classroom was that of a power struggle with a student. This caused her revert to a sarcastic retort, which resulted in the student becoming more conciliatory. However, far from feeling pleased that she had ‘solved’ the problem, Marlene’s critical reflection and analysis of this incident led her to understand that although she did not have the expertise about classroom behavioural management she would have liked, she would never repeat this type of practice again, because it was demeaning to the student. By the end of her practicum she had become aware of more effective possibilities available to her and had moved on.
Marlene’s responses to her experiences show how critical reflection can be viewed as a survival skill valuable to the day-to-day work of classroom teachers. This is from the premise that the every-day incidents we experience can affect our beliefs, cognition, emotions and behaviour, and as a result the relationship amongst these and the assumptions we hold or make can influence how we think and act. For example, Marlene reflected on several incidents that became critical to her understanding of her classroom practice. She spoke about a student with ADHD and how she dealt with this, and of her subsequent growing awareness of the need for inclusivity. She also spoke of the issue of students’ disengagement, and how she decided to introduce several minutes of heads on desks for quietness and meditation as a means of re-engaging the students. Marlene also reflected on using sarcasm on a sassy student, and how because of this the girl had been humiliated with sniggers from female students in the classroom. An incident that had been particularly challenging for Marlene, and which became critical to her practice, was when two students who had taken drugs were disrupting her classroom. She felt no support when the deputy principal intervened, and also felt compromised in her role of duty of care as a classroom teacher. However, it is worth noting that a pre-service student teacher enrolled in a unit is not the same as being the teacher who ‘owns’ the class. It seemed evident that Marlene was very aware of this and voiced rather sternly and passionately that under no circumstances would she allow a similar incident to have the same outcome ever again.

Critically reflective practitioners (CRPs) are mindful both of their professionalism as classroom teachers and of the broad expectations that surround this role. As Marlene’s
responses demonstrated, CRPs are capable of constant self-monitoring and have the ability to engage in reflective inquiry, particularly in relation to specific incidents or problems that arise within their practice. This enables CRPs to explore any assumptions that can frame their perception of these incidents. There is also knowledge of and understanding that one’s own beliefs/values, thoughts, emotions and actions reinforce these assumptions. Furthermore, from this position CRPs also critique the typical responses to such incidents and problems. Consequently, CRPs have the ability to make professional judgements, which in turn allow them to make informed and appropriate decisions in the course of their daily lives as classroom teachers. This importantly will influence their thoughts and actions, and can be transformative (Brookfield, 2010).
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Brookfield said, “To teach is to change the world” (1995, p. 1). But in many respects today’s teachers are facing challenges that can create barriers that work against change. Such barriers as more paper work that involves “legislation, professional codes and requirements,” pressure to achieve targets and outcomes, as well as having to adapt their own personal responsibilities and their own beliefs and values about life to the professional context (Brookfield, 2010, p. 215) all direct teachers’ energies away from pursuing the broader goals of education. That could be why there are recurring pleas from educators to espouse the notion of the critically reflective practitioner, for teacher education programmes to promote this practice and for teachers themselves to adopt it (Brookfield, 2010). As a result of this premise and to restate what Freire stated “I cannot teach clearly unless I recognise my own ignorance, unless I identify what I do not know, what I have not mastered (1996, p. 2). Thus, this research study sought to investigate the role of critical reflection and its effectiveness in enabling a small group of pre-service teachers in their final practicum to engage successfully with the complexities of contemporary classrooms. The aim of this study has been to investigate and discover to what extent, if at all, the curriculum and pedagogical content the participants had engaged in had been successful in enabling them to engage in critical reflection within their classroom practices (Dewey, 1933; Manternach, 2002). A major dimension for me also was the adult context in which the teacher education students themselves were learning. Adult learning principles provided a theoretical lens through which to understand the
participants’ learning contexts (Brookfield, 1986; Mezirow, 1991; 2000; Hase & Kenyon, 2000). Thus, the focus was on the extent to which participants consciously engaged in critical reflection to inform their practice, especially in relation to their responses to classroom incidents, their capacity to question their prior assumptions about teaching in light of their experiences, and their exercise of judgement in the classroom (Tripp, 1993; Brookfield, 1995). These responses were explored using an inductive approach using a framework by Furr and Carroll (2003) to analyse the pre-service teachers’ narratives. A qualitative approach to research was adopted to tease out, explain and illustrate how, why and to what extent the participants directly experienced the phenomenon of critically reflective practice.

The participants consisted of a cohort of nine pre-service teachers from Kenmore University in Australia who participated in the study over a period of two months of school experience. The process began with four one-to-one, open-ended interviews, which took place in the second half of their final school practicum. This was followed by presenting three open-ended questions to the three individual focus groups for discussion. This occurred during the participants’ final week of university, when the participants’ ATP (final teaching practice) had finished. The individual questions focused on how the participants perceived their experiences of their final practice. Question one asked if their practice was going as they presumed it would, while question two requested them to think back and identify and describe any classroom incidents that had challenged them in some way and made them re-evaluate any assumptions they may have held about their role as a teacher (Brookfield, 1995, 2010; Mezirow et al., 2009; Zeichner & Liu, 2010).
Question three asked whether the participants had experienced any incidents that were unusual or had an unexpected effect on them, and in question four the participants were asked to consider whether in the light of the answers to the three preceding questions they would now change any aspect of their teaching practice (Brookfield, 1995, 2010; Cranton, 1996). Analysis of the responses from the individual participants informed the three questions presented to the focus groups. Question one requested participants to think back on their final practice and in their role as a teacher reflect on any assumptions they may have held and/or discovered, and if they still held these assumptions. Question two invited the participants to describe a classroom incident that could illustrate any of their assumptions. Question three enquired whether on reflection what significance any of the incidents would have in shaping their future teaching practices. Both individual and focus group interviews provided insights into how pre-service teachers engaged day-to-day with the different challenges of teaching (Freire, 1974; Fecho, Price & Read, 2004; Brookfield, 2010).

By using the framework for analysing data based on an approach developed by Furr and Carroll (2003), the participants’ experiences of classroom incidents were explored to reveal how the pre-service teachers’ ways of thinking and their feelings about their experiences affected their classroom practices, or behaviour. Furr and Carroll’s model, with its four distinct clusters relating to beliefs, cognitions, feelings and behaviours, proved to be a productive approach to demonstrate the different dimensions of critically reflective practice. It also revealed a way to support pre-service teachers in dealing with the unexpected challenges and realities of the classroom (Mezirow, 2000; Brookfield,
2010). This research has found that the pre-service teachers who were reflective of their own practice were also actively engaged with the purpose of their work, with understanding and improving their own teaching, and appeared to be well prepared to recognise good teaching practices (Brookfield, 1995; 2010; Cranton, 1996; Mezirow, 2009; Zeichner and Liu, 2010). However there were many instances when the participants were not all critically reflective because other elements came into play as they attempted to make sense of their roles as teachers. What took many participants by surprise was when they experienced the negative attitudes of many students towards their education and learning, and the invasive nature of some students’ disruptive behaviour (Pellegrino, 2010).

Subsequently, this then exposed that these experiences sometimes led to reactive, uncritical responses from the participants within their teaching practices (Brookfield, 1995; Pellegrino, 2010). For example, a few incidents from the participants’ responses signified this. Tilly could be very animated in her responses and within the focus group also. She expressed how she was unable temporarily at times to teach effectively because of the lack of students’ engagement with learning or their detrimental and negative comments. Tilly spoke of ‘feeling’ out of her depth, unsure of what to do next and being ineffectual, which caused her concern with her abilities to accomplish the outcomes of her classroom lesson plan. Eva had similar experiences with disengagement and disruptive students. Eva decided to drop her high standards in relation to her expectations between student learning and her role as a classroom teacher. Eva negotiated with her students if they completed a piece of work they could listen to their iPods or do
something of their own choosing. Marlene clashed with a sassy female student in her classroom and delivered sharp sarcastic comments to the student, which caused sniggers from the other girls in the classroom.

Authors such as Brookfield (1995; 2010), Cranton (1996), Lyons (2010) and Zeichner and Liu (2010) all suggest that while in various ways the reflective practitioner is discussed or even promoted in education programmes, what is rare is the focus in research studies on understanding how pre-service teachers think or make decisions about their classroom practices. In Chapter Five I drew attention to a comment from Brookfield (1995) who stated that the various influences that have an effect on teachers’ lives and which can encourage teachers to act are also rarely found in institutional mission statements or improved policy proposals.

For this reason I wanted the study not only to investigate the (critically) reflective practitioner but to explore the extent to which the reflective practitioner became a critically reflective teacher through the means of analysing classroom incidents and/or prior assumptions. Authors such as Brookfield (1995; 2010), Mezirow et al. (2009), Zeichner & Liu (2010) suggested that only when an incident becomes critical can the process of transformative learning occur and change within the individual take place. In other words, gaining wisdom resulting from others’ experiences is not enough; change can only come about from one’s own experiences. This research discovered clearly that in relation to those lived experiences, reflection becomes critical when the explicit focus is on uncovering and challenging the decisions and judgement that frame practice (Patton, 2002; Brookfield, 1995, 2010; Mezirow, 1991; 2009 Dirkx et al., 2006). The study was
able to reveal that this concept and its application is valuable in helping pre-service teachers to become more conscious in their decision-making and in developing professional judgement about their practice (Tripp, 1993; Mezirow, 2009; Brookfield; 2010; Zeichner & Liu 2010). The research showed that several key themes emerged concerning the pre-service teachers’ practices. These included the importance of the theory and practice relationship in teaching, the changing nature of teachers’ work, and the nature of the preparation to teach and the role of critical reflection in that preparation (Knowles, 1973; Mezirow, 1991; Brookfield, 1995, 2010; Manternach, 2002).

In the following sections I draw on the discussions in the previous chapters to summarise the key findings of this study. In the discussion of the limitations of theory I have highlighted the findings about the relation of theory to practice. In many instances due to student non-engagement with lessons and behaviour problems in the classroom many of the participants seemed ill-equipped to critically reflect to bring about effective practices regards student learning (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Pellegrino, 2010). Next I highlight the ramifications of self-blame and some reasons for this issue. Self-blame was most evident in many of the participants’ responses concerning the ways in which they had thought and acted to some of the incidents they had experienced in the classroom. Brookfield (1995; 2010) has written numerously and widely concerning (pre-service) teachers assuming an uncritical stance towards their practice, which Brookfield argues causes a lifetime of exasperation. As a result this can trigger feelings and beliefs of guilt, lethargy and pessimism in (pre-service) teachers based on beliefs about their own incompetence (Brookfield, 1995). In the section regarding endorsements of the concept of the critically
reflective practitioner I have discussed educational policy that endorses this and also the ramifications if we in the education milieu do not embrace it, and if we do how valuable it would be to the effective teaching of our children who could be our leaders tomorrow. Finally, I respectfully offer recommendations to all stakeholders and agencies involved in teacher education programmes of the value of being a critically reflective practitioner in teaching.

**The Limitations of Theory**

Some participants had developed a strong theoretical base which enabled them to manoeuvre certain aspects of classroom difficulties to bring about effective change and positive outcomes. Others spoke of the theoretical knowledge they had acquired at university as not being sufficient to assist them in times of difficulty. Through the lens of the individual responses, differences as well as commonalities can be seen in the nature of participants’ engagement with theory. What perplexed most participants were the failure of ‘theory’ to help them deal with the overpowering issue of disruptive student behaviour, to the detriment of both their own practices and their students’ learning. This may be because there had been a gap in understanding on the part of some of the participants, or because of a lack of appropriate theoretical explanation of the practical strategies that inform practice (Brookfield, 1995; 2010; Pellegrino, 2010).

Regardless of their theoretical base many of the participants reverted to at best a technicist approach in their responses to critical incidents (Tripp, 1993). In several cases
some participants behaved in ways that indicated their rationale was to deliver the content and get the students through their lessons as smoothly as possible (maybe based on their own experiences of being high school students). Even if this meant lowering their initial high standards of teaching, nevertheless this was the action they had decided upon (Tripp, 1993; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). In contrast, critically reflective practitioners may well have questioned why they had decided to do what they were doing, whether what they were doing might represent poor rather than best practice, and how what they were doing could encourage particular types of practices not conducive for effective learning (Brookfield, 1995, 2010; Cranton, 1996; Mezirow, 2009). There was little evidence in this research of the participants engaging in these strategies to inform their decisions and judgements. The study revealed that when some participants were faced with student problems in the classroom, such as a lack of interest towards learning or behaviour management difficulties, they tended to resort to negotiations and bribery with their students in the hope of achieving favourable outcomes. Or maybe this was a coping mechanism to help them ‘pass’ the course (Fecho et al., 2004; Pellegrino, 2010).

Thus, at times I wondered if the participants’ responses indicated a lack of critical understanding of how their reasoning was linked the outcomes of their actions. For example, participants spoke of their surprise and disappointment at students in the classroom being allowed to wear hats, talk amongst themselves, listen to their iPods and suck lollipops. Rarely did participants consider the bigger picture of the context of their teaching and the ramifications of this for their practices. Such consequences might include lowering their teaching standards and making themselves subject to the whim of
their students rather than being pro-active in understanding and applying different teaching strategies that could assist with and improve their teaching practices, to the benefit of themselves and their students. Although these participants were pre-service teachers, the cause for concern is that their existing theoretical knowledge base, which might have been helpful in understanding what was going on and to guiding good quality teaching practices, may well have been forgotten or forsaken for the benefit of being able to move their students through their lessons and their education in a technically competent manner (Tripp, 1993; Brookfield, 1995; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001).

What was unexpected was how participants’ behaviour was compromised by what they had experienced in the classroom. Nearly all the participants experienced disruptive student behaviour, which influenced the participants’ ways of thinking in significant ways. By exploring how participants’ experiences could be broken down into four distinct clusters or dimensions, based on the model used by Furr and Carroll (2003), I was able to highlight how these pre-service teachers were experiencing their teaching practice. It was disconcerting to discover that due to their classroom experiences various participants were changing their goals, re-assessing their standards and lowering their expectations of themselves and their students (Brookfield, 1995; Black, 2005). But the study also disclosed that some pre-service teachers did not receive the support needed to succeed when unexpected incidents arose, as was suggested by Bullough and Gitlin (2001) as being a crucial component of positive pre-service teaching experiences. Thus the decisions, judgements and actions that the participants chose may well have been their only means of coping with the incidents they were presently experiencing, so as to
ensure their self-preservation in complex and challenging situations. The research also showed that in the absence of support to deal with unexpected incidents, participants’ behaviours were informed at different times by their beliefs, their thought processes and their emotions (Brookfield, 1995; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001).

From the overall analysis of participants’ responses it was found that they were not well prepared for the realities of the classroom with all the complexities of teaching, and that in many cases were unable to rely either on theoretical explanations of their experiences or on the appropriate support of mentors. It can be acknowledged that many of the participants did engage critically in varying degrees in the analysis of classroom incidents, and had begun to think critically about their assumptions about teaching. But the different dimensions of the model by Furr and Carroll (2003) exposed, first, the nature of participants’ ways of thinking and acting in response to the unexpected difficulties they experienced, and second, how these difficulties in turn influenced their future teaching practices.

**Ramifications of Self-Blame**

A further important finding of the study was that several of the participants blamed themselves for their inability to cope with particular incidents. Apart from the pre-service teachers’ cooperating teacher(s) there was little or no support for them in the school. There was no indication that there were others able or willing to provide assistance to them. Indeed the study revealed that within the school the support of a mentor for
critically reflective practice could be very valuable. Such a mentor could provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to think critically about the events in the classroom, and to move away from self-blame. Pre-service teachers can and do flounder abysmally in certain aspects of their teaching practices. Brookfield (1995) promotes critical reflection as a way for classroom teachers to stop blaming themselves for things they cannot be held responsible for, such as the broader education context. Brookfield has illustrated that by not being critically reflective, teachers (and by association pre-service teachers) are susceptible to self-criticism and self-blame when they are not able to get everything right in their daily work as a teacher. Nevertheless, Brookfield (1995) explained that teachers can combat their tendency for self-blame through the concept of critical reflection. Brookfield’s conviction is that critically reflective teachers endeavour to be receptive to the specific contexts in which they work, and are concerned with seeing their role as a teacher from an objective viewpoint. They are rational about what is expected of them and strive to collaborate and work collectively. They are also conscious of the ways in which institutional culture can work “to control what they do” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 264). However, the application of critical reflection enables teachers to “avoid the self-laceration experienced by those colleagues who think everything is the teacher’s responsibility. Being reflective they know that many of the problems they face are culturally and politically sculpted and not of their own making” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 265).
Endorsements of the Concept of the Critically Reflective Practitioner

In Western Australia, the critically reflective teacher was legitimated by the Competency Framework for Teachers policy (Department of Education, 2004) and in the Western Australian College of Teaching (WACOT) Standards of Practice policy (2009). The Western Australian Competency Framework for Teachers policy is a document which I drew attention to in chapter three, and was the policy document in place when this research study was conducted. This policy highlighted the notion that all teachers are expected to be critically reflective in their practices, not only as early career teachers but also throughout their teaching careers. In the most recent and updated policy document now renamed the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2014) critical reflection of a teacher’s practice is not as explicitly stated or advocated. Nevertheless, critically reflective practice is still deemed essential in many teacher education programmes as a means of achieving professional effectiveness. As this study has discovered, speaking about, theorising and having discrete critical reflection units in teacher education does not guarantee the eventual production of the critically reflective practitioner. Hoping that a critically reflective approach will rub off may not be enough.

The research has revealed that although policy documents, authors and researchers acknowledge the value of critically reflective practice, the theory and practice of critical reflection may not be well enough embedded either in schools or in teacher education programmes so as to ensure that it informs professional practice. Perhaps because the critical reflective practitioner is not systematically supported, many graduate teachers quickly become ‘inducted’ into non-reflective practice. Unfortunately the prevalence of
non-reflective practice was my own experience when working as a teacher. It is worth noting that when I met and spoke with a potential pool of sixty-eight final year pre-service teachers, I received only 13 expressions of interest in the study of critically reflective practice in teaching (and of those only nine stayed to the end of the project). These examples suggest that being critically reflective of one’s own practice may not have been rated as being important or highly relevant to teachers’ work. Undoubtedly, this particular area has to been seen as a major and critical part of initial teacher education programmes.

The literature suggests that by being skilled in thinking and reflecting critically, teachers can become more conscious of how they practice and enhance their skill development. This would then enable them to become more aware of and able to challenge preconceived assumptions that contribute to and influence how they ultimately think and act. From this perspective, teachers and educators who engage in and promote the theory and practice of the critically reflective practitioner could act as mentors and bring an understanding of this concept to their students (Cranton, 1996; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Brookfield, 2010). For these particular pre-service teachers the absence of such mentors was significant.

**Recommendations**

This research paper has hopefully given the reader an insight into the complexities of pre-service teachers’ work, which does give some indication that the varied demands on teachers today could be considered to be intense. As discussed in chapter 2 and based on
the notion that critically reflective practice is a learning process, and coming from the perspective of giving it the most chance to succeed, it would be best introduced, scaffolded and taught explicitly in all education programmes (Lyons, 2010). I would like to put forward the following recommendations to university schools of education, department of education policy makers, school leaders, classroom practitioners and pre-service students of education. It is crucial to involve all those concerned with teacher education in the development of a template to explicitly teach the concept and practice of critical reflection. The most fundamental challenge is to convince all stakeholders that fostering the critically reflective practitioner is a crucial component in teacher education (Mezirow, 2009; Brookfield, 2010; Lyons, 2010). If there were a dedicated, compulsory component of critically reflective practice in teaching, basic concepts could be explained. This could further be developed in role-playing between students, with the educator as mentor and facilitator so as to ensure the embedded learning of the concepts. The entry point could be at the beginning of teacher education programmes with exposure to the concept of the CRP and participation in critically reflective practice integrated in most units and following through consistently in each year until completion of the teaching degree. There is the assumption here that as a consequence the critically reflective practitioner becomes the norm in teacher education (and throughout teachers’ careers), since it would be seen to be the core of practice and would be so embedded that it becomes just another component of teacher education programmes. Establishing critical reflection about one’s practice in teacher education programmes could encourage the abilities needed for teachers to make informed and appropriate decisions in the course of
their ever-changing and complex daily work in the classroom (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Mezirow, 2009; Brookfield, 2010; Lyons, 2010;).

Teachers’ capacities to acknowledge any assumptions that underpin their experiences of classroom incidents are critical to reflective practice. Significant aspects of these incidents must be recorded, so a transformative process can occur (Mezirow, 1991; 2009; Brookfield, 1995; 2010; Cranton 1996). Teachers’ work involves incredible amounts of paperwork, which can become overwhelming and create despondency. However incidents can be recorded in simple point form and written in a daily diary for later perusal and identification of the underpinning assumptions so that, by means of being critically reflective, pre-service and in-service teachers may well be able to become more effective in their practice (Fecho, et al., 2004).

Our thoughts and actions grow from our beliefs, which in turn result from our cognitions and emotions and thus influence our behaviour. The model adapted from Furr and Carroll (2003) could be a valuable method to explain and break down the processes of critical reflection. Primarily this is because the model reveals the extent to which the whole being of teachers both influences and is influenced by how they think and act in response to incidents in their daily work. Further research could explore the value of mentors to model critically reflective practice by using this model. Negotiation of a commitment to this by cross-sector interest groups such as schools and universities could be most useful. This would create a trickle-down effect, as educators teaching in initial teaching programmes establish and pass on these understandings to their student teachers. Finally,
when teachers begin their professional work in the classroom, the concepts of critical reflection can be passed on to their students. I suggest it can never be too early for these abilities to be taught. Longitudinal research could document the impact of adopting critically reflective practices on pre-service teachers’ experiences over time to evaluate the extent to which critical reflection has become embedded in their teaching practices.

A final note would be to draw attention to the pre-service teachers involved in this study and emphasise how they have given us an insight into and a further understanding about their daily professional lives. It cannot be over-stated that teachers’ work today is becoming increasingly challenging. Additionally, and it could be said at the very core, is the huge disparity between individual teachers’ responses to student behaviour and the lack of consistency in the management of this. It was disturbing to discover how the different participants experienced a lack of consistency in practices, and how this worked against productive classrooms. This suggests a key role for critically reflective practice in understanding better how to address student behaviour problems. The alternative would seem to be the stark reality of disempowered pre-service teachers, who risk becoming idiosyncratic and reactive in their practices, as is highlighted in this study. Thus all teachers have to plan and work against this happening and the antidote is to be actively engaged in the critical reflection of one’s own practice (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Brookfield, 1995, 2010; Mezirow, 2009; Lyons, 2010).

The study would seem to indicate that dialogue about critical reflection on its own (about how teachers think and act) is not going to create change. Brookfield (2012) discussed
that in many of the campuses he visits he hears “many of the same laments” concerning the lack of students’ cognitive capacity to think an argument through, and that the “intellectual rigor needed to analyse its validity in a critical way, has all but disappeared” (Brookfield, 2012, p. 1). Brookfield (2012) has suggested that we may be “finding it difficult to get students to think critically” and so because of this he has declared, “Instead we need to take a long, hard look at how critical thinking is explained and taught” (Brookfield, 2012, p. 1). Lyons (2010) stated that in relation to the education of professionals it has not always been the practice to teach critical reflection. She acknowledged the complexity of reflective inquiry and spoke about a commitment to the nurturing of this concept. Thus, if this is so, a dedicated and mandatory commitment to the critically reflective practitioner on the part of all agencies associated with education may enable the development of teachers who are more cognisant of the usefulness of critical reflection for their practice (Brookfield, 2012; Lyons, 2010). This study suggests that if we do not want to see potentially good teachers regressing into technicists who as Tripp (1993) argued are no more than technically competent in the classroom (where they fulfil duties that others disconnected from the teaching milieu want them to do such things as improve standardized test scores and the like) then it is imperative we play an active role to support and assist pre-service teachers to be successful at being critically reflective of their practice, not only for themselves but for their students and for the society as a whole.

I would like to conclude by returning to how I started at the beginning of this research process. The significance of the critically reflective practitioner cannot be
underestimated. Nor can we ignore that pre-service teachers enter teacher education with a whole range of pre-existing values, and that these will influence how they think and act in response to their professional experiences and will in turn impact on their practice as classroom teachers (Brookfield, 1995; 2010; Ethell & McMeniman, 2002). The research has illustrated how and why reflective practice and critical thinking are promoted throughout both scholarly literature and in policy documents, therefore, I would argue that it is crucial for teachers and educators to think and act from this fundamental premise. I would like to invite stakeholders and policy makers in particular to give some thought, or critically reflect upon, the possibility of these factors becoming an integral part in the overall aim concerning education, particularly for pre-service teachers as they are the ones who shall be educating the next generations. This could be an invaluable asset, especially in teacher education programmes where incidents, events, and experiences emerge to have significance for an individual’s professional work. This could become the fundamental *modus operandi* of teaching and learning institutions, particularly in consideration of teachers’ work. In reality the vital crux for me is that if we as educators espouse the principles and effective practices of adult education and make a conscious effort to engage in critical thinking and reflective practice, then hopefully these attributes will indeed be passed on to our student teachers, who in turn will model the same attributes for their students to learn from (Brookfield, 2010; Lyons, 2010; Mezirow, 2009).

Finally, this study has also highlighted how participants were often caught by surprise by events that happened and were consequently unable to reflect critically, which partly may
have been because of limited experience but also because they were not seeing it done by other teachers. If we can bring about the development of critical thinking in classroom teachers, we can hopefully support teachers in changing their teaching practices. In the education of pre-service teachers (indeed all teachers) an endorsement of critically reflective practice could be a transformative and empowering process of change for teachers and students. A collective change of consciousness could result, with positive outcomes for the education of our future generations.

I would like to conclude with a quote from Jacinta (one of the participants), which was part of her response to the third of the focus group questions: ‘On reflection, what significance do you think the incident(s) you experienced will have with regard to your future teaching practices’? Jacinta’s response, which I feel defines the critically reflective practitioner, was as follows: “When I think about incidents or particular incidents that impacted on my teaching practice I now realise the more I reflect and write about the incidents straight away, the more likely I am to change!”
REFERENCES


Western Australia College of Teaching (WACOT). (2009). *Western Australian Professional Standards for Teaching.* Western Australia.


APPENDIX 1

Procedure Investigators Used to Analyze Data

Assembling Meaning Units
Gathered descriptions of critical incidents (meaning units) from participants along with their explanations of the meaning to them of the events

Coding
Reviewed each meaning unit (critical incident) according to the meaning to participants of each event, determined the general theme of the unit, and assigned a code for that theme

Categorizing
Grouped codes with similar meanings and constructed nine categories

Applying Theoretical Explanation
Identified the Beck model as the theoretical model that best explains how critical incidents influence counselor development

Clustering
Placed categories in four clusters according to the Beck model: Beliefs, Cognitions, Affect, and Behavior

FIGURE 1
Procedure Investigators Used to Analyze Data
APPENDIX 2

Participants: Interview Questions

Question 1. Think back over the past week(s) in relation to your classroom teaching practices and tell me about an incident that made you say to yourself, ‘My teaching prac is really going as I thought it should.’

Question 2. Think back over the past week(s). Identify a specific classroom incident in which you were faced with a situation, which challenged you in some way or made you re-evaluate some assumptions you may have held. Describe what happened and what particular aspects of the incident gave you a greater awareness of yourself in your role as a teacher and/or of the student(s) involved.

Question 3. Think back over the past week(s). Identify a classroom incident that you would classify as ‘atypical’ (i.e. the incident was unusual or it had an unexpected effect on you). Describe what happened and in what way particular aspects of the incident had an effect on you.

Question 4. In considering the 3 questions above and as a result of your experience in relation to any one of these, would it make you change some aspect of your teaching practice now?
APPENDIX 3

Focus Group Interview Questions

Question 1. Think back to your ATP and reflect on any assumptions you may have held or discovered you did hold/or still do in relation to your role as a teacher.

Question 2. Describe one or more classroom incidents that illustrate any of these assumptions. These incident(s) may involve yourself in your role as a teacher and/or may involve the students.

Question 3. On reflection what significance do you think the incident(s) you experienced will have with regard to your future teaching practices?
**APPENDIX 4**

Information Table re: Participants

Names of participants, their subject area(s) and teaching levels. Location of the schools and whether school was public or private regards participants’ final teaching practice.

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<th>Participants: Name:</th>
<th>Subject Area:</th>
<th>Teaching Level: high school/primary</th>
<th>Location of School:</th>
<th>School: Public/Private</th>
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<td>Public</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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