Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise, theory simply becomes "blah, blah, blah" and practice, pure activism. Paulo Freire

Critical reflection starts from the top. Leaders need to understand the role they play in creating the culture for it to occur within their educational environments. This artefact is designed for any staff member, however particular emphasis is placed on leadership due to its critical role. The artefact is in support of change that is needed in education to allow us to grow learners that can flourish in a changing world.

Critical Reflection in Innovative Schools

"In the face of an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, education can make the difference as to whether people embrace the challenges they are confronted with or whether they are defeated by them. And in an era characterised by a new explosion of scientific knowledge and a growing array of complex societal problems, it is appropriate that curricula should continue to evolve, perhaps in radical ways." OECD 2030

Innovative learning spaces call for innovative ways to manage the growth of the staff in the institution within the values and principles that the school holds. Critical reflection has to play a part in that.

In a challenging and changing world educators need to be reflexive in their approach to making a difference with students.

Role of leaders

Leaders play a critical role in creating the environment of trust and growth through a transparent process that is linked to each individual and their learning journey

Culture and educative purpose

The culture of shared trust starts at the top, however collegial relationships are critical for collaborative teams as they reflect on their practice and impact

Questions

Questions need to be open but directed to allow for the greatest critical reflection of self and practice.

When someone reflects in action, [he/she/they] becomes a researcher in the practice context. ….[he/she/they] does not keep means and ends separate but defines them interactively as [he/she/they] frames a problematic situation. [He/she/they] does not separate thinking from doing…. Because experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into… inquiry
(Schön, 1983, pp. 68-69)

The role of leadership

Trust can be defined "as the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the other party is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent" (Tschannen-Moran, p. 154). The authority of principals in their relationship with teachers can be seen as challenging when the conditions for reflection are not clear. That is, principals must lead in a way that demonstrates that reflection is a crucial aspect of the school and its operation.

The need for collaborative teams to know each other as learners and people is required for trust to develop. Bringing new members of staff on board can bring this trust challenge to the fore. If a school's culture is transparent around the place critical reflection holds, then those joining should be part of the truth.

Once trust is established, "the confidence one holds in the intentions and capabilities of the other persons to fulfill one's expectations results in feeling a greater sense of ease in the interdependence and a willingness to take risks" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 153). This statement brings to the heart what needs to be cultivated within schools. However, risk-taking for staff can sometimes be fraught with challenges as leaders' operating styles can enhance or reduce the probability of critical reflection being effectively connected to the educative purpose and personalised to the teacher and the schools' principles.

Leaders need to work hard on demonstrating that they are open to staff being reflective. It is critical that it is not linked to appraisal, but to personal growth. Leaders need to be aware of assumptions around relationships and how they are perceived. They need to have learning relationships with all staff and not have favourites. Risk-taking needs to be part of the ethos of the innovative space, and leaders need to demonstrate or even better, involve staff in these challenges. Trust and strong relationships are key.

The Culture

The lived, rather than espoused triangle, is the key to culture creation. All aspects of the school, as much as possible should take place within this triangle. It demonstrates the importance of a shared understanding and clarity of the schools' educative purpose

Vision

Mission

Values/Principles

Pedagogy
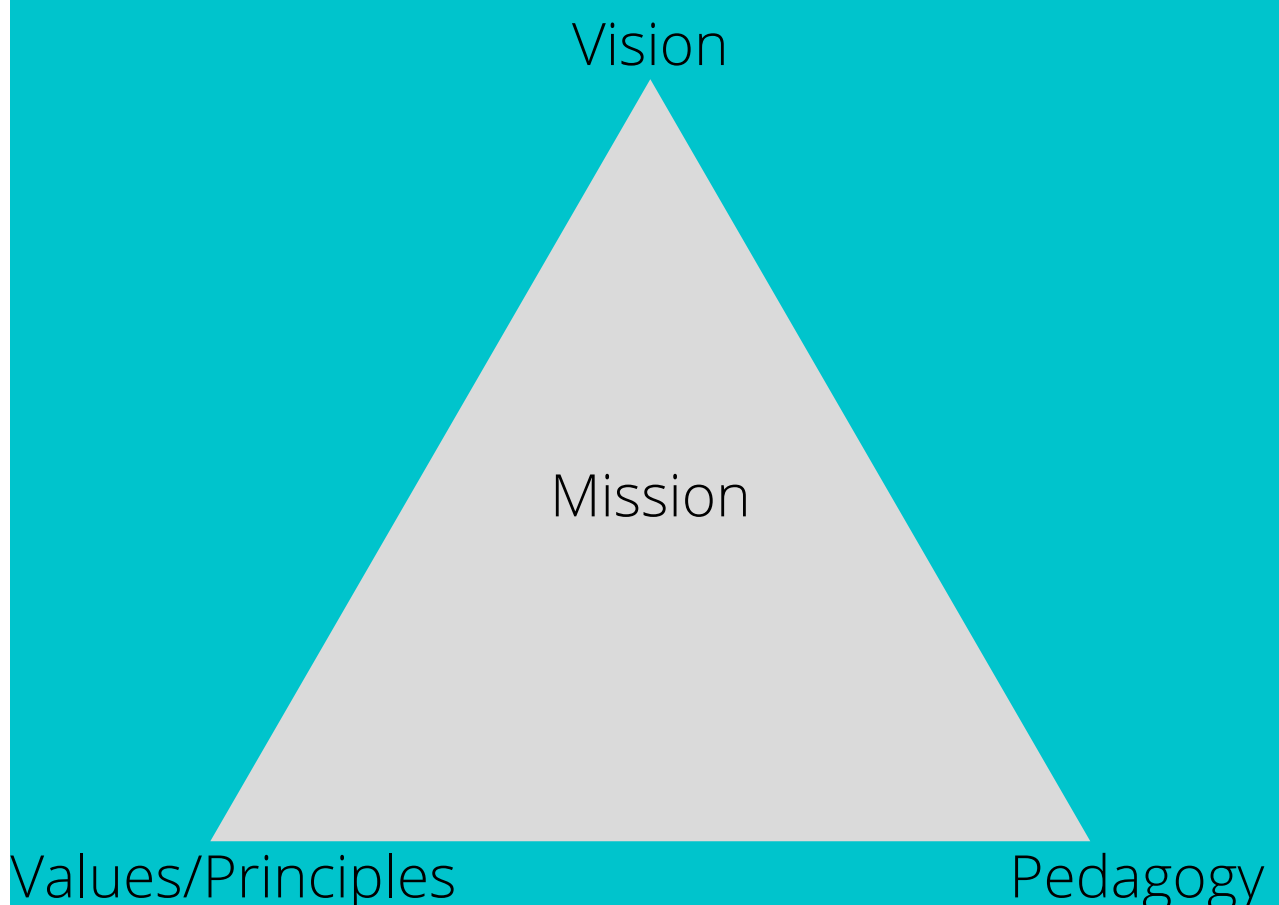
Critical Reflective Questions

These questions are designed to be a starting point. They need to be personalised to your setting. It is important that the essence of these questions stay strong.

The act of recording your thinking is critical. Blog! Journal! Audio record!

At a novice level
1. What do I do?
2. What does this mean?
3. How did it happen?
4. How might I do this differently?

At an intermediate level
1. What do I do?
2. Where does this fit within the context of the school?
3. What did the students say?
4. How might I do this differently?
5. What theory/process might support this?

At an advanced level
1. What do I do?
2. Where does this fit within the context of the school?
3. What did the students say?
4. What did my colleagues notice?
5. What theory/process might support this?
6. What will I change/modify?
7. How will I communicate this?

Required Reading

Bailey, Kathleen M. (2012). Reflective Pedagogy. In Anne Burns & Jack C. Richards (Eds.), The Cambridge Guide to Pedagogy and Practice in Second Language Teaching, (pp. 23–37). New York: Cambridge University Press.

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Brookfield, S. D. (1995). Becoming a critically reflective teacher. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

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