

The use of semantics in analysing student teacher and associate teacher interactions.

Paper Presented at AARE Conference Newcastle, 1994

Jane Mitchell  
Charles Sturt University - Riverina  
Po Box 588  
Wagga Wagga 2678  
Tel. (069) 332 413

This paper explores the use of semantic scripts to interpret evaluations between associate teachers and student teachers during the practicum. Semantic scripts can be used to draw out the invariant meaning of speech acts or genres. In this research the concept of semantic script is applied to a particular context, that of the post lesson conference between student teachers and associate teachers, to interpret and understand the interaction. Two semantic scripts will be presented that highlight particular aspects of the relationship between the participants and the nature and purpose of the evaluative activities and the possibilities within those activities for reflection. These two scripts represent quite different ways of evaluating.

While the development and substance of the semantic scripts presented in this paper are drawn from evaluating in practice teaching situations, the methodology is applicable in analysing ways of communicating in other learning and social settings.

My use of semantic scripts is based on the work of Anna Wierzbicka, a linguist, who has developed a way of explicating the meaning of speech acts and other kinds of purposeful activity. The explication or semantic analysis provides a framework for representing, illuminating and analysing meanings within and across cultures. Wierzbicka (1989) contends that it is "crucially important" to understand what the names for particular communicative activities mean because these activities shape peoples "perception of human attitudes and relations" and they "reflect their perceptions and they organize them." (10) It is this understanding that enables people to live in and have access to their culture.

My understanding of semantic analysis and semantic scripts has been furthered by discussions that I have had with Glenda Shopen a language educator at ACU Signadou and Tim Shopen an applied linguist at ANU. (See also Shopen, G. (1993).

I will firstly explain how and why Wierzbicka uses semantic scripts. An example may be a useful starting point. Wierzbicka, in her analysis of speech-act verbs gives this explication for the verb 'chat':

- a) I want us to say many different things to one another
  - b) I assume you want the same
  - c) I want us to say these things to one another because I think that this will cause us to feel good when we are together
  - d) I don't think of these things as important
- ( 1989:383)

Note the features of this script:

1. It is written using 'I' and 'you' to demonstrate the interactional nature of the meaning. Modes of interaction depend upon what 'you' and 'I' want and feel at any particular time and on who 'you' and 'I' are as individuals and members of a culture. ( Wierzbicka 1991:2)
2. The purpose of the communicative activity is made clear.

3. It is written using, what Wierzbicka calls, a natural semantic metalanguage. This metalanguage consists of, what she and others have identified, as universal primitives, indefinable words that are common across cultures and languages. They are called primitives because their meanings are the simplest possible. They cannot be broken down into anything simpler. The primitives are:

Pronouns: I, you, someone, something

Verbs: want, don't want, say do, happen, think, know

Determiners: this, the same, two, all

Modals: can, if/imagine

Classifiers: kind of, part of

Place/Time: place, time, after, above

Adjectives: good, bad

Linkers: like, because  
(1991:8)

These words are used to state invariant meanings in simple and understandable sentences. So the metalanguage, whilst seemingly technical and artificial, is derived from 'natural' language.

Wierzbicka makes clear her purpose in explicating meaning through the semantic metalanguage:

To compare meanings one has to be able to state them. To state the meaning of a word, an expression or a construction, one needs a semantic metalanguage. To compare meanings expressed in different languages and different cultures, one needs a semantic metalanguage

independent, in essence, of any particular language or culture - and yet accessible and open to interpretation through any language. (6)

In the work that Wierzbicka does on cross cultural communication, the usefulness of semantic scripts are obvious. She states that

speech genres are culture specific and provide an important source of insight into 'communicative routines' most characteristic of a given society. (151)

Semantic scripts are also useful for considering modes of communication within cultures. In this respect communicative events are also context specific. My concern at this stage is especially for the pragmatic meanings of communicative activities expressed through the subjectivities of people. I am using the metalanguage to provide a framework for description and comparison across contexts as well as with invariant meanings. Through semantic analysis it is possible to capture the meaning of communicative events. The script becomes a resource which shows the purpose of a activity, the roles of the participants and how they position themselves in relation to each other and to knowledge. The script also demonstrates that meaning is social.

Meaning is represented in communicative activities and interactions. In this particular paper the activities I will analyse will be 'evaluate' and 'reflect'; the context is the practicum and the participants are student teachers and associate teachers. 1

Semantic analysis will be used to get to the heart of the meaning of

'evaluate'. This provides the basis for considering components of evaluating in different contexts as well as the possibilities for reflective practice within those components. My understanding of the verb 'evaluate' illuminates for me how people in our culture conceive of this activity. It is important to consider evaluating as a cultural activity that has meaning for the participants. In the case of the practicum there are particular constructions and routines that make up the evaluative interaction between student teacher and teacher. Evaluating in post lesson conferences, is an activity in which the participants are talking and making judgements about the features of a lesson. I wish to consider this activity with respect to the relationship between the participants and how they negotiate the evaluative criteria, as well as to consider how reflective teaching and evaluative practice can be complementary.

Evaluating and reflecting: cultural and complementary activities, but what do they mean?

Evaluating is not an activity that exists in isolation in the practicum. It is but one activity that is part of teaching, learning, practice teaching, supervising, assessing, reflecting and mentoring.

The work by Fish(1989) and Field(1993) recasts these activities in ways that go beyond positivist and technical conceptualizations of teaching and learning about teaching. They see reflective practice as central to teaching. This notion of reflective practice now underpins much teacher education literature. Fish and Field have enumerated what competencies have been required in teacher education and they have discussed what additional ones could be thought of as desirable. In this respect both Fish and Field advocate that teachers should be mentors and educators of student teachers, rather than supervisors, by encouraging student teachers to reflect on their own practice and to develop their own theories about teaching. Thus they make the notion of reflection central.

Field acknowledges that evaluating is an important component of mentoring. Field devotes one paragraph only to evaluating in the chapter on mentoring. Note the way in which Field talks about evaluating. The following example demonstrates this:

Mentors should have skills in both formative and summative evaluation techniques. Because they have the students with them for such a long period of time, they should give constant feedback, set targets for the next lesson and the next day and the next week, and have sessions of formative evaluation as the practicum progresses. In order to give meaningful feedback on lessons, mentor teachers need to be able to articulate curriculum principles and method processes and be observant and analytical. They need to be able to focus on what went well in a lesson, and what did not go well, and be able to analyse and interrogate the processes in a helpful way that will lead to professional development of the student teacher. They need to be able to set achievable targets for the student teacher in line with the student's performance each day. (p.75)

My concerns with these statements are:

1. that they indicate some of the activities that can be part of evaluating, but they do not make clear what evaluate means;
2. her point of view is limited by only one possibility of what 'should' happen;
3. they are based on an assumption that 'evaluating' is 'one-way' communication from teacher to student teacher; and
4. there is no explicit connection between evaluating and reflecting on the part of the student teacher or the class teacher. Field does not

make clear how her way of evaluating can promote reflecting nor does she leave room for the student teacher to understand what has happened or to formulate goals in terms of his or her own reflection.

My contention is that reflecting can be part of the post lesson conference and the evaluative activities, and that evaluating can and 'should' promote reflection on the part of the student teacher.

Reflecting and evaluating are not mutually exclusive. However, with both these activities it is important to understand their constitutive parts so that what they mean is understood. Reflection has tended to become a rhetorical device used by particular interest groups and evaluation, taken to mean merely the transmission of judgements. Similarly, these terms are discussed with reference to activities that are equally complex and so make it difficult to develop a clear sense of what they actually involve. Consider the following example that is pertinent to the practicum. Barbara Field, drawing on the work of David Frost states that:

Reflection should enable the teacher and the student teacher:

- to assess his or her own skills to improve on them;
- to evaluate the chosen teaching strategies and materials in terms of their appropriateness;
- to question the values embedded in those practices and proceed to challenge the aims and goals of education;
- to continue to examine and clarify their personal values and beliefs about society and pedagogy;
- to theorise about the context of their pedagogical practice - that is, to try to develop explanations about the pupils, the interactions in the classroom, and about the processes of teaching and learning;
- to examine the adequacy of theories about pedagogical contexts and processes and develop a critique of them. (66)

The points raised in these statements are particularly important, however note the activities that constitute reflecting - assess, evaluate, question, examine, clarify, theorise, explain and critique, with respect to such things as skills, strategies, classroom interactions, values and theories. In this context the what and the how of these activities are complex and so make it difficult to clearly illuminate what it means to reflect.

Likewise, drawing on Field's work on evaluation, previously cited, the activities that are part of this are:

- giving constant feedback
- articulating curriculum principles and method processes
- observing and analysing lessons
- focussing on what went well and what did not go well
- interrogating processes that will lead to professional development of student teachers
- setting achievable targets (p.75)

These activities, too, are complex and ill-defined.

It is important to acknowledge that evaluating can both promote and be promoted by reflecting. It is possible to conceive of these activities without the circularity of saying that reflecting involves evaluating and that evaluating involves reflecting. One can consider the

interactional meaning using a metalanguage that enables a clear comparison of the relationship between these activities in the context of the practicum. Below are some working semantic scripts for reflect and evaluate. The purpose of this is to make explicit the way in which reflecting and evaluating can complement each other.

With this in mind, here is a semantic script for 'evaluate' that encapsulates crucial components of the activity by showing what people understand by the verb in our culture. This definition is a semantic invariant, a meaning that is part of the verb wherever it is used. 2 It provides a basis for comparing evaluative activities in different contexts.

I evaluate what you are doing

- (A) You are doing something
- (B) I am thinking about what you are doing and about the parts of what you are doing
- (C) I am thinking about what people would say about these things
- (D) I think that we both know something about these things
- (E) I think I know more than you do about what is good
- (F) I say to myself whether what you are doing is good and whether the parts of what you are doing are good
- (G) I want to say this to you
- (H) I want you to think about what I say
- (I) I think other people think it is good if we do this

Linking the script to the practicum context

This script demonstrates that evaluating is interactional and relational. Evaluating takes place between 'I' and 'you'; between, in the context of the practicum, 'I', the class teacher, thinking about and saying something to 'you' the student teacher about something you have done, lines (A), (B) and (G). Within the relationship it is acknowledged that one person has authority to say things. That authority may be based on knowledge, experience and institutional responsibility, line (E). Both participants know something about what is being evaluated (D). The extent to which this is acknowledged is contingent on the participants position on a knower/knowee continuum. Implicit in evaluating and explicit in this script are statements that reflect the values of the participants which are both personal and social (C). What is said is based on the teacher's values and conceptions of good teaching, with the purpose of

1. thinking about and saying to the student teacher whether what they have done is good teaching, in other words constituting the evaluative criteria. lines (E) and (F); and
2. based on these qualitative statements, providing the student teacher with something to think about. (H) This rests on an assumption that if you think about something you will know about it.

Here is a script for reflect. Through an examination of this script it is possible to see the components of reflecting that are similar to and that complement evaluating.

I am reflecting on something 3

(A) Something has happened

(B) I want to think about this so I can know about it

(C) Because of this I am thinking about what I already know

(D) Because of this I am thinking about what I think other people would

say about what has happened

(E) I want to say to myself what I think

In the semantic script presented here reflecting is personal. The purpose of reflecting is to understand something, to get under the surface of something, to find out reasons for something. The key to reflecting is thinking about what is known to know more or to know something new about something. Evaluating involves making judgements. Critical to evaluating are statements about whether something is good. Evaluating has a clear qualitative purpose. It is possible to also see that an intention to understand is a feature of both evaluating and reflecting. In the practicum both activities represent an interaction between thought and action. To evaluate requires some reflecting. Thinking about and knowing about something is necessary before saying whether it is good in any sort of considered way. As well, evaluative activities have the potential to promote reflection on the part of the student teacher.

Evaluating in different contexts

I will now look at the interactions between associate teachers and student teachers during the post lesson conference to compare different ways of evaluating. The data for this study was collected by taping the post lesson conferences between student teachers and associate teachers. After these tapes had been transcribed the participants read and made comments on what was said and why and provided further contextual details.

This study uses scripts to consider the activities that constitute evaluating in the two cases chosen for analysis. The evaluative process is quite different in each case in terms of the relationship between the participants, their values and what they say to each other.

The two cases can be contrasted with the script that has been presented for evaluate and with each other in order to consider the extent to which reflective practice is part of the evaluative process.

Two cases of evaluating in the practicum

The following excerpts are from the post lesson conferences in two cases. They are fragments only, but provide some insight into the nature of the interactions between the participants.

Case 1: Matthew (student teacher) and David (associate teacher). The setting is a Year 11 Economics class in a private school.

David: .....for them to sort of say right we're going to do that, I don't know whether they need that, again this is a personal thing, what I tend to do is just do one step at a time say right this is the heading, put this in your books, this is the focus of what we're going to be doing now and then go on. In other words, give them concrete instructions of saying, right, this is what we're going to do first, put that heading down and then have discussion, give them a definition they can write it down, as you were doing basically, just a point

Matthew: Maybe I should have done it before the lesson started, that's why

David: Have it on the board already, yeah, because that was another problem, came straight from the other class, I had race off to something very important, to go to the toilet, and I said I was going to bring an overhead projector down and I forgot that and so you know,

a little bit of a schmozzle which is a lot to do with me. I thought it was good, no, no, perhaps it was because you were nervous, a couple of people in here were looking at you, you asked a number of questions early and people were just falling out, they weren't putting their hands up, probably because of nerves because it was fine the other day, particularly in year 9 making a point, no don't call out, put your hand up, one at a time - nerves basically that point, because I know your normally pretty firm with that, I thought perhaps just the way the lesson was flowing, perhaps the chalk and talk and questions and questions was a little bit over done

Matthew: Right

David: Good, and some of these, I mean, it's a difficult area, some of the concepts which you were trying to get to particularly

diagrammatically they don't sort of lend themselves to, I've put down here guess what could be in this box type questions, you know, can anyone tell me what the shape of this curve might look like, very difficult, really difficult I think you know, when they've not really done that before, you know what I mean, and that can be a little bit annoying to students where it's such an open ended question, questions which they feel in themselves, oh I should be able to answer that or, I should be able to work it out particularly that last one, I noted down look at the marginal cost of this, really, problem was, you probably saw that yourself that you had that down as your list plan, that's where I think your lesson - with your list plans they're a guide, you need to be flexible, sometimes you need to say right that's not going to work, I need cut that bit off, I need to sort of, I need to get them down to work now, their becoming distracted, their becoming jittery and not listening, so I need to change the stimulus and get them down to work, perhaps you could have even left totally marginal cost today, left it as discovery in the exercise, they could have discovered it in doing that exercise which you gave out. I thought maybe you improved a lot with your clutch on them, with your general clutch on management, a couple of points you said right I want everyone to listen here, I want everyone to focus on the point I want to make, I thought you became stronger and stronger with that as a list - , I thought the plant analogy you had was excellent

Case 2: Judy (student teacher) and Simon (associate teacher). The setting is Year 11 History class doing a unit of work on the Arab/Israeli conflict. The school is a senior college. Simon: Yeah I think, well I was doing my participation chart and after a while I didn't need to do it because you were getting access to every person, by walking around and talking to them

Judy: But, when you do that participation chart up did you mean that I was having access to everyone when they were already in their groups and starting to work on the documents or before hand?

Simon: No, after they started the group work

Judy: During, yeah during the group work. Because what about the introduction?

Simon: Because you were then free, free to approach them

Judy: Yes, well exactly and I spoke to everyone in the class then, but the introduction bit, what, what did we do, we talked about Hertzl's primary document and the news, what about their participation rate there, did I, did I get to them all?

Simon: No

Judy: No, so that's what that chart is?

Simon: No what was happening was the usual thing, the dominant people were talking you...but it wasn't bad, it was better, in fact I think I, I noticed you getting to the quiet girls and

Judy: Yeah, I asked them specifically, yeah

Simon: But having noticed that I then noticed that once they started working in groups it was even better and the same was true today, you got access multiple times to every student

Judy: Well it's a lot easier to do that, I mean you're not talking to the class as a whole

Using semantic scripts to characterise evaluating in these two cases:

Script 1 emerged from and provides the basis for analysis of Case Study 1 and Script 2 for Case Study 2. In developing these scripts the following were considered:

1. the use of 'I', 'you' and 'we'
2. the relationship between the knower and knowee
3. the extent to which the evaluative criteria were negotiated
4. the amount of talking that each person did
5. the content of what was said

Each script was built upon the semantic script for evaluate previously discussed. The two scripts presented here have common and core components that define evaluate, but demonstrate clearly how the activities that constitute and represent evaluating in each case are quite different.

Script 1:

I evaluate what you are doing

- in the supervision of practice teaching

(A) You are doing something

(B) I am thinking about what you have done

(C) I am thinking about what I think is good practice and I think that what I do is good practice

(D) I am thinking about what you have done with respect to what I think is good practice

(E) I want to tell you what I think about your practice

- (F) I think you should do as I do
- (G) I have the authority to tell you these things
- (H) I know more than you do
- (I) I say things to you about what I think of your practice

Script 2:

We evaluate what you are doing

- in the supervision of practice teaching

- (A) You have done something. Before you did it we talked about what you were going to do
- (B) We are thinking about what you have done and we say to each other what we think
- (C) We are each thinking about good practice and we tell each other what we think with respect to that
- (D) I am thinking about what you have done with respect to what I think and what you think is good practice
- (E) I want to tell you about what I think about your practice but I also want to hear what you think about your practice
- (F) I would like us to agree on what we think is good practice
- (G) I have the authority to tell you these things
- (H) I know more than you do but I acknowledge you know things too
- (I) We say things to each other
- (J) What we say to each other affects what we might do in our future practice

Comment:

These cases show the way in which communicative activities, such as evaluating, vary with context. The scripts for the two case studies, when compared with the definition of evaluate have common components that make clear the purpose of the interaction. We know that something is being evaluated. The way in which the evaluating takes place varies with context. My contention is that the potential to be reflective, indeed to be reflective in a critical way, is greater in the nature of the interaction in Case 2.

Each script says something about the associate teacher/student teacher relationship in the evaluative process. Both relationships rest on a knower/knowee distinction and in each script the knower, the associate teacher, is placing a value on something that the knowee has done. He or she does this because of his or her knowledge and authority. By "knowee" I mean to signify two things: that the student teacher "knows nothing", so to speak, and that the student is the "known", an object of the associate teacher's authority and knowledge.

In the first script the assumption made is that the knower knows everything and the knowee very little. What is said is based on the subjective understanding of the knower. The way that the pronoun "I" is positioned signifies this. In the second script the dualism implicit in the framing of "evaluate" is not as pronounced. The pronoun "we" indicates that evaluating is subjective and intersubjective in that both participants know something and say to each other what they know. The value placed on the teaching activity is negotiated, agreed upon and shared.

Script 2 is more productive than Script 1 for both practical and critical reasons. Evaluating incorporates a dialectical quality in Script 2 in a way that extends teaching and learning possibilities for the participants. I am drawing on Proppes's (1982) understanding of dialectical in this context. Dialectical "is a convenient term for the

kind of thinking which takes place when human beings enter into friendly (meaning well intentioned, cooperative, genial and genuine) dialogue in order to find synthesis, or when they engage in reflection and self reflection" (quoted in Smyth, 1991, p.32). The relationship between associate teacher and student teacher inherent in the meaning of "evaluate" in this script is based on an assumption that both participants are knowers and knowees, both are thinkers and doers, both are theorists and practitioners. There are two agents in this frame. This is important because the knowledge of the student teacher is acknowledged. Knowing about teaching in the evaluative context is then constructed jointly by the associate teacher and student teacher. In this sense, knowledge of teaching is not a given that is merely transmitted. Built into this is the possibility for reflective practice of the sort advocated by Della Fish (1989). For her the student should

"possess the skills, ability, dispositions, understanding, and capacity to create, discover, use, and evaluate his/her own theories of action in order that in all his/her work with pupils he/she is committed to facilitating their learning to their highest potential, and concomitantly to learning him/herself how better to do so." (p.179)

Within the frame of "evaluate" in Script 2 is the possibility for the

student teacher to do some of the things that Fish suggests because the evaluative process is two-way. This is crucial because the student teacher is better able to learn through reflecting on his or her own practice. Here I agree with Donald Shon (1987, p.39), who argues in the teaching context that knowing that comes from reflecting is more valuable than knowing that is technical, instrumental and rule based.

The components of evaluating in script 2 are possibly, but not necessarily "critical" in the way that Liston and Zeichner (1991) suggest:

"During student teaching and other practice teaching experiences, students should be asked to reflect on their own assumptions and beliefs with a view to further articulating and justifying their views, and efforts should be made to link available knowledge about social context to their experiences in order to highlight potential obstacles to their chosen professional orientation." (p.87)

The "critical" point here is the linking of personal experience to social context: the negotiated approach to evaluation represented by Script 2 may encourage self-reflection, reflection about one's own teaching experience and how it matches up to notions of "good practice", but it will not necessarily encourage critical consideration of precisely what "good practice" is and how it came to be defined as such.

Nonetheless, I would contend that the approach represented by Script 2 is eminently preferable to that embodied in Script 1, which is predicated on an oppositional relationship between the participants, that is, a hierarchical distinction between knower and knowee. In this approach, the evaluator's conception of "good practice" is uncritically transmitted, received and (possibly) adopted: here there is little encouragement of self-reflection, much less of wider, critical thought about the notion of "good practice" itself.

This commentary is made possible through semantic analysis. Semantic analysis makes explicit the activities that constitute reflecting and evaluating in our culture. The salient features of these activities are represented in semantic scripts. Semantic analysis makes possible

a description of meaning. When this is understood, activities like evaluate and reflect can be critically considered and understood. Likewise contextual variation can be more clearly described in ways that make explicit relationships and values underpinning interactions and the ways these factors both shape and reflect the meaning of 'evaluate'. This analysis becomes part of my evaluating of evaluating.

Notes:

1. Whilst 'evaluating' and 'reflecting' are not strictly speaking speech acts they can still be represented, defined and considered using Wierzbicka's semantic metalanguage. The routines and constructions of practicum evaluations involve interactions between participants. Likewise mental verbs such as reflect are closely related in semantic structure to speech act verbs. (Wierzbicka, 1989:31)

2. The way in which the term evaluate is used varies tremendously. In some contexts it is used interchangeably with assess and appraise. In other contexts these terms are related but have different meanings. The way in which terms are used varies with cultural tradition and individual preference. In the UK the terms appraise and assess are widely used when referring to a consideration of the activities of teachers, student teachers and students (see Fish (1989) for instance). It is programs that are evaluated. In the US the terms are used interchangeably. Whilst it is unusual and odd to evaluate a person per se, it is quite common to evaluate something that a person does or has done.

In this study I use the word evaluate because of its breadth of meaning and because of the way it is used in the literature and in practice. As Print states: "In its broadest sense evaluation is concerned with making judgements about things." (1993:187) I agree with this, but think it is worth teasing out the meaning a little more, not with the intention of splitting hairs about the differences between terms, but in order to understand what the term means in a way that makes clear the communicative purpose and in a way that provides a framework to consider evaluative activities in particular contexts.

Consider the following sentences that make reference to 'evaluate' as examples of how the term is used. Examples such as these help validate the definition. (Wierzbicka, 1987:19)

Recent research has emphasised the valuable contribution evaluation makes to student learning through the provision of feedback on student performance. (Print, 1993:190)

Many US teacher leadership programs select, reward and evaluate their teachers, not according to multiple criteria of excellence and professional growth, but according to teachers' adherence to approved models of teaching, often ones that place a premium on basic skills. (Hargreaves, 1994:7)

Students and teachers have always been popular objects of evaluation in education. (House, 1986:18)

Evaluation of teachers differs depending upon whether one sees teaching as labour, craft, profession or art. (House,1986:7)

Evaluate is not unlike assess and appraise. The connotations may be slightly different. Evaluate is seemingly more official and less personal than appraise. Evaluate is often slightly broader in use than assess. Assessing is often underpinned by measuring and grading.

Evaluating places greater emphasis on the worth of something. Likewise, implications for the future are critical to the purpose of the evaluation.

What is said in evaluations is usually based on particular criteria that represent the evaluators assumptions of what is good and bad. Often these are presented in language that suggests that the evaluator is objective. I disagree with this. Values are not neutral. Concomitant with this is a strong sense that evaluating is a one way activity. Something, that someone or a group of people have done, is an object of someone's consideration. Built into the very meaning of the word is a relationship between an evaluator and evaluatee. The extent to which this relationship rests on a knower/knowee dichotomy is of particular interest.

### 3. Reflect

A study carried out by the University of New England in Armidale, NSW, asked students to reflect on the processes and practices of becoming a teacher. (Field, 1994:26)

Beginning teachers should be able to reflect critically on their teaching practices. NSW Dept of School Education - Competencies for Beginning Teachers.

Richo replied that in fact politics in Australia up to now had been a 'blokes' game'. But the question did force him into a rare self-reflective moment: "Maybe politicians like me are dinosaurs: maybe I'm the last of the line". (Gerard Henderson, Sydney Morning Herald, 8/11/94:19)

"I guess I feel I need a new challenge".....new 7.30 Report presenter Andrew Olle reflects on his career move at the ABC's Gore Hill studios. (Sydney Morning Herald, 8/11/94:3)

The terms reflect and reflective practice are commonly used in educational literature. What it actually means to reflect is often unclear. (Smith and Hatton, 1993) Reflect is sometimes used as a coverall for everything that educators should do and so it covers assessing, theorising, evaluating, examining, questioning, analysing, clarifying and so on. Saying what reflecting is with reference to equally complex activities makes it a difficult concept to understand. It is worth noting that when used, reflect is often accompanied by a term such as evaluate, explain and analyse. Or people talk about 'critical reflection' or 'reflective practice'. This says something, not only about reflecting but also about the dilemma that people have in defining what it means to reflect.

'Reflect' is also often used as "rhetorical garnish" (McWilliam, 1992:5) without any clear sense of what reflecting involves or what purpose it might have. This too may explain why it is often coupled with other terms.

Reflecting is a mental activity. In reflecting you are thinking about something in order to get below the surface of it, to know about and to understand it. The sorts of things that one reflects on are normally quite complex. It is possible to reflect on events, happenings, peoples behaviour, past actions, feelings, etc. One does not normally reflect on carrots, the fence or a cup of coffee.

Through reflecting comes 'insight', a way of knowing about something on a deeper sort of level. Not just because you have been told, not just because you have observed, not just because you have experienced something, but because you have thought about it on a deeper level in order to understand.

So there are things underneath the observable surface that can be understood by reflecting. Understanding things that are complex or that are beneath the surface such as meanings, intentions, feelings and

emotions can be difficult to convey in words. Reflecting too, is something that is difficult to do. It may be difficult to state reflections particularly when they are based on feelings and emotions.

Reflect is usually inhere to practice in much of the education literature. One reflects on ones practice. In this respect the activity of reflecting joins thought and action. Whilst there is debate about the difference between reflection in action and reflection on action and between technical reflection and critical reflection, what is of significance to me is not so much the differences but the commonalities. I would contend that the purpose of reflecting is to gain understanding. Understanding that is based on the interaction between thought and action is critical to recognising teachers' knowledge and the intellectual nature of their work. Related to this is a commonly held assumption, particularly in teacher education literature is that reflecting will inform future practice.

Something does need to be said about critical reflection. The modifier 'critical' is often used and I think misused or misunderstood. Being critical means having a perspective. Shopen states that people who think critically "use culture as a resource to develop their own perspective" and that they use this perspective to "analyse their culture and discern what they perceive to be it's good and bad features." (1993:2) Critical reflection is like this. It is thinking about something in order to know about it and in order to know about it's value. In this respect, reflecting critically is similar in meaning to evaluate.

References:

Field, Barbara and Terry (eds), (1994) *Teachers as Mentors: A Practical Guide*, (London, The Falmer Press)

Fish, D. (1989), *Learning Through Practice in Initial Teacher Training*, (London, Kogan Page).

Hargreaves, Andy. (1994), *Changing Teachers, Changing Times*, (London, Cassell)

House, Ernest (ed). (1986), *New Directions in Educational Evaluation*, (London, The Falmer Press)

Liston, D. and Zeichner, K. (1991), *Teacher Education and the Social Conditions of Schooling* (New York, Routledge).

McWilliam, Erica, "Towards Advocacy: post positivist directions for progressive teacher educators", *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1992, pp3-17.

NSW Department of School Education, (1993) *Competencies for Beginning Teachers*.

Shopen, T. and Shopen, G. (1994), *personal communication*

Shopen, G., (1993), "Semantics as a Resource for Teaching Critical Literacy", *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 16, 1, pp1-18.

Shon, D. (1987), *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco, Jossey Bass Publishers).

Smith, D. and Hatton, N. (1993) "Critical Reflection on Action in Professional Education", Paper presented at 5th National Practicum Conference, Sydney.

Smyth, J. (1991), *Teachers as Collaborative Learners* (Milton Keynes, Oxford University Press).

Wierzbicka, Anna, (1987) *English speech act verbs: a Semantic dictionary*, (Academic Press, Sydney).

Wierzbicka, Anna, (1991) *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics The Semantics of Human Interaction*, (Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter).