SELECTING TEACHER CANDIDATES WHO ARE PREPARED
TO PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL REFORM

by

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Abstract

A variety of policies originating from Ontario’s Ministry of Education make it clear that education reform requires that teachers reflect on their practice. Despite this, there is little evidence of a common understanding of just what reflection would look like in teacher practice. This means that Initial Teacher Education programs face ambiguous challenges both in producing teachers who can reflect on practice in order to participate in school reform and in matching program goals regarding reflection to admissions requirements. This study investigated the understanding and evaluation of reflection in an Initial Teacher Education program through interviews with 15 instructors and field partners who had evaluated applicants’ written evidence of reflection. Differences among participants were evident in the understanding of reflection; however, the overriding theme of conscious attention to and engagement with experience as a vehicle for change was consistent with current literature. Differences in the evaluation of profiles were based on perceptions of how well applicants met the criterion of specificity, which was emphasized in the rubric; what role their judgement should take in evaluation decisions; and the knowledge base on which those decisions were made. Participants described an organizational...
context in their Initial Teacher Education Program in which reflection was encouraged but not formalized or defined in any consistent way, and described opportunities for reflection that resembled informal communities of practice. They articulated some significant dilemmas in the fair evaluation of reflection that were similar to the challenges of school administrators evaluating the reflection required of teachers. The results of the study have implications for admissions policies as well as for creating a culture of reflection and inquiry in an Initial Teacher Education Program or school.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Happiness is a journey, not a destination” is the caption on a card given to me by a friend. I would have to add that learning, too, is a journey and not a destination. This thesis represents a significant part of my lifelong exploration and challenge of our public school system that began when I first challenged what we were being taught when I was in kindergarten. It is a major stepping stone to continuing that journey.

One doesn’t travel alone on such a voyage of discovery. My traveling companions and mentors have supported me in many ways that I appreciate very much. All of my instructors at OISE have deepened my understanding of the schooling and learning that framed my career as a secondary school teacher and administrator. Ruth Childs, the chair of my thesis committee, has been a constant source of encouragement and confidence in my ability to accomplish what I set out to do. My other two committee members, Nina Bascia and Joe Flessa, patiently and persistently challenged me to see the bigger picture underlying my experiences in schools. The external examiner, David Mandzuk of University of Manitoba, asked key questions that prompted a tighter synthesis of the errant threads of my thinking and writing.

Ruth Childs has also supported a learning community among her students that has sustained me and I know will continue to do so along our future paths. My heartfelt thanks go to the Datahost group.

To the instructors who gave generously of their time to participate in this study, and to Kathy Broad, Executive Director of Initial Teacher Education at OISE, who answered my many questions about the admissions process, my appreciation for your commitment to fairness and equity in the admissions process.
My family has understood my need to continue learning and have been constant in their support. In particular, my husband David has been an unwavering source of strength and inspiration who brought a sense of life’s possibilities and many cups of tea to my academic journey. My son Steven gave generously of his own research skills to verify my data, and acted as a willing and skilful proof reader.

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This work is dedicated to my mom. She didn’t live to see me complete this, but her spirit still gives me strength and her practical wisdom still guides my life. She would have appreciated the journey of learning taken by the daughter who had to be convinced to stay in kindergarten.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Reflection on practice is seen as an important professional skill for teachers. There is abundant literature on the role of the related activities of reflection and inquiry, both individual and collaborative, as vehicles for educational change and for improving student outcomes. The current emphasis on reflection may be prompted by a realization that many of our organizational and social structures need to be reexamined in light of social change. For example, the Ontario policy of compulsory schooling until the age of eighteen (Ontario Education Act, 1990) implies a change in expectations of students and schools similar to those of the late 1970's when such Ontario industries as Stelco in Hamilton and General Motors in Oshawa began to require a high school diploma as a condition for employment instead of completion of Grade 10. What implications do these changes have on teaching? If, for example, one in five students does not complete school, what is it about what we do and how we do it that produces such a result? Is that result acceptable? If not, then what can teachers do to increase the chances of students remaining in school? As well, what structures and policies in our system must change in order to change that result? These are not easy questions and require a commitment by schools and teachers to reflect at a very deep level about the decisions they make every day about what they will do, how they will do it, for whose benefit, and why. This reflective stance and the need for it are addressed frequently in literature about organizational change (Brookfield, 1995; Fullan, 1993, 1999; Schön, 1983). The two terms, reflection and inquiry, are often intertwined in the literature on education reform. For instance, Loughran (2002) states that reflection “places an emphasis on learning through questioning and investigation” (p. 34). Case (1992) makes the distinction between reflection as an individual activity and inquiry as a collective effort, and
Schön (1983) calls on the reflective practitioner to have a “stance toward inquiry” (p. 163). For the purposes of this review, the two terms will be used interchangeably.

**Reflection and Teaching**

In spite of the emphasis on the importance of reflection, little attention has been paid to what it looks like in action and what would count as evidence of reflection. Can there be any agreement on what constitutes productive reflection? If one teacher reflects on high failure rates in a class by examining the test questions and concluding that all students are different, and another teacher reflects after talking to students and concludes that the material used to present curriculum needed to be more relevant to their lives, can these both be considered worthwhile reflections? If one teacher educator defines reflection as ongoing dialogue with oneself and another defines it as focused inquiry, what impact does that difference have on their teaching, and on their assessment of reflection? If indeed reflective practice is a component of school improvement it would be helpful to know just what it involves and how we can evaluate it.

Reflection is seen not only as a professional requirement of teachers, but also as an organizational need. To help navigate through change, many schools have developed Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in a variety of formats. PLCs are intended to be vehicles for collegial reflection on practice (Andrews & Lewis, 2004; Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Louis, Marks & Krause, 1996). However, there is again very little to guide us “through the gap between the eloquence of the professional learning community model on paper and its messiness in practice” (Servage, 2008, p. 70). If faculties of education have a goal of preparing teachers who can participate meaningfully in collaborative reflection, whether or not facilitated by professional learning communities, what do instances of such reflection look like within the faculty? If, in modeling such collaborative reflection, faculties of education want
to inquire into their admissions practices, their capacity for such reflection is increased by a clearer understanding of how their own views of reflection impact on the admissions decisions they make and what happens when those views vary.

Teachers work in a world that is complex. Complex systems, as outlined by Radford (2010), have distinguishing characteristics. They have multiple, simultaneously interacting variables; they have non-linear and dynamic causal interactions, ill-defined boundaries, and the capacity for self-organization. A complex system cannot be understood by knowledge of its subsystems: the whole must be understood in terms of a dialectic engagement among its parts. That understanding is fluid, and defies prediction and control. Complex systems are different from complicated ones. Radford gives the example of the computer as a complicated but not complex system; complexity defines an organic, dynamic system: a government, a teacher education program, a school, a marketplace. A complex system implies a potential for disconnect between policies that are written in general language and the multiple interpretations of that policy that exist within the system by multiple stakeholders with a variety of interests in that policy. Labaree (2004) adds to that complexity the notion of contradictory purposes that drive the school system. He lists such agendas as promoting democratic equality, providing students with skills and values as citizens, promoting social efficiency in preparing workers, and promoting social mobility (p. 55). Labaree associates this complexity with difficulty in making change. Teachers must place themselves in the midst of these multiple agendas without any “established set of professional practices that have been proven to work” (p. 53) beyond specific times and locations. It appears that the need for reflection on their own practice is accompanied by the need for ongoing collective examination of these contradictory purposes and for some reconciliation of them as a prerequisite for significant institutional change. In Little’s (1993)
perspective regarding equity reforms, the complexity currently experienced in schools comes in part from a history of addressing low achievement among students from differing family backgrounds by remedying individual student deficiencies, and the continuation of this practice despite the mounting evidence that institutional structures and norms define and contribute to student failure (p. 131). The disconnect between the implications of this evidence and established institutional structures that frame teaching adds to the complexity of teacher education and school reform and makes both so challenging. Changing perspectives that have existed for a century requires new approaches to teacher learning and a new relationship to existing policies about teaching and teacher education. Little calls for teacher learning that is focused on inquiry and reflection on “big picture perspective on the purposes and practices of schooling” (p. 138). That it is an ongoing challenge is reflected in her statement ten years later that teachers continue to struggle with “sustained and deep consideration of teaching problems and possibilities, even in conditions formally structured for that purpose” (Little, 2003, p. 920).

Part of what makes this inquiry stance challenging may be the historical expectation of schools’ and teachers that they will implement policy which has been developed outside of the school setting. Clune (1990a) addresses this challenge by describing three lenses through which policies are addressed by schools and teachers. These three lenses describe differences in orientation: as mediator striving for consistency with policy goals, as critic adapting policy to meet perceived student needs, or as constructor of an ongoing dialogue about creating policy that is appropriate for the particular situation. In the context of education reform that seeks systemic approaches to equity and success for a broader range of students, it may be necessary for educators in schools and teacher education programs to become policy constructors. Although Clune’s descriptions of these views addressed curriculum policy, they form useful lenses through
which to look at teachers’ and teacher educators’ relationships with policies that may systematically contribute to student failure. This shift in teacher learning and the need for new relationships to policies that produce systemic barriers for some students is the context in which reflection on practice among teachers, teacher educators, and teacher candidates occurs.

**Reflection and Teacher Education**

If reflection by teachers is an important vehicle for educational reform, there exists a corresponding requirement for Initial Teacher Education programs to produce teachers who can reflect. ITE programs in Canada are university based; they are structured as either concurrent studies taken at the same time as a BA or BSc, or consecutive studies taken for one or two years after completion of a first degree. The length of consecutive ITE programs ranges from nine months to two years. Most Ontario consecutive programs are two semesters, or eight months, long (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). The short duration of such programs implies the need to not only develop skills in reflection during the program, but select applicants who have some potential or capacity for reflection. This is not different from assessing academic potential; both are attempting to assess a cognitive or personal dimension through indirect measures. Measuring reflection requires defining reflection and understanding what would be evidence of reflection. The process of addressing this change in ITE policy and practice may not be different from the process of school reform; it too may require teacher engagement and reflection, although the teachers to be engaged are the instructors in the teacher education program, not teachers in the schools.

This study uses the example of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) applicant submissions to one Faculty of Education that are evaluated for evidence of reflection on experience as an opportunity to build our understanding of just what reflection as a teaching skill looks like, how
such reflection is evaluated, and how reflection and its evaluation are both embedded in a complex organizational culture. This study will, through questionnaires and cognitive interviews, examine how the educators who evaluate the applicants’ reflections understand and recognize reflection. Data sources are outlined in Table 1. This study will be organized around the following questions:

How do readers understand reflection?

How do readers of applicant essay submissions evaluate evidence of reflection?

**Table 1**

*Study Outline*

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This chapter has outlined the reason for this study. Chapter 2 will examine the research literatures that have addressed reflection, the evaluation of reflection and the organizational context in which reflection takes place. It will also outline the conceptual framework and structure of this study, and its possible significance and limitations. Chapter 3 describes the methods used to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 outlines the results obtained from the interviews with application readers. In Chapter 5, the implications of these results are examined, with some tentative conclusions drawn in Chapter 6.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

Initial Teacher Education programs operate within the expectation of producing quality teachers, so this literature review first considers the desired professional characteristics of good teachers from a social and historical context that can serve as a backdrop for looking at ITE program policies and practices. Second, the concept of reflection on experience as a professional skill for teachers is explored from theoretical perspectives and from the perspective of its role in teacher learning, both in an ITE program and in schools. Third, a number of models for measuring reflection and how they inform the process of evaluating evidence of reflection are examined. Fourth, issues surrounding fairness and transparency in evaluating reflection as part of the admissions processes are compared to similar issues in the evaluation of teachers.

Changing Expectations of Good Teaching

Social and Cultural Change

In a large-scale analysis of research on teacher education in the United States, Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) note that definitions of good teaching change both over time and among groups in our society. The metaphor for good teaching employed by researchers has evolved “from disciplinarians to orchestra conductors to reflective practitioners” (Lee, 2008). That is not surprising, given that the role of education and the frameworks for thinking about good teaching reflect the society we live in, and the kind of society we would like to live in. That social framework on which our current educational structures and processes were originally based was radically different from the framework that exists now. The move from a predominately rural population to a predominantly urban one, and from there to a multicultural population, along with the proliferation of global media and communication capacity have created what Taylor (1997) calls two forces: global integration, and national fragmentation.
Digital information technology has made both information and communication around the world accessible from our homes. We can watch bald eagles feed their babies in British Columbia from a balcony in Italy via live webcam feed. We can discuss our consumer needs with someone in India and have what we need shipped from China to Saskatchewan. Such compression of space creates a global integration that was not possible thirty years ago. National fragmentation refers to challenges being made to the link between ethnicity and the nation. In an everyday way, a symbol of such fragmentation can be seen in our patterns of watching television. If you ask someone in North America who was over 10 years of age in 1964 if they saw a rock band called The Beatles perform on the Ed Sullivan Show at 8:00 p.m. on a Sunday night in February, the chances are high that he or she will say yes. If you scroll through the channels available on satellite television today, you will find programming in several languages, reflecting different cultures and geographies and available at multiple times. The culture of the twenty first century is different from that which served as the fundamental basis for both the school system in general and the role of teachers in particular. Fuller (2003) addresses this difference as a tension between current cultural pluralism and the history of integrating groups via large institutions.

Institutions, including schools, were both explicitly and implicitly shaped by certain epistemological traditions: in particular, the Newtonian view of the universe and the belief that the world is a giant mechanism, often likened to a clock, that can be studied and understood detail by detail in order to understand the whole (Palmer, 2007). Teaching once involved the transmission of these details. The world and the organization were seen as predictable and static. However, a more current framework is based on the new sciences: quantum mechanics, chaos theory and complexity theory. Briefly, this is a world of energy and not things. These sciences study the processes that underlie matter, and how things happen and, according to Wheatley (as
cited in Steinberger, 1995), require a new kind of thinking by the education system, a looking at how organization happens and what makes it work. The educational covenant of the 21st century should be built on connection, coherence, shared and mutually created meaning, dynamic relationships, and the human experience itself (Marshall, 1995). What does this basic change of epistemological framework mean to our understanding of what makes a good teacher? A look at the current literature on educational change and the accompanying change in what are seen as characteristics of good teachers makes this shift in expectations clear.

*From Implementation to Inquiry*

Accompanying these broader social changes have been shifts in our society’s views of and expectations of schools. Policy emphasis in Ontario has shifted from seeing dropping out of school as evidence of personal deficit to seeing such disengagement as an issue of equity and social justice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993). Policies now address success for all instead of tacitly accepting that approximately one quarter of students starting secondary school will drop out before completing diploma requirements (Hertz, 1989; King, 2003). These fundamental differences in the desired outcomes of schooling have resulted in the need for changes in teaching, and in both what and how teachers themselves learn. Emphasis on teacher learning has moved from training to reflection and inquiry and from implementation of given policies to collaborative construction of interpretations of policy that are appropriate to particular school situations.

Given that a capacity for reflection is seen as a desirable trait for teachers, to provide a theoretical and research basis on which to ground the practice of evaluating applicants’ reporting of their insight into experience, I sought out literature from the teaching profession and beyond to define the term reflection. One of the earliest conceptualizations of this capacity is Schön’s
(1983) work on reflection on practice as a tool for professionals in a variety of fields. A search of peer reviewed journal articles in education, social science and business databases yielded over 50,000 online publications on this topic in 15 years. In this process of popularization, the range of meanings and their application to reflective practice has been somewhat problematic (Zeichner, Melnick & Gomez, 1996). It seemed, therefore, worthwhile to return to Schön’s original 1983 work on which much current attention is based, in order to clarify his intended meaning.

Schön’s (1983) work has its roots in Dewey’s (1910) concept of reflective deliberation as a means to make sense of one’s experience. For Schön, the space between the presentation of a problem situation and the problem solving itself is where the professional must make sense of complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value-conflict. According to Schön, daily practice in professional fields from medicine to social work involves first of all setting the problem: that is, naming it and framing the context in which we address a problematic situation. Different ways of framing problems are essentially epistemological differences. For example, the problem of poor nutrition is named and attended to in one way by a sociologist and in another way by a health professional. Frames “bound the phenomena” (p. 309) we attend to and determine strategies we choose to address the phenomenon or problem situation. Most likely the sociologist is not attending to nutrient values, and the health professional is not attending to economic power structures. In a sense, frames construct the reality in which we function. Mezirow (1990) calls these frames meaning perspectives (p. xiv.)

Once the problem situation is framed, the actions of professionals are based on tacit, embedded knowledge that is as well a product of both training and experience. So the way we frame a problem and the knowledge we bring to address it are interrelated. When we consciously
address the knowing that is implicit in our actions, the process is what Schön (1983) calls reflection-in-action: thinking about something while doing it. He stated that much reflection-in-action arises from the experience of surprise (p. 56). When our intuitive, tacit decisions yield some unexpected result, we respond by questioning at a more explicit level until it either makes sense to us in our professional framework or modifies that framework. The concept here is one of dialogue in the midst of action and decision-making, even if that dialogue is with oneself. Schön’s term, reflection-in-action, highlights his view that reflection and action are intertwined and that reflection moves experiential knowledge from a tacit level to an explicit level of professional action and deliberation, and that continued action and reflection moves such explicit knowledge to our daily, tacit actions. In comparison, Mezirow (2003) considers reflection on our assumptions as part of a personal transformative process. The two models are similar and involve the same kind of dialogue; Mezirow’s focus is on how individuals interpret and make meaning of their experiences, and is related to the theory of self-actualization (Hart, Conklin & Allen, 2008), while Schön’s focus is the articulation of professional knowledge.

Schön uses the example of a pitcher whose technique is tacit during a game but can be reviewed on video afterward (p. 278). Schön’s point, however, is that we should not separate thinking from doing; we should avoid “seeing thought only as a preparation for action and action only as an implementation of thought” (p. 280). In both simultaneous and sequential action and reflection, the professional is moving from a position as expert: “I am presumed to know, and must claim to do so, regardless of my own uncertainty” (p. 300), to reflective practitioner: “I am presumed to know, but I am not the only one in the situation to have relevant and important knowledge. My uncertainties may be a source of learning for me and for [clients]” (p. 300). So the reflective practitioner is a learner engaged in ongoing dialogue on practice.
Models for reflection involve cognitive activity and emotions mediated by development, culture and opportunity. For instance, both Schön and Mezirow draw on the concept of metacognition. As the word implies, reflection is seen as a cognitive activity, an awareness and management of one’s own thought (Kuhn & Dean, 2004; Mezirow, 1990). It is related to what Piaget termed *formal operations* (Santrock, Woloshyn, Gallagher, DiPetta & Marini, 2004) to describe the developmental stage at which humans can deal with abstractions, form hypotheses, and engage in mental trial and error. Tasks have been developed to measure metacognitive activity, and there is considerable evidence that metacognitive behaviour is a predictor of learning (Veenman & Spaans, 2005). Building on this view, Kuhn and Dean (2004) equate metacognition with critical thinking, both being about awareness of one’s own thinking. McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, Fairbank-Roch and Owen (2004) created a continuum of cognitive activities from drawing on existing knowledge to construction of new knowledge. These authors see metacognition, then, as a cognitive activity that builds on more basic mental functions in a developmental way. Piaget’s position (Santrock et al., 2004) is that we resolve dissonance, and therefore learn, by either assimilating experience into current cognitive frameworks, which he called *schema*, or accommodating our cognitive frameworks to better evaluate that experience. When we encounter an experience that doesn’t match up with our current schema, and therefore that creates cognitive dissonance or discomfort, we either adjust our perception of the experience to fit the schema, or we adjust our schema to fit the experience.

Cross cultural studies have found significant differences in the development of metacognitive activity between cultures (Dasen & Ribeauipierre, 1987; Maynard, 2008); these findings would imply that metacognitive activity is culturally mediated. This sociocultural perspective, most often connected with Vygotsky (Kosulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003),
assumes that learning is mediated by dynamic relationships with other human beings. A variation of this metacognitive model is found in Boud, Keough & Walker (1985), who draws on Piaget’s focus on awareness and resolution of dissonance to conclude that reflection involves not only return to experience and reevaluation of that experience, but also attending to feelings. VanWoerkom (2008), as well, points out that emotion drives attention, “which drives learning, memory and problem-solving behavior” (p. 6). The use of terms such as awareness, cultural mediation, opportunity, and emotions suggest a wider view of reflection than a purely cognitive function. Taking a related position, Scales (1993) maintains that without the opportunity to reflect on their experience, adults assimilate that experience into existing models.

To label reflection as a skill or ability might be oversimplifying the issue. Perhaps it might be useful to see reflection as a capacity. In that case, an additional aspect of reflection might be the disposition to use this capacity. Diez (2007) draws on perceptual psychology to explore the tension between the ability and the willingness to examine one’s own thinking, and defines ability as “including a complex integration of knowledge, behavior, skill, disposition, attitude, and self perception” (p. 389). McArdle and Coutts (2003) call for the quality of balance, an ability to “make sense of new events through accommodation and assimilation” (p. 231).

Exploring the nature of reflection in more depth invites additional perspectives on its purpose or focus. This additional perspective on purpose is considered important for educational reform (Darling Hammond and Bransford, 2005; Loughran, 2002; Mezirow, 1990) in its distinction between reflection and critical reflection.

**Reflection and Critical Reflection**

Brookfield (1995) provides a potentially useful model of reflection and makes an important distinction between reflection on practice and critical reflection on practice. He
characterizes reflection as looking at assumptions about paradigms (e.g., that intelligence is normally distributed), prescriptions (e.g., that professional learning communities will foster greater student achievement), or causes (e.g., large classes decrease student achievement).

Critical reflection, on the other hand, has two distinctive purposes according to Brookfield: to understand how considerations of power underpin, frame and distort educational processes and interactions, and to recognize hegemonic assumptions (i.e., those assumptions that we think are in our own best interests but that have actually been designed by more powerful others to work against us in the long term). Critical reflection, then, is that same reflection on assumptions, but in the context of justice, fairness and compassion. It is not the process of reflection but the context that is different. To teach without critical reflection is to teach innocently, assuming that the meanings and significance we place on our actions are the same as the ones our students take from them. Smith (2006) argues that critical reflection is an essential element in teachers’ efforts to address the social justice issues that are often part of their lived experience and those of their students. In most conceptions of reflection, critical reflection is seen as a more complex level of metacognition, or reflection on practice (Kitchener & King, 1981; Kreber, 2004; Kuhn & Dean, 2004; McAlpine et al., 2004; Ward & McCotter, 2004). However, Brookfield (1995) sees it as a different context and purpose rather than an incrementally more complex process. Distinguishing these context and purpose without judging them as more or less complex acknowledges the cultural component of metacognitive activity addressed earlier in this review. Research on reflection by the researchers cited above found that both teacher candidates and their instructors were unlikely to critically reflect on their experience. It may be more instructive to recognize cultural variables related to this pattern rather than to view it through the lens of individual capacity for complex metacognition. If one takes the position that one of the purposes of
schooling is to “challenge the world and work for change” (Coulter, as cited in Royal Commission on Learning, 1994, p. 42), then critical reflection would be a necessary component of good teaching and mentorship. Culturally relevant education challenges the status quo, and is different from what Coulter referred to as “fitting seamlessly into existing society” (p. 42). It requires what Ladson-Billings (1995) calls a “critical consciousness” (p. 162). In order to challenge the status quo and help students do so, teachers need to be able to articulate the philosophical and ideological bases of their practice, explain why they structure their classrooms the way they do, and recognize how they conceive knowledge.

*Opportunities for Reflection and Inquiry by Teachers*

How do teachers learn such a reflective habit? If it is seen as an important component of good teaching, then a framework that supports and expects such questioning of practice and policies would be appropriate. One framework that supports teachers in the habit of collaborative reflective practice is the professional learning community, or a community of practice. In the education system, there is widespread support for and use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as defined by Dufour and Eaker (1998), often in the form of funding for PLC initiatives such as the current school improvement initiative in Alberta (Servage, 2008). Although there are several definitions of PLCs in the literature (Andrews & Lewis, 2004, Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), they all include some form of ongoing collective inquiry and what Louis, Marks and Kruse call deprivatized practice. Most models include an action orientation or focus on experimentation. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) define the practice generally as teachers working “collaboratively to reflect on practice, examine evidence about the relationship between practice and student outcomes, and make changes that improve teaching and learning for the particular students in their classes” (p.
6). This general model essentially looks at the more immediate issues of instruction and the means of improving student success, but does not often examine and challenge those beliefs and practices that work against that success (Servage, 2008; Zeichner, 1990). From the perspective of Brookfield (1995), mentioned in the previous section, this inquiry involves reflection but not critical reflection, and in Mezirow’s terms, involves instrumental learning and not communicative learning. The question remains of why PLCs do not result in the critical reflection that challenges beliefs and practices that form barriers to students.

Ideally, PLCs provide a framework for individual development, change in practice and collective capacity (Little, 2003). In reality, Little points to difficulties that teachers encounter “in achieving sustained and deep consideration of teaching problems and possibilities . . . and to related difficulties in contending with difference and disagreement on matters of practice” (p. 919). The difficulty of bridging the different contexts of a teacher’s life in school, between classroom autonomy and collective decision making, is explored by Bickmore (1998), who concluded that disagreements arose from “persistent philosophical and practical differences that were not all openly discussed among staff” (p. 1). We can gather from this that two key barriers to the effective role of PLCs in making schools better for students are resolution of conflicts, and articulation of values and beliefs. For example, Labaree (2004) refers to the “complex and often contradictory purposes that societies impose on schooling” (p. 54). On the one hand, schools and teachers are expected to promote social efficiency, the grade-and-sort function that prepares workers and promotes social mobility. On the other hand, teachers are expected to promote equity and social justice. Little (1993) points out the tension between reforms aimed at critical thinking and those aimed at basic skills (p. 130). It may be small wonder that conflict resolution
and articulation of values are challenging tasks for teachers in PLC’s, given the conflicting agendas of schooling and school reform and the individual nature of teaching.

At the organizational level, McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) point out the ongoing effort that is required to sustain PLCs. Creating a safe environment in which to question assumptions and beliefs and increasing the capacity of teachers to do so require a long term commitment by schools and district school boards. Teachers’ ability to critically reflect is often made more challenging by changes in leadership and changes in reform agendas that affect the resources, knowledge base and structures available to sustain the collective inquiry of a PLC.

Another model that has been developed from Wenger’s (1998) Communities of Practice (CoP) draws on his more interest focused, time limited and loosely structured framework for professional learning. Network Learning Communities (NLCs) have been developed for teachers in the United Kingdom and explored by a number of schools and researchers (Chapman & Fullan, 2007; Little, 2005; Katz & Earl, 2010) to overcome some of the difficulties of PLCs. NLCs are not characterized by Little (2005) as better than PLCs, but as a model which, if combined with the strengths of the PLC model, could provide the impetus for a third model that facilitates both collective attention to goals and autonomous pursuit of professional learning.

In preparation for their graduates’ participation in inquiry that includes complexity and challenge, many ITE programs adopt vision statements and policies that are aimed at addressing the capacity for teacher candidates to reflect and critically reflect on their practice. (e.g., Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2009a; Queens University, 2009). These policies imply the need for some common understanding of how reflection fits into teacher education programs. Some ITE programs adopt structures that are designed to help teacher candidates develop habits of reflection and inquiry (Mandzuk, Hasinoff & Seifert, 2005). The most common structure is
the division of teacher candidates into smaller cohorts that encourage the sharing of ideas and supportive social ties (Siefert & Mandzuk, 2006).

**Reflection and Teacher Education**

Reflection on practice can be examined from two different perspectives within teacher education. The first is from the point of view of faculty and their practice, including how they address or model reflection in their ITE classrooms. If it is the responsibility of an ITE program to produce teachers who can reflect on practice, is there a common perception that drives that goal? Teacher educators’ views of reflection and its role in teacher education may range from advocacy to a more ambivalent position based on their experience of what Clune (1990b) describes as the “educational reforms of the past [that] have become educational policy problems of the present” (p. 135). This clash of previous policy initiatives and current policies is acknowledged as well by Little (1993) as an emerging issue in teacher professional development. A useful lens through which to examine this sometimes problematic relationship with policy is Clune’s (1990a) distinction of teachers and schools as policy mediators, policy critics, and policy constructors. Lasky (2005) interprets Clune’s perspectives as a view of oneself as a mediator of policy or an agent of change through the roles of critic or constructor. In this sense, ITE programs can be agents of change, or not, through the reflective practice encouraged and modeled.

The second perspective from which to examine reflection is at the point of expecting reflection on experience as part of the application process. There is considerable established research detailed by Feiman-Nemser (2001) that would suggest that there is not enough time in a nine-month program to develop the capacity and habit of reflection. The fact that many ITE programs focus on reflection would indicate the belief that it can be taught or improved during a
nine-month program. There is actually considerable evidence from examining ITE student journals and assignments that explicit instruction and expectations about reflection during ITE programs produce mixed results (Bain, Mills, Ballantyne & Packer, 2002; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Loughran, 2002; Murray, Nuttall & Mitchell, 2008; Samuels & Betts, 2007; Yost, Sentner & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). Measuring evidence of reflection on experience in applicants would suggest a belief that in order to take advantage of a nine-month program, one must have a certain level of capacity for reflection already present. Going on the assumptions, then, that reflection is an important component of good teaching, that it is incremental and developmental, and that a certain level of skill is necessary on entry to an ITE program for teacher candidates to be able to learn from their practicum experiences and to practice reflection regularly as a new teacher, it would be consistent with those assumptions to assess the level of such a skill in applicants to ITE programs in the same way that we assess evidence of a certain level of academic skill.

If one sees, then, that reflection is both a capacity and a willingness to use that capacity, how would an ITE admissions process go about looking for evidence of this capacity? “I had a good time last night” is a reflection on experience, but not likely sufficient to demonstrate a capacity for making sense of new events. So what might an admissions process look for?

**Evaluation of Reflection**

**Models for Evaluating Reflection**

Based on a variety of theoretical frameworks, a number of researchers have developed schemas for assessing instances of reflection on experience. For instance, Kuhn and Dean’s (2004) levels of epistemological understanding provide an assessment of reflection based on a range from positivism (knowledge comes from an external source and is certain) to constructivism (knowledge is generated by human minds and is uncertain but susceptible to
evaluation). Using a similar metacognitive framework, Kitchener and King (cited in Mezirow, 1990) outline a set of distinctions, from reflection based on the certainty of external truth to the construction of knowledge through evaluation of available evidence. These models use a continuum, then, from certainty to inquiry based on evidence.

Comparable levels of reflective thinking which move from descriptive to analytical and critical are identified by Hatton and Smith (1995) who identify five levels: reporting, responding, relating, reasoning, and reconstructing. These levels are similar to five identified by Bain, Mills, Ballantyne and Packer (2002), and drawn on by Kreber (2004). These models have certain common characteristics: they are hierarchical and they move from simpler to more complex cognition. The change in level is consistently from a more descriptive approach to one in which change is envisioned.

Ward and McCotter (2004) used a grounded theory approach to develop dimensions of reflection: focus, inquiry and change. By focus, they mean the focus of the reflection, whether on self, students or a broader view of learning. By inquiry, they refer to the process of questioning, whether it is an event or an ongoing process, and by change, they refer to the application of inquiry to change of practice and/or perspective. They characterize levels of reflection ranging from routine, with the self disengaged from change, to transformative, with the self engaged in fundamental questioning and change. The intent is not necessarily hierarchical ranking of these levels; different forms may be appropriate at different times: “[t]he developmental path for many preservice teachers suggests that concern for self and gaining competency in teaching tasks is and probably should be the most immediate focus” (p. 254). The distinctions here seem to be from immediate and self-focused concern to inquiry into more global issues of change.
In order to examine the appropriateness of various models for evaluation of reflection, a search was conducted of current Ontario Ministry of Education documents, with the intention of exploring the applicability in the context of admissions decisions at the ITE program level. However, although reflection is addressed in many policies in education there is no definition of reflection provided to accompany these policies, or guidelines for evaluating reflection in the standards of practice of the Ontario College of Teachers (2008) or the Ontario Ministry of Education policy on the supervision of teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a). Schools are left, then, with the challenge of working out a relationship between reflection and its evaluation, and figuring out how both of these relate to teaching and learning.

**Reflection, Evaluation and Teaching**

Schools and faculties of education exist within multiple contradictory mandates; two of these mandates will be examined in the context of public schooling and Initial Teacher Education. The first is social justice, which implies an orientation to examining institutional structures and norms that define and contribute to student failure (Little, 1993), a mandate that could produce a reluctance to fail a teacher candidate, especially given the lack of ability “to measure adequately the effects teachers have on students” (Labaree, 2004, p. 13). On the other hand, the need to make discrete pass/fail evaluations of applicants to an ITE program based on very limited knowledge of them is an agenda of social efficiency, of deciding on the distribution of resources when applicants to a program outnumber the spaces available. These contradictory agendas form the organizational reality in which evaluation of reflection occurs. This parallels the contradictory mandates in public schools where the Student Success Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, undated) announces a social justice oriented goal “to help all students graduate” and at the same time measures learning as a grade at the end of 110 hours of scheduled
time (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999), a policy which seems oriented toward social efficiency. Agendas of social justice require opportunities for teachers “to discover and develop practices that embody central values and principles, rather than to implement, adopt, or demonstrate practices thought to be universally effective” (Little, 1993, p. 133). In other words, teachers need to be policy constructors, and this takes opportunity and support for “informed dissent” (p. 138).

In contrast to this picture of teaching and teacher learning, Zumwalt and Craig (2005) conclude from their review of hundreds of studies on indicators of teacher quality that the measurement of teacher quality found in that research continues to be dominated by measurement of the intellectual ability and scholastic achievement of teachers, even though these qualities are not sufficient for good teaching. Just what characteristics of teachers are consistent with the view of teacher as policy constructor with an agenda of social justice? Darling-Hammond (1997) makes a distinction between cognitive understanding of and sensitivity to learner differences in classroom practice. This is supported by a number of studies that point to a variety of non-cognitive factors that influence individual students’ learning: caring, kindness, integrity, initiative, and skill development (Wayda & Lund, 2005); initiative, fairness, decency, service, pro-social behavior, honesty, humility, trust, empathy, healing, and a sense of community (Armstine, 1990); strength, confidence, balance, stability and value maturity (McArdle & Coutts, 2003) and orientation to moral principles (Howey & Strom, 1987). Common threads from this list include commitment to treating students fairly and being sensitive to factors that influence individual student learning. These qualities require that teachers make explicit, and reflect on, their own biases (Cochran-Smith, 1992, 2004; Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Hiebert, Morris, Berk and Jansen (2007) agree that...
expert teaching strategies are not enough; the need to examine and possibly revise one’s teaching requires analysis and reflection on one’s goals for the classroom and for students, and hypothesizing about the reasons for successes and failures. Identifying the need for reflection on teaching decisions and actions is a different position than automatically attributing students’ failure to deficits in the students themselves, and instead implies the adaptation of our professional actions to meet the needs of a wide variety of students. Hare (1993) points out that teachers function in close proximity to their students and at the same time need a critical perspective. These seemingly incompatible positions require viewing oneself as a learner as well as a teacher and, as Hare emphasizes, the humility to be an inquirer instead of an expert.

This inconsistency between conclusions from research on the characteristics of good teachers and the lack of attention to those characteristics in establishing indicators of good teaching reflects the education system’s roots in Newtonian, positivist thinking, and makes us realize that assessment of such characteristics is relatively uncharted territory; it underlines the difficulty for ITE programs to address non-academic characteristics of both applicants and graduates. If effective teaching for educational reform includes reflection on values and assumptions, then those capacities are central to the evaluation of both emerging capacity at the level of ITE program admissions and more fully formed capacity at the level of certification. However, these expectations are embedded in a university system that relies almost entirely on academic grades as the basis for admissions decisions.

**Evaluation of Reflection in the Admissions Process to Teacher Education**

Another context in which evaluation of reflection becomes a focus is the practice by Initial Teacher Education programs in Canada of making decisions about admitting and preparing teachers at university faculties of education. Assessing academic qualifications is the
traditional method of making admission decisions. When qualities beyond academic preparation are deemed important, the admissions process becomes more complex. At several Canadian faculties of education, the admissions process involves written submissions or interviews by applicants that require them to reflect on their own experiences (e.g., Lakehead University, 2009; Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2009a; Queens University, 2009; University of British Columbia, 2009).

In the context of evaluating individual ITE program applications, there are several problems associated with measuring reflective skills in an applicant’s submission. First is the problem of defining just what we mean by reflection. Second is the problem of defining what constitutes evidence of reflection, and a third is how to evaluate that evidence. Further issues complicating the evaluation of reflection include the possibility of multiple interpretations of evidence by a variety of raters. Inter-rater reliability will likely be an issue if a variety of interpretations are brought to bear on the same evidence.

The range of interpretations and ratings of applicant submissions by raters might arise from the fact that much of the professional knowledge gained by these raters is tacit, or unspoken, so the connection between what they read and their perception of good teaching may be difficult to articulate. Moving from this realm of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge that can be shared and therefore made accountable is an area poorly supported by research. Laird (2005) points out the difficulty of quantifying and verifying the very kinds of information needed about college applicants, including “both academic and non-academic achievements against the opportunities and challenges faced by each individual” (p. 54).

Appropriate evaluation of the level of reflective capacity that would comprise a minimal expectation of ITE program applicants is uncharted territory in the research literature. The
distinction between hierarchical models, i.e., those that conceptualize critical reflection as the most complex form of reflection, and Brookfield’s (1995) categorical model that addresses assumptions about paradigms, prescriptions or causes, may be most useful here. What this would mean in the assessment of ITE program applications is that reflection in any of these categories could be used as sufficient evidence of reflection. The question would then remain, however, of how to evaluate such evidence of reflection. Can one distinguish between more or less reflective responses?

It may be useful to examine non-hierarchical approaches to reflection. If evaluative judgements are to be made, then it would be useful to start by looking at models that have already been established through research in order to give us some direction in assessing their applicability in this instance. There is considerable overlap in how these previously published models move from simpler to more multidimensional conceptions of reflection. These distinctions may be useful in providing a framework for categorizing how application profile readers evaluate reflection.

One pattern that emerges is an inquiry orientation. Hatton and Smith (1995) highlight a distinction between simply describing a situation and taking an inquiring stance toward that same situation. Loughran (2002) considers a problem to be the beginning point of reflection. Kitchener and King (in Mezirow, 1990) address the role of uncertainty in making judgements instead of espousing a particular belief. If we acknowledge all of these perspectives, we come up with a sense of inquiry about a problem instead of description of a situation.

Another recurring pattern is the process of framing and reframing issues (Loughran, 2002; Ward & McCotter, 2004) in a cyclic process that Hatton and Smith (1995) call dialogic. The shared meaning here appears to be a revisiting of previously held positions. However,
Hatton and Smith caution that this *dialogic process* may be related to language skills. Despite this relationship, or perhaps with recognition of the importance of being able to articulate issues, the concept of reflection as *taking a new look* at a situation or problems might be a useful construct from which to evaluate reflection in applicant profiles.

A third area of some agreement concerns *perspective* (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kember, McKay, Sinclair & Wong, 2008; McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, Fairbank-Roch & Owen, 2004). The range appears to be from detached or at a solely personal level, to a broader societal perspective and application. These three areas of agreement, then – *inquiry, reframing* and *perspective* – can form a useful framework for examining reader evaluation of profiles.

It may happen that applicants to an ITE program do not fit into an established hierarchical framework. Murray, Nuttall and Mitchell (2008) reviewed 38 empirical studies from international literature that used a variety of frameworks to measure reflection by pre-service teachers (i.e., those in an ITE program) and found that reflections were most commonly descriptive, concrete and focused on self, with higher level reflection upon abstract ideas and concepts being relatively rare. The likelihood of finding a similar pattern in current ITE program applicant submissions would seem quite high. If that is the case, then on what basis can incremental judgements actually be made by profile readers?

In summary, the literature shows that the challenge of elaboration, application and evaluation of the concept of reflection is found at all levels of education responding to the need for systemic change.

**This Study**

The review of literature has highlighted that along with educational change comes change in the needs for teachers’ learning. This study draws on Little’s (1993) framing of issues
concerning teacher learning that are related to systemic reform characterized by complexity and ambiguity. The focus of her research was the public school system and teacher learning; its possible applicability to teacher education and admissions will be examined in this study in the context of ITE instructor practice and the implementation of ITE program admissions policies.

Little (1993) discusses two areas of school reform that relate to this study. The first is the area of equity, and concerns policy goals of increasing student success rates; research has led to persuasive evidence which makes it clear that failure at school is more often a systemic problem than a result of individual students’ deficiencies. The implications of this evidence create a clear disconnect between established norms of teacher practice and new teacher learning needs. The second area is the nature and use of assessment, and its relationship to equity. Several teacher learning issues arise from these reform agendas.

Little refers to one issue as a limited grasp of possibilities. By citing this as a teacher learning issue, Little acknowledges what Schön (1983) called frames for addressing issues, Mezirow (1990) called meaning perspectives, and Piaget called cognitive schemas (Santrock et al., 2004). They are those tacit mental frameworks that are resistant to change, and whose change often requires significant investment in “expanded information, deeper discussion and debate, and a tolerance for public dispute over fundamental matters” (Little, 1993, p. 140). This study examines just what mental frameworks exist about reflection and the degree of consensus around these frameworks among teacher educators.

The second teacher learning issue that Little frames is the pressure for fast-paced implementation. Teachers are faced with policies such as Ontario’s change from compulsory school attendance until the age of eighteen (Ontario Ministry of Education, undated) that have immediate and profound implications for teaching. In university programs generally, legal
challenges to admissions policies call for urgent changes to college admissions criteria (Guinier, 2003); on the other hand this urgency creates pressures that work against the ongoing critical reflection process required to make changes in the fundamental structures and practices. This study will explore the tension between organizational demands and the need for reflective practice.

Little’s identification of the magnitude of the task as a third complexity issue refers to the frustration of working with the current reality of schooling while at the same time envisioning what might be. It is a difficulty that can be compared to looking through a microscope and binoculars at the same time. This study addresses this often stressful pairing of perspectives by examining the kinds of reflection that ITE instructors engage in with their teacher candidates, and the extent to which they articulate reflection on their own practice.

Political will as a fourth component of the complexity of reform refers to the “tension between institutional imperatives and individual prerogatives, between the conditions necessary to attempt systemic change and the conditions that engage individual teachers in their work” (p. 141). To what extent is the reflection among ITE instructors systemic rather than particular in focus, and collective versus individualistic? In other words, does it demonstrate a balance of individuals as reflective practitioners and a community of inquiry?

Little situates these areas of complexity for teacher learning in the context of professional development. Mismatch between models of professional development and the tasks of school reform produce a disconnect between the training paradigm with its positioning of teachers as passive consumers of fragmented knowledge, and the need for inquiry and critical reflection to address systemic barriers to change. Related to this training model are the limitations of professional development that presents packaged knowledge without teachers having the
opportunity to act as critics or producers of that knowledge. What is needed instead is a focus on problem solving and inquiry. To what extent, then, do instructors in a teacher education program experience a tension between the practical demands of preservice training and the need for inquiry and problem solving? Specifically, this study examines what happens when the agenda of school reform produces two contradictory agendas that must be worked through by instructors in an ITE program. On the one hand, instructors in the ITE program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education are expected to help teacher candidates develop the capacities to reflect, participate in learning communities and teach for social change (OISE, 2009); on the other hand instructors are mandated to judge applicants on the basis of limited information for the purpose of allocating resources. How instructors navigate this contradictory agenda is the subject of this analysis.

The first research question of this study addresses the individual interpretation of the policy word reflection; it draws on the related epistemologies of constructivism and phenomenology for its conceptual framework. The question, “how do readers understand reflection?” is a focus on meaning-making by the individual and the search for common meanings. Descriptions of individual values and beliefs, perspectives and experiences are essentially constructivist considerations; the assumption is that understandings of concepts, in this case reflection, represent individual interpretations and understandings that are embedded in a social context. It would be expected, for instance, that classroom teachers might see reflection differently from a board consultant, and that science teachers might see reflection differently from history teachers.

The second research question, “how do readers evaluate evidence of reflection?” addresses an application of policy. Admission to the consecutive Initial Teacher Education
program at this university depends in part on successful completion of a written profile by applicants from which readers evaluate evidence of reflection. This evaluation is done on an individual basis, essentially without consultation with others beyond common training. The fact that policy implementation decisions are made in this fashion brings to mind McLaughlin’s (1987) observation that “at each point in the policy process, a policy is transformed as individuals interpret and respond to it” (p. 174). It is these individual values and beliefs drawn from experience, then, that transform the moment of policy implementation.

The evaluation of evidence of reflection provides another opportunity to examine ITE instructors’ roles in the implementation of a policy that operates within a paradigm that may be inconsistent with their perception of teacher learning. Clune (1990a) provides a helpful framework for looking at this. He distinguishes between schools and teachers as policy mediators, policy critics, and policy constructors. Schools and teachers can be seen as mediating policy outcomes by using discretion about implementation; from this perspective, evaluation would concern the consistency of implementation with policy goals. The role of reflection would be instrumental: how best can we get this task done. Viewing schools and teachers as policy critics focuses on the validity and limits of the assumptions behind policy. Reflection would take the form of critical analysis of the policy. From the perspective of schools as policy constructors, schools “have their own complex, shifting and contradictory agendas” (p. 258) in much the same way that ITE programs do. From this perspective, in which a policy is seen as constructed by the schools and organizations for which they are intended, reflection is “an endless, recursive dialogue, rather than a series of self-sealing implemented commands” (p. 259). This study will examine coherence between how instructors perceive reflection and how they engage in the implementation of admissions policy.
To approach these two issues of inquiry and evaluation, a phenomenological approach will be taken in an attempt to identify collectively generated understandings of reflection that enable inquiry and its evaluation. Indeed, the absence of such collective understandings would make fair and consistent evaluation of applicant submissions more challenging. The research questions, then, deal with the dynamics between individually held perceptions of reflection and the policy need for collective meaning.

Patton (2002) identifies foundational questions of constructivism as: “[H]ow have the people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, ‘truths’, explanations, beliefs, and world-view? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact?” (p. 96). In this sense, individual constructions of reality have consequences for those with whom we interact. In this particular study, the perceptions of reflection on the part of those reading application profiles have consequences for those applicants.

Phenomenology has been described as a philosophy, an inquiry paradigm, an interpretive theory, an analytical perspective, and a research methods framework (Patton, 2002). Describing the individually constructed and lived reality of a phenomenon such as reflection is the phenomenological approach to research design. This approach is not intended to result in a theory, but rather a better understanding of a phenomenon, in this case both the understanding of reflection and in particular the evaluation of reflection. The methodological techniques arising from a phenomenological approach, primarily interviews, assume that the reality of a phenomenon is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual (Creswell, 2007). Normally, phenomenological studies seek to find what is common among the perceptions of a relatively small group of participants in order to unravel the essence of that phenomenon.
Although finding a common definition was not the overall intention of this study, reader perceptions of reflection on experience and what constitutes evidence of it, whether or not it results in a single, essential phenomenon, are a critical piece of the data required to study how profile readers interpret what applicants have written. They provide a framework for examining the fairness of the admissions policy and its application. In the larger sense, the research question addresses the possibility of assuming a common interpretation of policy.

The phenomenological approach suggests the need for a methodological process that can draw out “the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Taking a phenomenological approach to individual profile evaluation means that this study did not seek the one “true” meaning of reflection. Rather, it is the interpretations of this concept that are of importance to this study. Are there common interpretations of reflection by readers? Similarly, are there common terms in which readers describe their lived experience of decision-making with regard to the profiles?

**Significance and Limitations**

This study attempts to articulate some of the individual values and assumptions behind policy and practice in an ITE program in order to address the issues of teacher learning in a complex environment of change. Examining the basic assumptions that we operate on individually and in an organization is difficult in large part because they are just that: basic and assumed. They are tacit, unspoken, and usually unacknowledged guides to perception and behaviour that are stable and resistant to change because that change would require an unsettling of cognitive balance (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Diamond, 2005; Friedman, 2006; Fullan, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Schein, 1972). According to Piaget (1976), unsettling the cognitive balance refers to the dissonance that requires a shift from assimilating our experience into our
already established guides to perception and behaviour, which he calls schema, to having to accommodate our schema to match new experiences. What he terms cognizance is an awareness of the relationship between “thought and reality” (p. 353). It is through this cognizance that we move from uninterpreted perception (basic assumptions) to accommodating new information. Reflection on these basic assumptions is at the heart of our ability to adapt to, or what Piaget calls accommodate to, and meet changing needs. This change process from assimilation to accommodation is difficult and uncomfortable, but it begins with making explicit the assumptions and values from which we operate. Vygotsky’s sociocultural perspective (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003) would add that this change process, or learning, is mediated by social interaction, particularly language. We cannot reflect on that which we cannot articulate. The verbalizing of concepts of reflection and how we evaluate reflection can be a vital step in understanding the basic assumptions that inform the decisions of teacher educators and teachers. That understanding of assumptions is in turn the basis for being able to address equity and social justice issues.

Beyond application at the individual level, Fullan (1993) maintains that this articulation of experience and practice is part of what makes a complex organization such as a school or an ITE program successful:

“. . . the secret to success of living companies, complex adaptive systems, learning communities or whatever term we wish to use, is that they consist of intricate, embedded interaction inside and outside the organization, that converts tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge on an ongoing basis.” [Italics added] (p. 15-16)

By tacit, Fullan refers to skills and beliefs which are below the level of awareness. By explicit, he refers to words and numbers that can be communicated and shared in the form of
hard data. So, it is the need to be able to communicate at a level beyond subjective insights, intuitions and hunches that are often rooted in individual ideals, values or emotions on an ongoing basis (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) that marks a dynamic and effective organization. Such an organization requires that its members be able to articulate those individual insights in such a way that these insights can be discussed openly, argued about, and revisited on a regular basis. Cochran-Smith (2004), Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) and Feiman-Nemser (1983) view such an institutional process of collaborative, deprivatized reflection on the effectiveness of ITE programs as essential for coherence and effectiveness.

In addition to program effectiveness, there are issues surrounding the fairness of admissions to higher education that have arisen out of a number of court cases in the United States (Guinier, 2003). One element that has come out of these Supreme Court decisions is the need to understand “the relationship between data, demographics, and reflective practice to inform the way institutions operationalize the concepts of diversity and democracy” (Guinier, 2003, p. 172). Although this study is not focused on diversity, the implication of these court decisions is that the agendas of social justice, fairness and equity are best met when fairness of admissions to higher education programs is clearly embedded in policy and practice. The call from the Supreme Court is for review of the use of grades as sole admissions criteria, and for “educational leaders to assume responsibility for creatively fashioning admission practices that fit a changing reality” (p. 181).

The current reality is that in a number of ITE programs in Canada, reflection is a stated component of either admissions policy or requirements (e.g., Lakehead University, 2009; Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2009a; Queens University, 2009; University of British Columbia, 2009). Clarification of what reflection and the evaluation of it look like in practice
would likely benefit all faculties who address it on a regular basis through either admissions policies or program expectations.

Beyond this particular instance of policy application, this study adds to our explicit awareness of reflection as a component of professional practice and to our capacity to evaluate it as a dimension of teacher practice.

One of the limitations of this study is a limit of the phenomenological approach in general. It provides a useful framework and a common language to use in increasing our understanding of the concept of reflection and the process of evaluating evidence of reflection, but it is essentially descriptive and does not offer any explanation or suggest revisions to current theories. It answers the questions posed by this research study but leaves to further investigation the effects of this clarification of the role of reflection and evaluation of evidence of reflection on candidate performance in an ITE program. As well, some generalizations can be made about the role of reflection in the lives of teachers and the role of school leaders but support for those generalizations comes from the literature and not from evidence in the schools.
Chapter 3. Method

The admissions process to an Initial Teacher Education Program provides an opportunity to address the two research questions of this study: (1) How do educators understand reflection? and (2) How do educators evaluate evidence of reflection? The admissions process for this particular initial teacher education program requires applicants to provide evidence that they can reflect on and learn from interactions with learners; this admissions process has provided the context within which this study was conducted. This chapter will begin by describing that initial teacher education program, its admissions process, and the role of reflection within that process.

The Context

Initial Teacher Education in Canada

Certification to teach in elementary or secondary schools in Canada requires a non-teaching undergraduate degree (BA or BSc) and a teaching degree (BEd). Programs leading to the teaching degree are often called Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs, and are offered through Faculties of Education at universities. As Crocker and Dibbon (2008) describe, Canadian ITE programs are either concurrent with other undergraduate university studies, or are a one- or two-year post-baccalaureate program. The majority require a combination of academic and non-academic qualifications for admission. The non-academic requirements include work experience, essays or profile statements, references and interviews. Crocker and Dibbon (2008) note that admission requirements are “generally much higher in Canada than they are in many other jurisdictions (e.g., United States, and many European countries)” (p. 30). Given that graduation rates, according to Crocker and Dobbin, are quite high in consecutive programs, admission to a program becomes the most significant gateway to the profession.
Most ITE programs in Canada surveyed by Crocker and Dobbin have mission/goal/value statements, although the extent to which these guide admissions and the program is unclear. Themes in these statements address the development of, for example, competent professionals, respect for diversity, and reflective practice. Crocker and Dobbin conclude that “(a)dmissions officers or committees in such institutions are faced with a complex task, especially in dealing with criteria that are difficult to quantify” (p. 29).

The University of Toronto’s Consecutive Initial Teacher Education Program

The consecutive ITE program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), the University of Toronto prepares teachers to be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers, the self-governing professional body for teachers in Ontario. The program receives more applications for admission than there are available spaces. The Admissions Handbook states the program’s intent to “be vigilant that differences are not treated in ways that produce direct or indirect forms of discrimination” (OISE, 2009, p. 4). Development of fair and equitable admissions policies that meet the program’s stated goal of a “fair and transparent” admission process includes reflection on current practices and ongoing review of that process to ensure that it reflects the criteria, the requirements of the program and the demands of the profession. At the time of this study there were three admission requirements: English language proficiency, academic standing at graduation of at least a B average, and the satisfactory completion of a profile. The intent of the profile is for applicants to provide:

- a written reflection based on personal experiences that they believe have helped them to prepare for a career in teaching. . . what is most important is the ability to clearly articulate insights that have been gained from these experiences in terms
of understanding of teaching and learning, and understanding of teachers’ roles in appreciating diversity and promoting equity and social justice. (OISE, 2009)

It is from a point in this admissions challenge that this study draws the opportunity to understand reflection and its evaluation.

**The Program’s Admissions Process**

Admission policy for University of Toronto’s Initial Teacher Education program calls for evaluation of applicant descriptions of a personal experience of reflection on teaching and learning. The instance of policy implementation examined in this study is embedded in a larger policy framework as outlined in Figure 1.

As indicated in Figure 1, the first steps are completed through the Registrar’s Office, and result in a rejection of all applicants who did not meet minimum academic and language requirements (OISE, 2009b). The resulting pool of applicants was grouped by division applied for (Primary/Junior, Junior/Intermediate, Intermediate/Senior). Batches of profiles from a particular division are assigned to readers who are instructors in the program and external personnel (e.g., elementary and secondary school teachers and principals). After training, either in person or online, each reader evaluated at least two batches of applications. The evaluated section included three parts: Part 1 consisted of response to a question asking for insight into an interaction with a learner, Part 2 asked for implications of social identity, and Part 3 asked for implications of experience with advantage/disadvantage. After a reader evaluates all three parts of the profile together, it is forwarded to the Admissions Committee for final decision making.
The Role of Reflection

After English language proficiency and appropriate academic standing have been established by the Registrar (OISE, 2009), application profiles are read and evaluated by instructors of the program. This study focuses on those instructors in the ITE program who read and evaluated applicant profiles, and on their evaluation of Part 1 of the profile, which asks for reflection about an interaction with a learner. There are two other parts of the experience profile, one addressing the role of social identity as an influence on teaching, and the other asking how an experience of advantage or disadvantage can influence teaching and learning. These two questions are not included in this analysis. It is therefore a particular segment of the admissions process that is the focus of this part of the study, and the means by which evaluation of reflection is studied.

The application question being studied here follows a listing by applicants of three experiences they believe have prepared them for a career in teaching and reads as follows:

From one of these experiences, tell us about a specific interaction you had with a learner or group of learners. What did you learn about teaching and learning from this interaction? (250 word limit)

- describe a specific interaction from one of the experiences,
- describe one or more insights about teaching and learning you learned from that interaction,
describe how the insight(s) came from the interaction.

(OISE/UT, 2009b)

**Design**

The two research questions called for two different interview techniques. The first question, the investigation of how readers of the application profiles understand reflection, was approached with interviews containing open-ended questions. The second question, the investigation of how readers evaluate reflection, was approached with cognitive interviews.

**Understanding of Reflection**

One of the most common methods for a phenomenological inquiry is participant interviews. This method was used in this study in order to understand the meaning of reflection in the professional lives of teachers, and to find common understandings of the concept of reflection. This involved locating within each interview transcript those significant statements and phrases that speak directly to the phenomenon in question, that is, to reflection; *textural description*: describing the “what” of reflection; *structural description*: describing the “how” of reflection; and *essence*: offering a tentative definition of reflection in terms of essential recurring features (Patton, 2002).

**Evaluation of Reflection**

The methodological techniques of phenomenology are used to describe the lived experience of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). In order to describe the experience of evaluating reflection, it is examined at one particular point of policy implementation through cognitive interviews, often called think-alouds. The admission policy for this Initial Teacher Education program calls for evaluation of applicant descriptions of a personal experience of reflection on teaching and learning. Readers are given batches of applicant...
responses and rate each of the three parts as Insufficient Evidence, Low Pass, Pass, or High Pass. To earn a Low Pass on the first part, which is the focus of this study, the applicant must describe a specific interaction and describe an insight gained from that interaction. To earn a Pass, the applicant must connect the insight to the interaction. To earn a High Pass, the applicant must describe how the insight(s) changed/will change their practice. (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2009b) This process was completed by individual readers online with the rubric presented alongside the applicant profile. As the reader indicated that each requirement was fulfilled in the order listed above, a mark was automatically assigned to the profile by the computer program. In other words, if the rater judged that the applicant did not describe a specific interaction, the profile was given a rating of Insufficient Evidence by the computer regardless of whether the reader judged that an insight had been described. In the online rating program, readers were given the opportunity to label their confidence in their rating of any profile by indicating Confident or Not Confident. Ratings indicated as Not Confident by two readers are automatically given to an experienced application reader for additional input; as well, readers can contact an experienced reader for discussion of the individual situation.

Sample

Participants for this study were drawn from the list of all those who had acted as application readers for the 2009 admissions process. This included field personnel, contract lecturers, seconded lecturers, and faculty lecturers. All application readers who had evaluated profiles the previous year were sent an email by the director of admissions for the consecutive teacher education program, with an endorsement and an attachment of my request. Second letters were sent out several weeks later independently, and then a third reminder was sent at the end of the first teaching block. Fifteen of the 59 experienced application readers agreed to and
participated in an interview. All participants were former or current teachers of elementary or secondary schools. The majority (N=11) were currently instructing in the ITE program on temporary secondment from their schools, or on contract. No tenured faculty members were involved in the study. There were 10 female participants and 5 males. All readers had received training before rating profiles.

**Procedure**

Interviews were divided into the two sections outlined above. The first section consisted of open-ended questions exploring the meaning of reflection in each person’s professional life. The questions which framed the interview were:

- What is your perception of reflection as part of your professional life?
- What do you think has influenced your perception and experiences of reflection?

Information was also gathered about academic background. The second section consisted of a cognitive interview, or think-aloud, that walked each person through three application essays. Cognitive interviews, or think-alouds, have been widely used to trace cognitive processes (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000; Branch, 2006). Validity issues have been pointed out, with the concern that retrospectively collected protocols are subject to both forgetting and fabrication (Russo, Johnson & Stephens, 1989). It is unlikely that the participants had previously read these particular essays; all participants had read at least ninety application essays the previous year from the pool of over 5,000 applications. Because of the time elapsed and the number of essays read, there was no expectation that participants would remember their response to these particular profiles if they had seen them; the profiles were, therefore, read as new information.

The same three applications were presented to all participants. All three profiles used for these cognitive interviews were for the Intermediate/Senior division of the ITE program (i.e.,
those applicants who intended to teach at the Intermediate or Senior division, Grades 7 to 12) from the previous year, and all three applications represented people who had been offered admission to the current year’s ITE program. Their identity was not known, either to the researcher or the participants. Part 1 on all three applications, the focus of this study’s cognitive interview, had been given the evaluation High Pass by two markers the previous year, on a marking scale of Insufficient Evidence, Low Pass, Pass, High Pass. That rating would have resulted in an offer of admission to each applicant; however, the final result of whether or not each applicant accepted the offer of admission and attended the program was not known, either by the participant or the researcher.

The rating structure outline above for the online rating of applicant profiles was followed in the cognitive interview; that is, each point of the scoring rubric was addressed in order and a judgement given for each point. Then an overall judgement was given by the rater, along with the reasoning behind it. The issue of rater confidence was addressed in the cognitive interview as well.

**Data Analysis: Interviews**

The first part of the interview was analyzed using phenomenological analysis methods. *Bracketing* is an initial phenomenological process that requires the researcher to set aside one’s beliefs, feelings, and perceptions in order to be more open or faithful to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2007). It was necessary for the interviewer, a former teacher and school administrator, to acknowledge and set aside previous experience in providing opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice. In order to ensure that this happened, a research assistant independently coded the interview transcripts; a high level of agreement on the coding provided evidence of successful bracketing. The next process was *horizontalization*, the
identification of significant phrases or sentences that pertain directly to the lived experience of reflection. Meanings were then formulated from these phrases or sentences. These formulated meanings were then clustered into themes, which were then compared to identify common ideas across participants.

Qualitative data from both sections were analyzed using NVivo 8 software. The first part of the interview, that is, the open-ended question about reflection, was coded to establish individual themes for each participant and then common themes across participants. The research assistant coded this section and the themes produced were compared. One coding produced seven themes around the nature of reflection and the other coding produced five themes; on discussion between the researcher and the assistant, it was discovered that the two sets of coding covered the same ideas; a clarifying separation was made in one of the five themes produced in one coding, and an efficient merging of two related but infrequent themes was made to the coding that had produced seven themes. This process produced six agreed upon themes of responses to the interviews. Interviews were then recoded according to these six themes. In addition, the response by theme data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet along with data on organization attached to (e.g., elementary school, OISE), role within that organization (e.g. teacher, counsellor), academic background, and gender to examine patterns of responses against participant characteristics.

The next step was to produce a textural description of the identified themes around the experience. The final step was a structural description, an attempt to find deeper meaning and commonality in the perceptions of the participants.
Data Analysis: Cognitive Interviews

Comments from the cognitive interviews were transcribed verbatim, and organized according to the evaluation criteria they were addressing: (a) description of the specific interaction, (b) the insight gained from the interaction, and (c) how the insight came from the interaction. Gender, academic background and current role of the participants were recorded, along with the actual rating given to each of the three profiles.

Data in the first part of the interview were analyzed using NVivo8 software to indicate for each participant the presence or absence of a particular theme. These comments were compared to the think-aloud data coded in a similar way, using crosstabulations in SPSS18.0 software.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Understanding Reflection

The interviews were conducted in two parts: exploring reflection and evaluating reflection. The first part, exploring reflection, addressed participants’ perceptions of reflection in their professional life. Coded data from verbatim transcripts of the first section of the interview yielded 296 significant statements about reflection and the meanings formulated from them. Examples of these significant statements and their formulated meanings are summarized in Table 2.

From these statements and their formulated meanings, three clusters of themes emerged: the nature of reflection, the context of reflecting, and the conditions required for reflection. Table 2 summarizes those theme clusters and their associated meanings. They were, however, not mutually exclusive understandings; some statements addressed more than one theme. For instance, one participant’s statement of possible responses to a failed attempt at guided reading in a classroom, “it’s not a question of guided reading doesn’t work, it’s that guided reading the way I approached it didn’t work. . . so how can I go about if differently, but that takes time to step back and think about it” was coded to reflect the concept of doing something differently, and the concept of needing the opportunity to think about it. Participant statements quoted in the following section are identified by participant number only.
Table 2

*Selected Examples of Significant Statements on the Nature of Reflection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Statement</th>
<th>Formulated Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think about what went well, what didn’t go well, what could I do differently – that thought process of looking back on a particular lesson</td>
<td>Reflection is a retrospective examination of our actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is taking our beliefs and examining the processes and procedures in place that are supposed to support those beliefs</td>
<td>Reflection is an examination of the relationship between our beliefs and our actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It does require explicit frameworks that can provide a richness within that reflection rather than back in my early teaching days, driving home, thinking, gee, that was a crappy day.</td>
<td>Reflection requires some structure to provide focus to our thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I taught a lesson and I walk out and say that didn’t work as well as I hoped, if I am unaware of any research on instructional practice or on adolescent brain development, it’s harder for me to reflect – there’s a degree of reflection I can do around that, but the depth of the thinking requires some additional background.</td>
<td>Reflection needs some kind of basis in knowledge beyond the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you talk about something you understand it at a deeper level, and then you begin to see why that process is so necessary</td>
<td>Making our thinking explicit adds a deeper level of understanding of our actions and beliefs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Theme Clusters With Their Associated Formulated Meanings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The nature of reflection: What is it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Retrospective evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sense making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ongoing inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Making thoughts explicit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The context in which reflection occurs: Why and how does it happen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. A vehicle for change or improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Informal and ongoing process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Deliberate and structured process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The conditions that support reflection:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Knowledge base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Disposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Nature of Reflection

Theme 1: Retrospective Evaluation

The first six themes addressed the nature of reflection. The most common theme that came out of the exploration of reflection in professional practice was that of *retrospection*: in Schön’s (1983) terms, reflection on action as opposed to reflection in action. Over two thirds of participants (11 of 15) saw reflection in these terms. This retrospection often took the form of questions such as one ITE instructor’s ongoing questions, “what went well, what didn’t go well,
what could I do differently” (P4). Other instructors gave examples of “checking out student responses to what they did, questioning their goals and lessons, in order to see the power of pulling it together” (P1). They asked questions about “how did students respond to that, to what extent did they get it” (P3). One instructor called it almost like “instant replay in my mind” (P8). It frequently had an evaluative framework. “I would consciously try to deconstruct the experience and already start thinking about what I should have done or what would I do the next time” (P8). The defining characteristic of these comments was that they looked back on lived experience.

**Theme 2: Decision Making**

The next most common description of reflection was that it was a decision-making process, expressed by ten of the fifteen participants. Decision making went beyond retrospection to planning action. At one level, it was described as looking at instructional decisions. One ITE instructor focused on decisions about individual lessons, “I wrote a note on the top of it, if you teach this again, remember this . . . is what worked and this is what didn’t work and change this question, and modify that” (P14), while another focused on planning at a broader level of, for example, curriculum decisions in an ITE program: “when I have only six Science classes with these guys throughout the whole year, it really forces you to reflect on what is important in practice, what are the big ideas, the fundamentals for these folks, because most of them in elementary do not have a Science background, so I am really thinking, broad, broad, broad strokes” (P13).

In the context of a busy elementary school environment, one teacher viewed it as a sort of ongoing decision making throughout the day: “every second, even when I am deciding where to have my students line up I am reflecting on is that a good spot, oh it might not actually, oh wait a
minute, should they be beside that, or should that class be near us – small little things like that” (P9). An ITE instructor looked at an ongoing inquiry and planning, “a circular planning system [in which] they will always have to be reviewing what they’ve done” (P2).

These comments echo McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume, Fairbank-Roch and Owen (2004), seeing reflection consisting of two mechanisms: monitoring and decision making. Decision making allows knowledge to flow to and influence action in an ongoing iterative process. As a former school board consultant said, “Without reflection, as well as observation and evaluation – without those, how do you know what you are doing, and what you should be doing (P7)?

**Theme 3: Critical Thinking**

A third theme that was identified in a third of the participants’ responses as a descriptor of the nature of reflection on practice was *critical thinking*. One interpretation was “comparing our beliefs and our practices” (P5) while another’s interpretation was more metacognitive, “doing some thinking about thinking” (P14). Both views converge in various models of critical thinking. Reflection as critical thinking draws from several theories, outlined by VanWoerkom (2008). *Ideological* critique, most well known as the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory, concerns the process by which people learn to recognize ideologies that are embedded in practice and power relationships. As one former secondary principal said, “if we say that we want to be inclusive and we want to appreciate the rich diversity, can we critically examine and reflect on the processes and procedures to ensure they do those things, so it is taking the beliefs and examining the processes and procedures in place that are supposed to support those beliefs” (P11). Another said that reflection by teachers and instructors in the ITE program “examines the processes we follow and the choices we make to determine who [the processes] might be disadvantaging by what they are doing” (P10).
In the analytic philosophy tradition described by Ennis (1998), reflection means evaluating arguments or propositions and making judgments that guide beliefs and actions. Two participants described reflection as ‘the key component of critical thinking’, an intellectual tool to be used in assessing our own thinking, our beliefs and our practices. They talked about reflection that is based on background knowledge and that requires, among other things, habits of mind. Other participants described a pragmatist view of reflection, (Brookfield, 1995; Dewey, 1910), a process which is careful consideration of beliefs and knowledge in the light of evidence. Two ITE instructors discussed coming to an understanding of the beliefs that underlie our teaching of mathematics by comparing the current North American practice to the Japanese practice of teaching mathematics by deep exploration of students’ thinking that went into the work, “the reflecting on how they came to their conclusions and also the discussions that went on to get to the results” (P13).

The organizational learning tradition refers to critical thinking concepts as the framework through which organizations change (Schön, 1983). The question “why I am doing it this way and not another way?” (P10) was how one participant saw the starting point for looking at “how we do things”. Several mentioned Professional Learning Communities in which teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively with others to improve, for example, large scale testing results.

**Theme 4: Sense Making or Coherence**

Reflection in this sense is the stepping back to see the big picture, to make the parts fit together, to make connections. The notion of sense making is used in this analysis as the interpretation of experience in social contexts (Ng & Tan, 2009), a seeing how what we do fits into the larger context. Coherence is the degree to which these contexts are shared among
individuals and in the broader organization (Grossman, Hammerness, McDonald & Ronfeldt 2008), how well they fit together. Some participants’ perspectives on this was “coming to a better understanding of things so that things don’t seem disjointed from initiative to initiative” (P10), whether it was part of lesson planning, “what are my learning goals, my targets as a day” (P15), or at the broader level “what is that I believe about all kids and what are my goals for the children and how will I differentiate to help them reach those goals” (P15). For another participant, it was seen as a more deliberative process about the art of teaching: “being a reflective practitioner means having the ability to look at the technical side of what we do, you know, the technical core, the instructional part of it” (P11). On the other hand, it was for several participants, “seeing the bigger picture and trying to make sense of it”, and coming to “a better understanding of things.”

**Theme 5: Ongoing Inquiry**

A third of the participants made comments relating reflection to ongoing inquiry. For one, it sounded like awareness in action: an ongoing consideration of their behaviour, their practice, their changes (P5). Another called it a state of “curiosity” (P6). One participant saw it as “self awareness and a willingness to think about themselves” (P8), a way of going about daily actions that is “ongoing, never ending” (P9). Another expressed it as continually asking questions. This view is most closely associated with the literature on habits of mind, and was called that by two participants (P6, P11).

**Theme 6: Making Thoughts Explicit**

The last theme identified by a third of the participants was reflection as making thoughts explicit. One participant talked about the “need to move from unconsciously skilled to consciously skilled” (P15), in order to share knowledge, and that a conscious skill is that which
can be articulated. Another talked about the gap between the idea of reflection and its practice: “the tricky part about reflection is articulating that reflection” (P3). Another stated that “reflecting isn’t just about me talking to myself in my head; it’s also being able to talk to other people about it” (P9). Another description was that “when you talk about something you understand it at a deeper level” (P2). Two ITE instructors mentioned that teacher candidates often get tired of the expectation to reflect, but if you “ask them informally to talk about what they did after they have taught a lesson in their practicum, they are actually articulating their reflection, and that is a valuable learning process” (P4). This understanding of reflection as articulating one’s thinking is consistent with Erault’s (2000) explanation of the role of making tacit knowledge explicit. He names four reasons for doing so: to improve performance, to communicate knowledge, to link actions to desirable outcomes, and to construct artifacts to assist in decision-making or reasoning.

The Context of Reflection

A second cluster of themes relates to the context in which reflection occurs. The comments coded under this category dealt with the why and how of reflection: the reasons for doing it and circumstances under which it might occur. Three main themes emerged from the data.

Theme 7: Vehicle for Change or Improvement of Practice

These comments deal with the why of reflection. For one participant, it was a way to answer questions such as, “Is there a better way to do it, is there a better way of looking at the issue that I’m dealing with” (P10). This question or a version of it was asked by thirteen of the fifteen participants. Reflection in whatever form it takes is a tool for the improvement of practice. One ITE instructor explained that with teacher candidates, “we go over a lesson plan
together and reflect on why it might not be so great, so we are constantly building it in to what we are doing, hoping to get [them] to realize that a lesson plan is not just a product that goes into their binder; it has to be revisited to think about how it worked” (P2). Another pointed out that you are more likely to reflect on what you have done “when things go where [you] have not expected them to go. “It’s not just not going well; it can be when they don’t go as you expected them to go” (P4). It was how many of them described good teaching: “good teachers are always learning, always wanting to improve no matter what level they’re at in their teaching and learning so I think it is part of teaching and learning, and changing for improvement” (P5). Part of that picture of a good teacher included the ability to look at one’s own practice and see oneself as a learner: “if I believe that I was a born teacher my notion would be that I can’t get any better at my own practice, and I think that [reflection] casts teachers in a different light because they become learners and the personal reflection allows them to control their own learning, have input into their total learning. And that’s very powerful” (P2). This reflection and learning were seen by several as an organizational learning mechanism, much as Schön (1983) did: “I think the development of a reflective practice, within a school, speaks well to the ability for the school to improve” (P11). It is this context of organizational change that forms the basis for much of the Professional Learning Community framework of collaborative planning, curriculum study and learning assessment (Servage, 2008).

**Theme 8: Informal, Ongoing Practice**

Comments around this theme might appear to be mutually exclusive to and somewhat contradictory with the theme described after this, which is of **deliberate, structured practice**. Instead, participants were often describing two separate contexts in which meaningful reflection occurs. Several participants described informal reflection, some talked about structured
reflection, and some mentioned both as productive contexts for reflection. As an individual practice, “it tends to be a lot in my head, sometimes I’ll write little notes to myself” (P14), or a “sort of a deconstructing in my mind what I said, and whether or not I deem that as successful on the basis of the outcome of the conversation” (P8), or “it’s just automatic, whatever you are doing, you are thinking about it” (P14). This interpretation sounded much like a consciousness of or attention to what one is doing. Several participants noted that in the busy world of elementary and secondary schools, this habit of ongoing questioning was necessary.

**Theme 9: Deliberate and Structured Process**

In contrast to the idea of an ongoing mindset, the context of an explicit framework was addressed by 13 of the 15 participants. For instance, one comment addressed the process of coming to a conclusion as a valuable component of reflection. “Because when it is deliberate then the notion of coming to a conclusion seems to be something that makes sense. When it’s not deliberate, it can be fleeting and not as valuable” (P10). As one participant explained, originally she had earlier in her career seen reflection as, “basically just driving home from work thinking, I didn’t do that very well, and this kind of an intuitive sense of thinking about how I could do it better next time” but with experience she came to see that “it does require explicit frameworks that can provide a richness . . . rather than back in my early teaching days” (P10). Several participants mentioned specific frameworks for reflection: deBono’s Six Thinking Hats, Japanese lesson study, professional learning communities, staff meeting agendas, and action research.

**The Conditions of Reflection**

This group of comments reflects what participants said about the conditions under which reflection can happen. Five clear themes emerged from the interviews.
Theme 10: Opportunity

The most frequently identified need was that of opportunity, defined either as time or as related to the idea of deliberate and structured reflection. Common remarks were, “you need down time to reflect; you need to get away from the situation” (P1), “you need time to step back” (P4), and “you have to be in the right head space. You have to be not hurried, not preoccupied with other things” (P10). There was consistent recognition that a teacher’s day provided little or no opportunity to do this: “teachers have so much thrown at them” (P1). They cited various versions of barriers such as “the lack of people to talk to, not enough resources – you may be the only grade 3 teacher, and you don’t have anyone to talk it over with, you have all the EQAO [Education Quality and Accountability Office] pressure on your own, and you need to have something ready for tomorrow, you don’t have time” (P1). One participant remarked that as instructors in the ITE program, “we get them to do it, do it, do it, and then next year they’re out there teaching six courses, they’re thrown into the soup, and if they reflect it’s that they don’t have time to reflect” (P2). The clear message from this was that the opportunity most participants saw as necessary for reflection simply does not exist in elementary and secondary school teaching. Not surprisingly, then, an elementary school teacher described the process as “reflecting on my practice at almost every point when I am teaching or when I am dealing with a child” (P9). Even in the daily life in the Faculty of Education, several participants described the opportunities for reflection as infrequent, and “hit and miss” (P15). In contrast to environments which did not support dialogue easily, two participants whose role involved counselling of students recognized that informal, ongoing conversations were possible because the structure of their work environment, with colleagues available and close by for spontaneous focused conversations.
**Theme 11: Knowledge Base**

Participants agreed that one does not reflect in a vacuum; reflection requires a *base* in observations, knowledge, experience, or theory. This basis can come from everyday experiences and observations. One participant called them “triggers to reflection. They might be a meeting you’ve attended, a conversation you’ve had, a problem you’ve experienced, or just maybe even a success that makes you reflect on other things that are happening beyond that single success that you might be able to move from this success to another” (P10). Several participants identified such triggers as an article in a journal, course instruction or concepts, collaboration with other teachers, a meeting they had attended, or research on instructional practice. Reflection based on knowledge can also mean looking at data, “moving from being intuitive to using data, or proxy indicators” (P11). Action research was used as an example of a framework that provides for more structured reflection on experiences and observations.

**Theme 12: Disposition**

In exploring the conditions under which people reflect, many participants mentioned an element of personal *disposition*. One sense of this was that it can be a personality variable: “They do it by nature – they talk about it in the lunchroom, or they get together for beers at the end of the week or what have you, and they share, and they do it naturally” (P2); some saw it as being “open minded” (P3). Other comments reflected a conscious focus, the presence of a “habit of mind, or “an approach to one’s career” (P6); “I read an article and ask, how does this apply to me and my own practice, how does it apply to my students” (P14). Some participants expressed the recognition that reflection could be the product of both personal variables and habits that may make some people more likely to be reflective. “It’s like other Multiple Intelligences, for some it’s a strength, some not so much but they still need to see the value of it” and “to what extent
this is kind of a personality variable or an approach to one’s career, I think there is something to
be said for that” (P6). Both recognize the interaction between the two perspectives of personality
variable and habit of mind. The general message of these comments was that although there
might be individual differences in comfort with reflection, it is possible to develop “a disposition
that is more sophisticated, more targeted” (P11). One has to “have a disposition of mind that says
you look at your practice and you think about how you can improve” (P11). Most saw this
disposition or habit of mind as a necessary component of teaching. There was recognition that
this can be nurtured, but that a culture supporting reflection and the opportunity to do it were just
as important.

**Theme 13: Culture**

An institutional *culture* that supports reflection as a viable part of professional life was
identified by over half of the participants as a necessary condition. Given that reflection “isn’t
built in and partly it is hard to slow down and say no to demands” (P1), it happens, in some
cases, that “teachers feel that they need to be given permission” (P15). One participant reported a
reluctance among teachers to engage in reflective relationships with colleagues: “we had the
structure to do it, to view each other’s lessons and then talk about it, but that broke down – it
doesn’t happen as much as it should. I don’t think teachers see it as something that they might
enjoy – that they might enjoy getting that feedback or getting into that conversation about what
they’re doing” (P2). However, another participant made a point of distinguishing colleagues at
her own school as those with whom she felt most comfortable reflecting because of their
common experience. So a culture of safety that enables reflection is needed to overcome
personal discomfort or reluctance.
So what were participants saying about a culture that would overcome these obstacles? Some responses indicated informal support such as schools which had “cultures that were very positive and safe . . . that allowed you to take chances, after you had thought through an issue or a problem or something that had occurred in the past, how might you do it differently” (P8). Another observed that “there were positive relationships and a high degree of trust” (P11) that encouraged reflection. Creating and maintaining a safe environment that encourages reflection and collective inquiry is considered in much of the literature on educational leadership as a key function of the principal (Belchetz & Leithwood, 2005; Day & Harris, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Murphy & Datnow 2003). Others described a culture that developed from the use of a deliberate, structured framework for reflection, a cognitive framework for thinking. Those mentioned by participants were deBono’s Six Thinking Hats, Japanese lesson study, professional learning communities, staff meeting agendas, and action research. Others described the use of an organizational framework, most commonly the Professional Learning Community model.

In the context of these cognitive frameworks, organizational frameworks and in the development of a culture that is more generally supportive of risk and inquiry, several participants mentioned the importance of a leader creating a school culture of safety and critical inquiry. Almost as often, the lack of such a culture was addressed as a deterrent to reflective practice (P1, P2, P11, P15). No participants articulated a perceived leadership role in creating such an environment in any context other than an elementary or secondary school.

Table 4 summarizes the distribution of comments made by participants.
Table 4

*Distribution of Responses Exploring the Nature of Reflection, Context of Reflection, and Conditions for Reflection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Reflection</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of participants who addressed this theme</th>
<th>Number of references to this theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Reflection</td>
<td>1. Retrospection, re-evaluation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Decision-making</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Critical thinking</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Sense making/coherence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Ongoing inquiry</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Making thought explicit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of Reflection</td>
<td>7. Vehicle for change or improvement</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Informal and ongoing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Deliberate and structured

Conditions

10. Opportunity

Opportunity

for Reflection

11. Knowledge

Knowledge

Base

12. Disposition

Disposition

13. Culture

Culture

Relationships among Themes

It is clear from Table 4 that participants had multiple views of reflection. The fifteen participants expressed 296 different statements about the nature of reflection, the context in which it occurs and the conditions under which it occurs. Views of reflection were clearly not exclusive: They may have described reflection as coherence as well as making thoughts explicit, or they may have described reflection as retrospection and decision making at the same time. Some, for instance, said that at times reflection is informal and ongoing, and at other times it is deliberate and structured; sometimes it is an individual thinking process and at other times it is collaborative. Clearly the themes were intertwined in most cases. As well, the implications of their description of the nature of reflection for its context or the conditions were fairly constant across groups. Using a cross-tabulation of participants who had made comments on each theme, it was clear that for all views of the nature of reflection, a similar proportion of participants saw it as a vehicle for change and as a deliberate activity. As well, for all views of the nature of reflection, a similar proportion of participants saw it as requiring opportunity and some degree of disposition to engage in reflective practice.
Some correlations existed between themes; these were found by crosstabulating the themes using a statistical analysis program. Seeing reflection as ongoing inquiry was correlated with seeing it as decision making, critical thinking, and having a culture that supports reflection. Seeing reflection as sense making was correlated with having deliberate and structured opportunities and a culture that supports reflection. It would appear that the perspective of ongoing inquiry focuses on good decision making; the perspective of sense making implied a more deliberately structured opportunity. Both require a culture that supports the activity.

Is there a consistent picture that comes out of these themes? In phenomenological terms, is there an essence to reflection that is captured by these interviews? Themes about the nature of reflection (retrospective evaluation, decision making, critical thinking, sense making/coherence, ongoing inquiry and making thoughts explicit) all contain elements of intention or consciousness and they all contain a relationship with experience or knowledge. One could term this group’s lived experience with reflection as a conscious attention to and engagement with experience as a vehicle for change. This is extremely close to what Ward and Cotter (2004) found using grounded theory techniques; their conclusion was that reflection had three components: focus, inquiry and change. As well, the picture reflected by participants overlaps with the themes found in the literature review of this study: inquiry, reframing and perspective.

The Evaluation of Reflection

The second part of the interview examined a specific instance of reflection and its evaluation. Cognitive interviews, or think-alouds, were conducted with the fifteen participants. They each examined and evaluated three novel application profiles to a consecutive (post baccalaureate) Initial Teacher Education program, all of which were actual profiles from the year before. The section of the application included in this analysis asked applicants to:
1. Describe three experiences that you believe prepared you for a career in teaching. Specify what you did in each experience.

2. From one of these experiences, tell us about a specific interaction you had with a learner or group of learners. What did you learn about teaching and learning from this interaction?

The participants did not know the evaluations these application essays had received, but in fact they had all been rated by two readers as High Pass in the previous year’s profile evaluations. Results of the rating by the participants are summarized in Table 5. Possible ratings were Insufficient Evidence (IE), Low Pass (LP), Pass (P) and High Pass (HP).

Participants were all experienced readers who were aware of, and reminded of in the interview, the online marking process and marking scheme for the application essays. In evaluating each essay, the reader in the actual online process would check off boxes to indicate evidence of the following components, which reflected the question posed to the applicants in the admissions process:

- Describes a specific interaction
- Describes one or more insights about teaching and learning
- Describes how the insights(s) came from the interaction
- Describes how the insight(s) changed or will change their practice

The instructions on the profile made it clear to applicants that evaluators would expect a response corresponding to each of these points. Training of the readers prior to the actual evaluation of the applications that had occurred nine months before this study also included clarification of these four expectations.
During the interview, participants were guided through these same steps and responded to each of the three components. They were aware that the four rating levels (IE, LP, P, HP) were automatically assigned by the computer system based on the checklist. To earn HP, all boxes must be checked by the evaluator. For a P rating, the first three had to be checked. For an LP, the first two had to be checked. That meant that a specific description of an interaction and of an insight arising from that interaction constituted the minimum threshold for having the application considered for admission.

Table 5 summarizes how the participants evaluated the three profiles they read in the interview. All participants rated the second profile as the weakest one. Five participants saw the third profile as the strongest, and ten found the first profile as the strongest; however, the average rating of the first and third profiles were very close (3.4 and 3.2). This suggests some consistency among participants despite the differences in actual ratings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Profile</th>
<th>Number of Participants Rating Profile as IE</th>
<th>Number of Participants Rating Profile as LP</th>
<th>Number of Participants Rating Profile as P</th>
<th>Number of Participants Rating Profile as HP</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4**</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *1 participant unsure between LP and P, counted as LP (reader’s first choice); **1 participant unsure between P and HP, counted as P (reader’s first choice).
What Accounted for Differences?

The inconsistencies found in these evaluations of profiles centred around four issues that explain almost all of the variation in rating the profiles: defining specificity of interaction, deferral to judgement or the rubric, connection with individual knowledge and experience, and quality of insight.

Defining Specificity. When participants differed on their ratings, it was frequently concerning their interpretation of the specificity of the interaction. If the interaction was not considered specific enough and was therefore not checked by a rater, the computer automatically awarded the profile an IE. In other words, even if the insights were considered reasonable but not based on a specific interaction, the resulting evaluation was still an IE. For example, one profile given to the participants said, “I worked directly with a special needs child” and based their insight on that statement as an interaction. Defining the specificity of an interaction was a matter of personal interpretation. For this profile, one participant said “it was done very specifically” (P2) and another said “I don’t find a lot of detail as to what that specific interaction was” (P9). For one participant, then, this passed the criterion of “describe a specific interaction” and for another, it did not.

Deferral to judgement or the rubric. In rating both the first and second profiles, participants generally agreed that the insight was acceptable but there was some disagreement about the specificity of the interaction. Some participants deferred to the rubric in this case, and some to their judgements. Two of the participants who saw the interaction as not specific enough deferred to the rubric and gave an IE to the profile, and three deferred to their judgement and moved the rating from HP to P or from a P to an LP. Those deferring to their judgement in these cases frequently mentioned that by not checking the “describes a specific interaction” box on the
rubric, they were automatically refusing admission to this applicant. Several mentioned this as a heavy burden no matter which way they decided: either removing them from further consideration if they followed the rubric, or taking away from the transparency of the rubric by deferring to their judgement. They most frequently said they would return to that particular application or mark their rating as “Not Confident” to automatically ensure that someone else looked at the profile as well.

*Connection with individual knowledge and experience.* In rating the third profile, the interaction described in the profile was seen consistently as being specific, so specificity was not an issue in the different ratings. However, three of the four participants who gave a LP rating to the profile drew from their individual knowledge and experience, in this case with competitive school teams. The insight that “skills have to be demonstrated and not just explained” by the coach was seen as such a superficial observation by participants who had been involved in a coached sport that it did not ring true to the them, and they deferred to their judgement for a rating.

*Quality of insight.* In the third profile, some participants did not make a connection to their knowledge of sports coaching but still saw the insight as weak. They too deferred to their judgement, compensating by moving their rating from HP to P. In the second profile an applicant described working directly with a special needs child. Several insights were described by the applicant, including the importance of recognizing and responding to non-verbal cues, the importance of time and patience, the need for a respectful relationship, the need for a range of teaching techniques, the awareness of the classroom as a diverse setting and the need for a teacher to be adaptable. Participants who responded to this list as a “not coming from an authentic place” or “laps[ing] into an essay that could be relevant to any learner”, or “the kitchen
sink approach” did not check off the last box, and therefore gave the profile a P, while those who saw the insights as consistent with the interaction gave the profile an HP.

**What Didn’t Account for Differences?**

To address the question of whether or not participants’ views of reflection made a difference to their rating of profiles, a comparison was made between how reflection had been defined by the participant and what rating a profile was given by that participant. Did those who saw reflection as, for example, retrospection rate profiles differently from those who saw reflection as critical thinking? When profile ratings were compared among participants who had defined reflection according to each of the identified themes, the resulting picture was one of consistency across definitions of reflection. Table 6, using the ratings of all three profiles, illustrates that the rating most frequently given is consistent across all instances of defining reflection and similar to the most frequently given rating by individuals. For instance, the most frequently assigned rating across all profiles and all definitions of reflection was High Pass. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these comparisons are by comments made concerning the nature of reflection, and most participants made comments in more than one area.

**Table 6**

**Rating Distribution of Nature of Reflection across Profile Ratings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Reflection</th>
<th>IE</th>
<th>LP</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>HP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrospection</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense Making</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No differences in ratings were discernible from differences in academic background, in part because for many of the participants, this academic background was somewhat eclectic: combinations of Math and Guidance, Drama and Psychology, History and Special Education, or Sociology and Library/Information Service were more common than single focus backgrounds. Crosstabulation of roles in the ITE program or outside of it with ratings of the profiles were not a source of difference in ratings. No differences were found between male and female raters.

Average rating was calculated for each reader, coding Insufficient Evidence as 1, Low Pass as 2, Pass as 3, and High Pass as 4. Average rating ranged from a low of 1.67 to a high of 4.0. There was no correlation between average rating and understandings of reflection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>10.0%</th>
<th>10.0%</th>
<th>10.0%</th>
<th>70.0%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making Thoughts Explicit</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual ratings (N = 45)</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5. Discussion

Implications for Teacher Learning

Results of this study indicate consensus among the participants about the importance of reflection in professional learning and growth. This is consistent with the goals of the ITE program (OISE, 2008), the Standards of Practice for the teachers of Ontario (Ontario College of Teachers, 2008), and numerous Ontario Ministry of Education documents such as Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993), The Road Ahead: Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Report (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008a), Partnering for Success: A Resource Handbook for New Teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b), the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009c) and the Ontario Leadership Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). In the sense of supporting a policy that has been established outside of their organization, participants were policy mediators (Clune, 1990a) who supported the policy and sought to implement it in ways they considered consistent with their views.

The Nature of Reflection

Although all participants saw reflection as an important aspect of their professional life, their perceptions of what reflection looks like in practice were different from individual to individual, ranging from minute-to-minute decision making in the classroom to critical analysis of beliefs and assumptions that underlie what schools do. All of these individual variations are well represented in the scholarly literature on education cited earlier in this document. As well, these variations are all part of Cochran-Smith’s (2004) multifaceted definition of teaching for social justice, which includes learning to ask good questions, collaborating with other professionals, interpreting multiple data sources, developing usable knowledge, developing
critical habits of mind, and sorting out multiple perspectives. The question remains, however, of what the implications are for policy implementation of this wide range of legitimate views on reflection. If teachers are expected to engage in reflective practice, and ITE instructors are expected to teach the skills related to reflective practice, is it important that they arrive at a common view of what it looks like? That would appear from one perspective to be unnecessary, given that they all formed part of the mosaic of Cochran-Smith’s conception of learning to teach for social justice, cited above. And although the majority of participants in this study were instructors in an ITE program, all participants had been, or were at the time of this study, teachers in elementary or secondary schools. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that these differences in interpretation of policy concepts are legitimately and autonomously developed conceptualizations of teaching and learning to teach. If we regard this as an issue of school reform or teaching for social justice, one tension that arises is how an ITE program balances this autonomous inquiry with learning to articulate our values in a collegial setting and working through the conflict-ridden process of arriving at common meanings in order that they may be communicated to students and applicants in the interests of transparency. Coming to understandings about just where agreement is necessary, how it will be arrived at, how it will be reviewed, and how it will be communicated to applicants are instrumental in the work of Mezirow (2003) and Brookfield (1995).

In Little’s framework, this messy dialogue is needed to increase teachers’ ability to redesign teaching and learning, to enlarge their sense of the possible. To create this dialogue requires teacher learning that focuses on problem solving and not training. It requires teachers as active constructors of knowledge and not passive consumers. Participants recognized that reflection was an engagement with complexity, with no linear, straightforward solutions to
issues. Expanding on Little’s (1993) use of the term *problem solving* to provide a distinction from the training model of teacher learning, participants identified more specific aspects of a problem solving model. The descriptions of the nature of reflection provided by participants of this study point to the capacities associated with such a model: decision making, critical thinking, articulation of thinking, sense making, ongoing inquiry and retrospective evaluation. These perceptions of the nature of reflection as it applies to teacher candidates are consistent with the problem solving approach advocated by Little (1003) for teachers’ growth.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2000) reported on the professionally isolated nature of teaching and its limited opportunity for reflection. The result is a system with little shared, codified knowledge and a high level of personal, tacit knowledge. If the level of explicit knowledge and opportunities for collaboration and reflection are limited, and the complexity of ITE programs or schools makes those opportunities difficult, then one of the challenges will be developing the capacity to make knowledge explicit and shared.

*The Context of Reflection*

Participants saw reflection as a vehicle for change that is embedded in both informal and formal processes. Some saw it as an ongoing examination of one’s actions, some saw it as most productive when structured and purposeful, and others saw both contexts as valuable. In any case, this awareness of the multiple contexts of reflection illustrates what Little identifies as a dilemma of teacher learning: a one-size-fits-all approach that expects teachers to arrive at a unified approach to the issues of school reform is not compatible with either Little’s perception of the magnitude and complexity of the task of school reform or the participants’ view of reflection as an autonomous but not necessarily solitary effort. Even within professional learning communities intended to support teacher learning, “multiple interpretations [of professionalism]
are available and certainly these interpretations will undergo permutations and create different standards of professionalism, given different political, economic, and social climes” (Servage, 2009, p. 153). These multiple interpretations were also evident when participants addressed the contexts in which individuals can best learn.

**Conditions Supporting Reflection**

Themes that emerged from participants’ comments in this study included opportunity, knowledge base, disposition and culture. These themes reflect the literature on teacher learning. First, there was general agreement among participants that teachers, especially new teachers, require some opportunity to reflect. Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kiesmeier, and Benson (2006) examined experiential learning experiences and suggested that “without strong opportunities for reflection on the experience, learners will tend to assimilate the experience into their existing models of meaning” (p. 42). So the first requirement is this deliberate opportunity for reflection. Yero (2002) points out that looking at teacher thinking will not provide a set of clear, universal directions. The task is to provide teachers with “opportunities and incentives to reflect on and evaluate their own beliefs, values, and the metaphors they use to characterize their work” (p. 3). This examination of beliefs implies a different opportunity for someone who is interested in Japanese lesson study than it would for someone who is able to have ongoing online discussion with colleagues. For an ITE instructor or an administrator in a school wanting to support reflective teacher practice, supporting this variety would look different from what is most commonly implemented as a one-size-fits-all professional learning community; it may look more like multiple communities and a variety of activities and approaches. However, participants in the study did not describe any opportunity within the organization that supported their own reflection other than the policy expectation. They mentioned either informal conversations in
hallways or lunchrooms, or focused learning and reflection activities that they were involved in as an offshoot of their work in the program rather than an expectation of them. Intentionally or not, this appears to be a more loosely structured Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998), and in some cases a Networked Learning Community, than the more common and structured PLC. What comes to mind is Little’s assessment of the need for the political will to embed such activities in the structure of the school or program day. This political will has to take into account the cost of providing such a structure and how it would relate to the larger organization. This appears to be an organizational decision at both the school level and the ITE program level.

A program response does not have to be the construction of a professional learning community such as the commonly used model of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) as defined by Dufour and Eaker (1998). According to Dufour (2003), the PLC consists of a clear sense of consensus on mission, collaborative teams, clarity of outcomes, common assessments, standard definitions of proficiency, analysis of results and development of improvement strategies. This picture sounds closer to an athletic team pursuit than to the messy reality that this study uncovered. This is not the language spoken by the participants. In this study, participants described a variety of approaches that they themselves used for their own professional growth, and ITE instructors gave numerous examples of how they encouraged it in their students in the program. They recognized Feiman-Nemser’s (2003) point that unless future teachers learn to modify their pre-existing images of teachers and teaching, they are likely to teach the way they were taught. The goal is a more informed, larger perspective, not particular instructional outcomes, and that may require a common understanding of reflection and how to create the conditions for encouraging reflection. The issue for these participants would not seem to be the
need for a single dialogue, but rather a framework that takes into account those complex, shifting and often contradictory agendas that Clune (1990b) and Labaree (2004) refer to.

The ITE instructors’ descriptions of their opportunities for reflection more closely resembled the model of Communities of Practice as framed by Wenger and Snyder (2000). This includes a loosely structured, focused and time-bound approach that created community through emphasis on a particular issue of interest to the participants. These Communities of Practice described by the participants did not appear to be embedded in any intentional institutional framework. Considering Little’s concerns about teacher learning opportunities that need to go beyond the training model, the question arises as to whether such a framework of teacher learning is more or less consistent with the concept of teacher as change agent. Although it serves as a more eclectic approach to the more widely used professional learning community model it is not very amenable to supervision and may therefore collide with policies on teacher evaluation. That collision may in turn require new learning for teacher candidates, teachers and the administrators who evaluate them.

The second requirement for reflection identified by participants was the development of a knowledge base. This was described in contrast to basing reflection on emotional responses or intuition. Knowledge sharing was seen as being able to articulate one’s thinking and having the opportunity to do so. Participants saw sense making, critical thinking, decision making and articulation of beliefs as ongoing efforts but these efforts were not working from the same knowledge base nor were they faculty wide. Addressing the skills and habits of reflection as a teacher practice and the evaluation of applicant evidence of reflection were the responsibility of the ITE instructors. Although participants made no references to faculty input from other departments in the organization as a source of a knowledge for their decisions, the articulation of
the capacities involved in reflective practice outlined by the participants informs a potential framework for building decision making capacity. In this sense, there also appears to be a missed opportunity for sharing an extensive base of research knowledge. This lack of shared knowledge base is a barrier to reflection in the public schools, and may be so in the ITE program. Partly because of the lack of opportunity to develop a shared knowledge base, Thomson (2006) found that elementary and secondary school principals felt limited in their comfort, ability, time and common language to conduct reflective conversations with teachers on observed lessons. One result was sometimes a lack of common understanding between the teacher and the principal of the intents and meanings behind what was observed in the classroom. So the dilemma becomes a balance between the need for creating knowledge that is meaningful to oneself and the need for common language to share that knowledge. From Little’s perspective, this becomes an issue of using professional development models that support change by encouraging problem solving based on shared knowledge.

It follows that it is an institutional and educational leadership role to support the variety of ways in which knowledge can be acquired and shared as a basis for reflection. Are some available models more helpful in supporting this knowledge base than others? One possible model is mentoring, a practice encouraged in the new teacher induction program in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b) and a program designed for new principals (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). However, mentoring by existing teachers as a technique to help make that change is an “unnatural activity for teachers” (Feiman-Nemser, 2002, p. 28) because the ability of practicing teachers to help new teachers challenge pre-existing biases is limited by their own inability to explain the principles behind their practice, or talk about teaching in analytic, non-judgemental ways. The assumption behind mentoring is that the mentor can
articulate the skills that they themselves use and can put words to the actions they see in a mentee. So we are back to the need for a common language of some kind to frame our conversations, and that requires the political will to create the opportunities for the development of such skills.

A third requirement for reflection described by participants is *disposition*. Reflection and reflective dialogue require a capacity for or habit of reflection on our values and practices as teachers (Brookfield, 1995; Haberman & Post, 1998; Scales et al., 2006). McLaughlin (1987) adds willingness to this capacity. It becomes an important component of teacher learning, then, to develop the habit of reflection. If it is to be a habit in an ITE setting and in a school setting, it cannot be an activity that happens once a month; it is an ongoing commitment to conscious attention to and engagement in our experiences. Participants described ongoing individual inquiry and retrospection, as well as ways in which they encouraged retrospection in teacher candidates. But most teachers have been successful students, and much of their understanding of and comfort with the school system is based on eighteen or more years of being in that system that they have successfully navigated. The challenge in ITE programs, and then in schools, is to develop the habit of reflecting on assumptions that *not* questioning has likely served teachers well as students themselves. Posing such questions as what is the purpose of assigning a mark to student work is new territory for teacher candidates. The function of an ITE program and a school becomes not only the expectation of this unaccustomed inquiry, but also creating the culture in which one can function with the status quo, i.e., assigning marks to student work, and still questioning the assumptions behind those practices. Given such existing frames, or cognitive schemas that teacher candidates arrive with, encouraging this questioning stance and a disposition to reflect will likely require considerable time the midst of a nine month ITE
program. The tension between the time required to develop dispositions to reflect and the press of other skills needed by teacher candidates creates a dilemma similar to what Little (1993) saw in schools as the fast-paced implementation of policies. On the one hand, ITE programs are an important source of modeling for reflective practice and of instruction in its attendant skills; on the other hand, the instructors felt the same time press to develop those skills in teacher candidates within the short span of the program.

The fourth theme identified by participants addressed the conditions that support reflection. Little’s (2003) uses the notion of affordance as resource within an environment that provides opportunity for particular kinds of behaviour and that interacts with a person’s capability to perceive it. In a physical sense, this might mean that a small flat surface mounted on four legs might be seen as suitable for sitting on if one has had life experience with chairs. In the context of a culture, the extent to which school structures and routines are perceived to provide the opportunity and safety to engage in inquiry and reflection are affordances for reflection. In an Ontario school, one affordance for inquiry and reflection is the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2009a, 2009b) policy on teacher performance appraisal. If a principal and teacher take advantage of this affordance, then the performance appraisal can include, for instance, an ongoing project of inquiry into practice. The principal’s modeling and attention to such inquiry provides further cultural affordance for reflection. As one participant of this study, a former secondary school principal, said: “we apply a policy in the school the way it’s written and we find it doesn’t bring about the outcome, or it isn’t true to the intent of the policy, we have to have the ability to rethink that, and we’d only do that through critical reflection.” In practice, then, the principal is responsible for modeling at the school level what Hare (1993) calls the “critical examination of practice, texts, and curriculum” (p. 18).
On the other hand, if, as one participant pointed out, experiential learning is not seen as legitimate, then it is seen as wasting time to play with new technologies in order to learn a new statistical program that would support professional inquiry. Another participant commented on teacher candidates discovering that if a school’s expectation is that curriculum must be covered, then inquiry and critical thinking are not seen as legitimate. The idea of permission to experiment and take risks appears to be a cultural affordance for reflection. Participants’ comments about their own experiences illustrated a range of affordances within the ITE program from none to informal opportunity to formal programs that enabled reflection and inquiry. Several participants described their onsite involvement in Japanese lesson study or participation in an online community of practice addressing critical thinking, although leadership at the Faculty of Education level was not mentioned by participants.

**Evaluation of Reflection**

*Evaluation of Evidence of Reflection in ITE Program Applicant Profiles*

The question of how individuals evaluate these applicant profiles is the second focus of this study. How can such a constructivist understanding of reflection as described in the previous section exist alongside the process needed to produce a single evaluation of reflection in applicant profiles?

There were clear differences among raters in how they responded to profiles. One might argue that it is safer and fairer to use academic grades as the sole basis for admission decisions, but there are two issues to consider in this. First, this lack of consensus in ratings of reflection may be just more visible than lack of consensus about assigning marks in different programs from different universities in different jurisdictions. The use of these profiles as a proxy measure for the capacity to reflect on experience is not an undisputed one (Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008), but
in the wake of U.S. Supreme Court challenges to admissions requirements in American colleges, Guinier (2003) reports the court’s recommendation that colleges gather as much information about an applicant as possible to create a more equitable process than relying solely on grades. Fairness demands a relationship between admissions criteria and program goals, but this relationship is often contested. Is there evidence that being reflective, for instance, makes one a better teacher? The second issue becomes one of developing fair and transparent means of gathering this additional information. ITE programs may not be able to process profiles in the same way as academic information; it may not be possible to expect consensus on the rating of an application profile. If not, then how can the collective capacity for fair and transparent evaluation of reflection be achieved?

This study’s findings indicate that the differences in ratings were due not to application raters’ differences in understandings of reflection, but rather differences in their interpretation of what applicants wrote, in their understanding of their responsibility in the face of ambiguous responses, and in their previous knowledge and experience on which they drew. The participants in this study described the dilemma of the balance between using their own professional judgement and following the rubric without exception in the interest of fairness. They wrestled with whether or not it was fairer to follow the rubric and, for instance, immediately fail an applicant on lack of specificity of the incident described in their submission (a judgement that produced an automatic failure) or to give that applicant the benefit of the doubt and somehow compensate elsewhere in the rubric for a lack of specificity.

The comments by the participants reflected both support and constraint from the policy as presented in the rubric. It is informative to return to Clune’s (1990a) perspectives on relationships to policy. While some saw the applicant’s insight as poor and deferred to their
judgement by lowering the rating, others came to the same conclusion but deferred to the rubric in making their decision. In interpreting the requirement of specificity in the applicant profile, and in connecting to their personal knowledge, participants were acting as both policy mediators and policy critics according to Clune’s definitions. If they accepted the scoring rubric as a choice in the face of ambiguity, they did so in the belief that it would be the more fair and transparent way to respond. In challenging the rubric by using their judgement to override it, or in challenging the quality of the insight, participants were acting as policy critics. In some way the rubric did not match their conception of fair evaluation. Although this evaluation activity did not afford any opportunity for the ongoing dialogue that would produce the engagement level Clune called policy construction, several participants had evaluated applicant profiles at a time when the activity was a collaborative event. They noted that an advantage of the opportunity for dialogue that characterized that model was that decisions were based on articulated and shared knowledge. They also noted that fairness is likely served as well or better through the individual online model currently used because the fatigue or burnout that affects their judgement can be avoided by self-pacing of the online evaluation process. However, implicit in their concern about the role of their judgements was the need for dialogue about the process and some commonly understood criteria for quality that would underpin the fairness they felt was important. They expressed a desire to be fair, and an awareness of the impact of their decisions. They expressed some discomfort over the criteria they used for their decisions in the absence of a foundation of research and knowledge to inform them.

Participants identified that the discrepancy between admissions expectations and applicants’ submissions may be in part language based and may require further research to compare applicants’ understandings of those expectations relative to the understanding by profile
readers in order for the language of the admissions expectations to be more broadly understood. The noting of the issue of applicants’ understanding of the question implies that the fairness of the admissions decisions may also be enhanced by scaffolding applicant answering capacity through mediating, primarily in the form of task clarification. This issue is similar to the challenges faced by elementary and secondary teachers when they try to assess evidence of a student’s ability to apply or evaluate information, especially when English may not be her or his first language. The comments by participants made it clear that a carefully developed rubric that was clarified in the application information and scaffolded with very clear instructions would be appropriate for the applicants and supportive of the evaluators. The choice to indicate uncertainty in their online evaluation and the opportunity for personal dialogue with an experienced colleague were also mentioned as valuable. This suggests the value of such an affordance in schools where much of teachers’ assessment of student learning confronts the same level of ambiguity and the same issue of language proficiency.

The striving for reliability, and therefore fairness, in the evaluation of ITE program application essays may come not from seeking total agreement among profile evaluators, but rather by accepting lack of agreement as a reflection of that diversity, and developing alternative approaches to arriving at a rating. Revisiting instructions for applicants as well as raters to ensure as much clarity as possible is an ongoing process by this particular ITE program; this is essentially establishing a shared knowledge base for both applicants and profile evaluators. There is not likely to be a definitive set of instructions that would be understood in a common way by all applicants, in the same way that policies are understood differently by different teachers. However, conducting research within the ITE program on the clarity of instructions recognizes that the application process is itself a dialogue; engaging more fully in that dialogue
could potentially be very informative. The participants’ comments as a whole reflected their recognition of the complexity of the task. Implicit in their comments is the recognition of the time and energy required for collaborative decision making.

Four participants who had extensive experience in rating applicant submissions expressed their belief that it didn’t matter what process was used; all processes yielded the same results: a small percentage of teacher candidates performed at an excellent level in both the course work and the practicum, a small percentage performed very poorly in both, and the largest percentage performed at a level somewhere in between. The issue to them was not arriving at a perfect tool for making admissions decisions, but that the process be revisited, clarified, and re-examined in order to make it as fair as possible. Some cited a history of poor answers to certain questions as starting points for reflection. This was consistent with their understanding of the role of reflection in their own practice: “How might I do this better next time?”

**Evaluation of Teacher Reflection**

Although it is a focus of this study, the evaluation of reflection is not confined to the assessment of application profiles for an ITE program. Does this struggle for fairness in admissions policy to an ITE program and the implementation of such a policy inform the evaluation of reflection of teachers by principals in the provincially mandated, at least in Ontario, performance appraisal of teachers? Reflection on practice forms a significant expectation in the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession in Ontario (Ontario College of Teachers, 2008). Reflection, inquiry, self-directed learning and collaboration are mentioned multiple times in the five standards. These standards form the basis for the manual outlining the performance appraisal for experienced teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, p. 22) and the manual for the performance appraisal for new teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b, p. 28),
both of which include the expectation of “continuous learning and reflection, using a variety of sources and resources.” For new teachers, there is a three-level rubric for evaluating the level of performance by teachers: Satisfactory, Development Needed, and Unsatisfactory, and for experienced teachers the rubric has two levels: Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory. Clearly this system of appraisal considers reflection as an important construct that one can evaluate. However, the same issues arise in evaluating reflection by current teachers as in the admissions process to the ITE program.

Two of the issues that arose in the evaluation of admission profiles concerned interpretation and use of judgement. These are likely to be factors in the evaluation of teacher reflection as well. For instance, one source of difference in the evaluation of the profiles was judgement about the quality of the insight described by the applicant. Some evaluators amended their rating when they perceived the insight as superficial. Again, the notion of professional judgement becomes part of the decision making. Participants expressed discomfort with the lack of established criteria for making these judgements, primarily in the interest of fairness and equity. They acknowledged the need for using personal judgement, but those who had experienced a more collaborative model of evaluating applications said they had appreciate the opportunity for what Little (1993) called “informed dissent” (p. 139). Since this study was conducted, the evaluation rubric for applicant profiles to this ITE program was changed to allow for a difference between “insight” and “significant insight,” which gave some latitude for professional judgement, but the dilemma changed to one of deciding just what constitutes a significant insight. So the dilemma has shifted and not disappeared. It appears that making an evaluation, even with a rubric, still requires professional judgement. Participants wanted this to be an informed judgement.
Teacher performance appraisal manuals, with a two- or three-point rubric, still require interpretation of what is unsatisfactory and what is satisfactory. If the competency is to “engage in ongoing professional learning and apply it to their teaching practices” then there are numerous points of judgement in assessing this competence; school administrators will have to wrestle with the same interpretive issues. How they interpret the evidence presented by teachers is likely filtered through individual knowledge and experience in much the same way as it was by the participants in this study. This last source of difference came from the evaluators’ connection with individual knowledge and experience. If one takes the position, as Vygotsky did (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003), that cognition and learning are social and cultural rather than individual phenomena, this would be no surprise. If one takes a Piagetian perspective (Santrock et al., 2004) that we assimilate new information into our existing individual cognitive schemas or frameworks, this would still be no surprise. If we, as both these theorists agree, construct our own knowledge, then we must interact from a basis of that knowledge. The important question in the context of fairness and transparency in ITE program admissions or in teacher evaluations is whether that personal framework is based on legitimate professional knowledge and is made explicit. If an admissions profile evaluator observes, as several in this study did, that on applicant’s insight into an experience as an assistant coach was patently obvious to anyone involved in team sports, does that observation based on their own experience in team sports produce a bad evaluation? In another profile, one participant’s experience with special needs children prompted her to judge as inappropriate an intervention technique that one applicant included in a long list of interventions that were given as evidence of having learned about teaching special needs children. Someone without experience with special needs children may not have made the same judgement. Basing our judgements on previous experience is how we
learn; acknowledging our own biases and beliefs and including them in the dialogue of evaluation is a part of the transparency and fairness of the evaluation process. Providing ITE instructors and school administrators with the opportunity to reflect on how their judgements are related to their own experiences would serve the same goal of transparency and fairness in both the teacher evaluation process and the evaluation of teacher candidates.

In the evaluation of reflection both by applicants to an ITE program and by teachers as part of their performance appraisal, support for evaluators would have to, as Little (1993) maintains, go beyond the training model and focus on problem solving and articulation of the knowledge and beliefs that underpin practice. Determining what might constitute appropriate reflection and how to acknowledge and evaluate it may result in significant learning in both circumstances.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

This study addressed the understanding and evaluation of reflection within the context of teacher learning that supports school reform. The experiences of the participants illustrated the complexity issues affecting teacher learning as outlined by Little (1993) and the tensions surrounding those issues. The comments of the study participants addressed three areas: understandings of reflection, the context of reflection, and the conditions that support reflection. From each of these groups of statements, it is possible to see how the tensions that Little describes play out in the professional lives of these instructors.

Understandings of Reflection

If what came out of the interviews was an understanding of the experience of reflection among ITE instructors as a conscious attention to and engagement with experience in the context of improvement or change, is this helpful in supporting teacher learning in an ITE? Comments about how they understood reflection in their practice included Mezirow’s (1990) instrumental reflection and in some cases Brookfield’s (1995) critical reflection. Although two thirds of the participants made reference to critical thinking, most gave examples of instrumental reflection. There were no specific examples given of critical reflection at the organizational level on the values and assumptions that guide the program. This pattern of participant understandings was similar to other findings among instructors of faculties of education cited in this study, such as Ward and McCotter’s (2004) elements of focus, inquiry and change; their findings did not involve any significant amount of critical reflection beyond the level of individual practice.

Is there a role for critical reflection within the ITE program on the assumptions that underpin teacher learning? Little identifies the need to become conscious of expanded
possibilities. If a program is seeking to address that need, for instance in the context of equity and social justice, then a framework for reflective teacher learning becomes useful at two different levels. The first is the modeling and teaching of reflection and inquiry to teacher candidates, and the second is at the level of teacher learning for instructors themselves. Therein lies part of the tension expressed inherent in the instructors’ comments. On the one hand, the instructors recognized the value in examining values, attitudes and structural biases; on the other hand they are preparing teacher candidates for the reality they will face in the near future. Little (1993) quotes a principal’s analogy of this dual focus to trying to change the tire on a moving car (p. 141). Schön (1985) himself acknowledged that reflection-in-action can be called a contradiction of terms (p. 279). Instrumental reflection such as retrospective evaluation of lessons and interactions with students that characterized most of the reflection described by instructors is not likely to be sufficient for educational change either at the public school or teacher education level (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Labaree, 2004; Little, 2003). However, the role of and support for critical reflection in a faculty of education offering an ITE program was not clear among the participants of this study. Perhaps the challenge lies in providing a more enriched framework for reflection than Schön provided. Brookfield’s (1995) model of reflecting on assumptions about paradigms, prescriptions and causes has the potential for guiding reflection by teachers and ITE instructors, and for scaffolding the expectations for ITE applicant essays. This framework goes beyond instrumental reflection to structure inquiry into assumptions and beliefs about teaching practice. In Clune’s (1990b) terms, mentioned earlier in this document, this would amount to policy creation.
The Context of Reflection

Participants agreed that the purpose of reflection was to change and improve practice. They expressed a tension between the reality of needing informal and ongoing reflection on practice and the value of structured, focused reflective inquiry. They saw both as valuable, but described informal, retrospective reflection most often as a practice. This tension lies between two models of reflection. One is Schön’s reflection-in-practice, the ongoing, primarily individual articulation of theory-into-practice that characterizes professional skill. The other is Wenger’s (1993) Community of Practice as a collection of informal, focused, somewhat time-bound initiatives. One is primarily an autonomous, individual activity, and the other is characterized by collaborative attention to an issue of mutual interest.

There was some discussion among participants of the Professional Learning Community model, but only one, an elementary school teacher, described direct participation in a PLC. Most initiatives they did describe were not necessarily organized within the faculty; in some cases they were online communities. They described opportunities that reflected their personal interests, such as critical thinking. Program-wide dialogic reflection may require a more defined framework than is currently associated with Schön’s work. To provide the affordance for such reflection, the organizational structure that supports reflection would be less structured, while the conceptual framework that supports it would be more structured in order for reflection to be a powerful tool for school reform.

Little (1993) describes the tension between this autonomous reflective practice and collaborative structures of inquiry as finding a balance between institutional imperatives and individual prerogatives. The balance illustrated in this study appeared to lean toward the autonomous practice of reflection and inquiry. Servage’s (2009) conclusion is that schools may need to explore other models of collective inquiry beyond the PLC model. Wenger’s (1998)
Communities of Practice model, as it was articulated in this study, may be more compatible with the reality of diverse understandings, beliefs, and perspectives. Isolation for teachers may need to be replaced by dialogue among autonomous professionals and not by the necessity of coming to consensus on the meaning of teaching. Participant descriptions of opportunities to reflect appear to put the instructors in a position both to model communities of practice that focus on problem solving in focused way rather than struggling for consensus, and to engage teacher candidates and new teachers in them. However, there was no evidence of any organizational intent in using a Community of Practice model, and infrequent mention of any formal mechanisms within the organization that supported critical reflection. Whether this is an intentional characteristic of faculties offering ITE programs, or a reflection of the more autonomous nature of post-secondary education, or the result of decision-making, was not addressed by participants.

**The Conditions Supporting Reflection**

Participants described four conditions they considered important for creating the conditions that support reflection: opportunity, knowledge base, disposition and culture. Participants described triggers and dispositions; these imply responsibility both on the part of organizational leadership and individual teachers. Together, they create what Little (2003) called affordances, a term that implies an interaction between possibilities present in the environment and a person’s readiness to take advantage of that possibility. Although faculty collaboration is indicated as a program principle for this particular ITE, it was not clear from the participants how this was supported in their own learning or in their professional practice. The creation within the faculty of a framework from which reflection can be practiced and taught might provide the affordance of a common base of knowledge and language to support instructors,
teacher candidates and applicants. Such a common language has potential to inform teacher learning at all levels.

If an ITE were to deliberately create the affordance of individual and collaborative reflection and inquiry based on a common framework in order to support both instructor and teacher candidate learning, it would take, as Little (1993) describes it, the political will to approach it as an initiative requiring systemic effort and the collective capacity (p. 141) that comes from shared knowledge through a dialogue of reflection and inquiry. In the context of such dialogue in the school situation, Servage (2008) points out that it is “rather naïve to expect that a harmonious collegial culture will emerge simply from an unsubstantiated notion that diverse perspectives can be corralled under the deceptively commonsense moral imperative of a focus on student learning” (p. 72). If a collegial culture is not likely to be harmonious, and if teachers need significant opportunities for increasing their skills at articulation of tacit knowledge and at addressing conflict among diverse perspectives, how can ITE programs prepare teacher candidates for such a challenge? Little’s recommendation of balancing the tension between “individual latitude and collective endeavor” (p. 141) might be served well by comparing the functioning of the two models: the more structured Professional Learning Communities found in public schools and the more informal Communities of Practice that were the intentional or implied framework of the ITE of this study.

**Evaluation of Reflection**

Participants described the challenges they experienced in trying to be fair in their evaluation of application profiles. They struggled with the tension between using their professional judgement and the need for constancy in evaluation. They struggled with the rubric on which the marking was based, seeing it as both support and restriction. They recognized that
one the one hand, applicants might lack language skills to express themselves clearly enough, and on the other hand that teaching requires considerable language skill. They understood the potential of all three applicants, but knew that definitive judgements had to be made. They became policy mediators as described by Clune (1990a). Their dilemmas paralleled the issues relating to student assessment in public schools. Education reform involves “teachers wrestl[ing] with the criteria for good work and the forms in which it might be expressed” (Little, 1993, p. 131). Little also addresses the tension between the need to create authentic assessments and the expense and difficulty in developing and scoring such assessments (p. 131). At both levels, this suggests dilemmas of evaluation that require different assessment skills and the opportunity to develop those skills. It also suggests the need for ongoing dialogue and learning. This study has highlighted the difficulty of evaluating higher order thinking skills without considerable structure to facilitate reliability and fairness. The dialogic development of such a conceptual structure at a Faculty of Education is an opportunity to draw on extensive research knowledge and skills in the creation of a tool that could facilitate school reform. That process of policy creation would not only serve the fairness and transparency of admissions standards but also provide a model for teacher learning.

**Implications for School Reform**

The expectation for school administrators to encourage reflection as a component of teacher learning and evaluate it presents the same issues that have been encountered in this study. The need to partner with teachers to provide a variety of opportunities, to support access to knowledge that will form the basis for reflection and to create a safe culture that supports a habit of inquiry reflects the comments of the participants of this study and the policies that form the framework for teacher growth. It also defines a new set of reflective skills for administrators.
The development of a framework to guide reflection and its evaluation at the school level represents a component of those new skills. The creation of such a guide requires the political will to bridge current practice aimed at supporting teacher learning with teacher and administrator learning needs that have arisen out of those current practices.

The conceptual framework outlined at the beginning of this study highlights the tension between established school practices and new teacher learning needs. This tension creates the need, as Little (1993) describes it, for moving past established approaches to such issues as equity onto a focus on reflection and inquiry in a shared culture of informed dissent. This study of admissions to an ITE program points to similar issues in teacher education programs and their admissions processes, and suggests the need for similar processes that allow for the constant collaborative review of admissions and program to address these issues. There is considerable justification for this, including the recommendation that Guinier (2003) reported, “for coherence between program priorities and admission requirements” (p. 180) and for “continuously reflecting on the situation, gathering data, sharing information and reconsidering alternatives” (p. 181). This implies the need for an ITE program to create the affordance of reflection and inquiry not only for teacher candidates, but for instructors as well.

This study used as its starting point the admissions decisions to teacher education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The dilemmas articulated in this investigation are not likely unique to this particular setting; they are clearly teacher learning issues among ITE instructors, teacher candidates, and practicing teachers and administrators. An ITE program provides a potential platform for developing both a model for organization-wide reflective practice that is not a one-size-fits-all model, and a research-driven framework to guide reflection and its evaluation that would address new teacher learning needs. These are complex
undertakings and not easily addressed without the political will to invest the resources for
development of new affordances for teacher learning. Such a course clearly represents a journey
and not a destination.
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