# Intercultural Reflection on Teaching:

# An overview of the origins and philosophies underpinning the three reflective methods

# Reflection on Teaching

Reflection is an important vehicle for enhancing university teaching (Karm, 2010; Kreber, 2004; McAlpine & Weston, 2000) and plays a role in both initial and continuing development of university educators. The importance of reflection, for example through methods like peer observation, self-assessment, and feedback for the enhancement of teaching is well documented in the academic development literature (e.g., Fendler et al., 2013; Kreber & Cranton, 2000). Another term that is quite popular in the literature is *reflective practice*, though the scope as to what reflective practice is, is quite broad (Farrell, 2007). Claims for reflection in education date back to the works of John Dewey (1933), who stated that one main aim of education is to help individuals with the acquisition of habits of reflection to advance from routine thought and action to more intelligent cognitions and behaviour. In the 1980s, Schön (1983) adopted Dewey's thoughts. Although he did not direct his theory of reflection-in-action to teachers, it was well received in this field (e.g., Farrell, 2012; Kreber, 2004). Both Dewey and Schön introduced a way of systematic reflection on practice that allowed for a fruitful framework for research on reflection on teaching.

Apart from exceptions such Karm (2010), little is known about the reflective activities, which participants of academic development courses and academics on the ground engage in. Recent research has stressed the value of peer review and observation for community building (Harper & Nicolson, 2013; McLeod et al., 2013) and of approaches which enable the examination of teaching from multiple perspectives (Kenny et al., 2014; Huxham et al., 2017). While the uses of peer observation and collegial supervision are well documented (e.g., Bailey, 2006; Bell & Mladenovic, 2014; Drew et al., 2016), the purposes and formats of observation schemes vary considerably, ranging from developmental to evaluative assessment of performance (Gosling, 2002). McAlpine et al. (2004) describe reflection on teaching 'as a process of formative evaluation in which one collects and uses feedback to revise and improve instruction' (p.338). A key element therefore is perspective taking, often facilitated by collaboration.

### Cultural dimension of higher education

The cultural dimension of higher education has been considered in relation to disciplinary cultures and their ‘academic tribes and territories’ (Becher & Trowler, 2001), departmental cultures which for example shape academic identities and assessment practices (Jawitz, 2008), and broader ‘cultural-educational contexts’ (Volet, 2001). Publications on academic development have only recently started to consider interculturality and predominantly focus on transnational teaching (e.g., Smith, 2009). There has been some interest in the experience of staff mobility and being an academic in different countries (e.g., Hsieh, 2012; Kreber & Hounsell, 2014), but links have not been made to reflection on teaching.

## References and Recommended Readings

This short list provides references as well as recommended readings on reflection on teaching in general. Further references can be found at the end of the descriptions of the three methods.

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# The methods used and adapted by the intercultural Reflection on Teaching (IntRef) project

The IntRef project aims to foster reflection on teaching in an intercultural context supported by the use of technology. Therefore three reflective methods were chosen and adapted to meet the purpose of the project. The following paragraphs describe the methods and their origins and provide a brief review of relevant literature.

## Intercultural Teaching Process Recall (iTPR)

iTPR is based on Teaching Process Recall (TPR) as developed and implemented at the University of Northumbria by Tony Claydon and colleagues (Claydon & McDowell, 1993). The process was specifically designed for use in postgraduate training and development courses for newly appointed members of teaching staff, part-time lecturers, researchers who teach, and colleagues in learning support roles. The technique is a variant of Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) devised by Kagan (1984) in the 1960s whose initial application was to develop the communication skills of mental health workers. IPR was later adapted to address the needs of teachers and other professional groups. Its roots lie in Bloom’s ‘stimulated recall’ technique which is based on the idea that ‘a subject may be enabled to relive an original situation with vividness and accuracy if he [sic] is presented with a large number of the cues of stimuli which occurred during the original situation’ (Bloom, 1953, p.63). The use of video is an integral component of TPR which therefore lends itself well to sharing and collaborative reflection when individuals teach in different locations. Since evaluation of teaching can be a stressful experience, TPR aims to reduce this by taking place in a small group to develop trust between participants, participants deciding themselves which section of their video to use and being in control of the discussion, and an emphasis on describing, analysing and reflecting on teaching and evaluation by the recaller rather than the other participants.

In iTPR a group of higher education teachers video their own teaching, watch the recording and select an extract. Extracts are shared and discussed during a mutually supportive transnational meeting facilitated by video-conferencing. Each ‘Recaller’ takes ownership of the discussion of their excerpt, during which the other participants offer observations and ask questions which help the recaller to explore what they were thinking, feeling or doing at the time. Interpretations come from the recaller who is supported to gain an objective view of themselves in action, describing and analysing their behaviour, intentions, feelings, thoughts and decision-making processes. At the end of each viewing and discussion, participants including the recaller produce some written comments for the recaller.

Video-based professional development programmes have been relatively widely used in teacher education, while they appear less frequent in higher education. Donnay and Charlier (1990) initially positioned video self-reflection as an act of confronting one’s image and beliefs about teaching with one’s actual teaching, and this has been confirmed by several studies included in Gaudin and Chaliès’s (2015) comprehensive literature review. Overall, the efficacy of video for teaching development is relatively well documented; however, there is less evidence of the dimensions which can make video-based reflection more or less effective. Tripp and Rich’s (2012) review found that specific reflection tasks and frameworks seemed to facilitate reflection and focus teachers’ attention, while the teachers themselves preferred choosing the focus as well as collaborative rather than individual reflection. Both of these preferences align with the way in which iTPR operates.

Self-assessment is a key component of iTPR. The process of watching the recording and identifying a suitable excerpt for discussion prompts the recaller to evaluate their own teaching. This means that they monitor their teaching internally, i.e. against their own ‘values, ideas, goals and skills [which] are extremely important, especially in informal self-assessment without external prompts’ (Yan & Brown, 2016, p.1248). In addition, the approach to questioning used in iTPR has resonances with action learning (Revans, 1982) in that questions are used to help someone else reflect and find their own answers. While the dialogue which takes place during the iTPR discussion stimulates internal feedback, it also generates feedback from external sources. Contemporary writing about feedback (e.g. Boud & Molloy, 2013, Carless et al., 2011, Nicol, 2010) highlights the way in which dialogue and interactions with others elicit evidence, perceptions and judgements that help the individual understand what is needed for action. An iTPR group comprises participants from different disciplines, departments, institutions and countries. This range of perspectives contributes to the richness of the dialogic milieu and feedback, while individual agency and self-regulation are foregrounded in order for such feedback to lead to actual improvement. iTPR is thus in line with current thinking about principles of assessment, lifelong learning and professional development.

**Further Information on iTPR**

* **General information & introductory video**: <https://intref.webspace.durham.ac.uk/intercultural-teaching-process-recall/>
* **Walk-Through Guide**: [**Intercultural Teaching Process Recall (PDF)**](https://intref.webspace.durham.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2021/04/IntRef_WalkThroughGuide_iTPR_VerOct2020.pdf)
* **Technological Toolkit**: [**Intercultural Teaching Process Recall Toolkit**](https://rise.articulate.com/share/F7D_LkRj7qbKmONVmGSvrhQLrLxVjez1)

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## Intercultural Reflecting Team (iRT)

### Background

The Reflecting Team (RT) method was originally developed for family therapy (Andersen, 1987; Friedman, 1995; Kleist, 1999; Lax, 1995). Andersen developed the RT from approaches using a one-way mirror (cf. e.g., Pender & Stinchfield, 2012): A team of therapists was asked to observe and reflect upon statements on a client. One team member spoke directly to the client, while the other therapists observed and discussed behind a one-way screen. In addition to its origin in therapy context, it has been stressed that RTs could be used and other settings (Cox, Bañez, Hawley, & Mostade, 2003, p. 90). This variety results in structural similarities between RTs facilitated in different context, for example therapy training programmes (Chang, 2010; Cole, et al., 2001; Sells et al., 1994; Shurts et al., 2016), group supervision (e.g., for general practitioners, Nielsen & Soderstrom, 2012), intervision/supervision for teachers (Fiege & Dollase, 1998), group facilitator education (Thomas, 2006), or peer coaching in leadership training (Rosskogler, 2002)

However, White (2000, p. 71) states that there is “no *uniform approach to the emphases, content, themes and styles of team reflections”.* Structural similarities comprise thekey elements of spatial separation and the generation of multiple perspectives: Studies showed that RTs assist by generating multiple perspectives about the problem under consideration (i.e. Chang, 2010) and that spatial separation increased the client’s receptivity to the team’s reflections by preventing them from making immediate verbal responses to the team’s reflections (Sells et al., 1994). Clients reported benefiting from the multiple perspectives offered by RTs and appreciating the team’s accessibility. Chang (2010) reports that the way in which the RT created a context for change was important for therapists.To benefit from these elements, a facilitator who guides the group through the RT process is usually part of the method. The method has been influenced by social constructionismand applies systemic techniques whose application can also be supported by the facilitator.

### RTs in higher education

RTs in higher education can provide a powerful method for reflecting on teaching on a collegial and equal level. Academics provide problems encountered during teaching which are discussed by a group of fellow academics. The provider of the (teaching) situation learns from observing others discussing the presented case. For the IntRef project, an international and technology assisted version of the RT was developed which supported a transnational group to discuss cases using video-conferencing. It can be assumed that the diverse background represented in an interdisciplinary and transnational group should provide a fruitful context for reflecting on individual views about teaching and teaching techniques. In addition, discussing situated examples of teaching has the potential to enable academics to transfer new ideas into their own teaching, even when not discussing their own case.

**Further Information on iRT**

* **General information & introductory video**: https://intref.webspace.durham.ac.uk/intercultural-reflecting-team/
* **Walk-Through Guide: https://intref.webspace.durham.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2021/04/IntRef\_WalkThroughGuide\_iRT\_\_VerOct2020.pdf**
* **Technological Toolkit**: https://rise.articulate.com/share/44vjHmSA89I1P0hMzr1\_Q6gJueAhDvCP#/

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## Intercultural Peer Observation

### Background

Peer Observation (PO) is a specific approach that builds on classroom observation practices to identify ways to improve teaching and learning. The activity involves one or more peers who mutually observe each other while teaching, offer constructive feedback and help each other to reflect (Murphy et al., 2018). Reviewing teaching with the assistance of colleagues through observing and being observed is a developmental opportunity (Race, 2009). It is a collaborative process that benefits from colleagues’ experiences and creates a platform for sharing, learning from each other and providing meaningful feedback. PO aims to foster analysis, discussion, self and collaborative reflection on teaching practices and to devise individual and joint professional development plans to enhance teaching in the future.

In some universities and countries teaching observation is common practice but the purposes of observation schemes can vary considerably. Gosling (2002) distinguishes between three main purposes: *evaluation* where senior staff judge the teaching of others for quality assurance purposes, *development* where educational developer or expert teachers guide others to improve their teaching, and *self and mutual reflection* through discussion and review of teaching between peers. Both the implicit and explicit purposes of observation schemes influence the way in which they are operated locally, staff buy-in and engagement with such schemes and their actual impact on teaching practices. PO as developed and practised in intercultural reflection on teaching is based on collaboration and exchange between two equals.

### Benefits/why engage in peer observation?

The main idea behind PO is that people can learn from taking part in social interactions, such as discussions with colleagues, as well as developing reflective practice by observing others and oneself. There are many benefits in teaching observation and feedback. While it is often assumed that the benefits are mainly for the observed person who receives feedback, research shows that the observation itself can lead to greater reflection and change in practice (Cosh, 1998). Thus, peer observation is a process that can benefit both the teacher being observed and the observer, enabling teachers to develop a shared understanding of effective teaching and increase their capabilities, for example in relation to pedagogical approaches or strategies to engage students and assess their learning.

Some of the benefits for the observed teacher are:

* The opportunity to receive personalised constructive feedback that is developed through classroom evidence
* The opportunity to receive feedback on how they implemented something new in class (teaching methods and strategies previously learnt or observed)
* The opportunity to recognise and reflect on aspects of teaching that are positive and those that can be enhanced
* The opportunity to become more aware of what good teaching and learning may look like, identifying alternative ways of interpreting and doing things

Some of the benefits for the observer teacher are:

* The opportunity to discuss teaching and learning processes and to practise constructive feedback based on the observation
* The opportunity to increase knowledge about teaching and to get inspired to experiment with new ideas, methods, and the strategies which have been observed or discussed
* The opportunity to compare different teaching and classroom practices and reflect back on personal teaching
* The opportunity to see more clearly students’ points of view and reflect on good teaching and learning

### Using videos in PO

Compared to classic peer observation protocols, where observation takes place with the observer present in class, the use of video-recordings presents multiple advantages. Using videos can for example be particularly useful for testing the effectiveness of teaching methods, identifying alternatives, and enhancing classroom interaction and the role of students (Harlin, 2014).

In fact, videos give access to classroom events without sacrificing authenticity and complexity (Rosaen et al., 2008), revealing missed events and making students’ thinking more visible (Barnhart & van Es, 2015). The teacher who is observed has the chance to watch their own session and develop their personal reflections through watching their recording. On the other hand, viewing a peer’s video can help them clarify and question personal assumptions on teaching and learning and develop new related understandings. It thus has the advantage of increasing knowledge about teaching and developing knowledge-based reasoning skills to analyse and reflect on own teaching. Seeing own and peer videos can provide teachers with a double mirror - by being faced with an inner and outer perspective. In this way, teachers can improve their professional vision and engage in different sense-making strategies about their teaching.

Further, compared to feedback developed through observation in class, research found that feedback that is developed through video is more specific, better grounded on and supported by evidence (Tripp & Rich, 2012). For this reason, it proves to be more easily accepted by the observed teachers, who can watch videos at different times, compare peer interpretations and feedback with recorded evidence, and identify the strengths and limits of their practice and approach.

**Further Information on iPO:**

* **General information & introductory video**: https://intref.webspace.durham.ac.uk/intercultural-peer-observation/
* [**https://intref.webspace.durham.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2021/04/IntRef\_WalkThroghGuide\_iPO\_\_VerOct2020.pdf**](https://intref.webspace.durham.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2021/04/IntRef_WalkThroghGuide_iPO__VerOct2020.pdf)
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