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**Using *Core Reflection* in teacher education**

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**Abstract:**
This paper reports on a self-study by two teacher educators who used Korthagen and Vasalos' (2005) core reflection model. This model extends Korthagen's earlier ALACT model of reflection for teachers, to include deeper levels of personal reflection, tapping into the emotional dimensions of practice (for example, beliefs, identity and mission). The researchers identified two concurrent dimensions of teacher educators' professional learning – the examination of teaching practice and professional identity by the participant in the core reflection process (Kerith), and insights gained by the facilitator (Judy) in using the core reflection model in professional dialogue. The researchers concluded that the acknowledgement and examination of personal characteristics (*core qualities*) and emotions in teaching practice, and in the core reflection process itself, is an important way in which teacher educators can construct their professional identities, and examine and improve their practice in educating student teachers.

**Introduction**
This paper examines the experiences of two teacher educators using a reflection process known as Core Reflection (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Both authors are early career researchers: Judy is a former primary school teacher who has been a teacher educator for approximately two years; Kerith is a former early childhood teacher, who has been an academic for approximately seven years. The study involved three core reflection sessions, over the period of one semester. However, in this paper only data from the first session is included. The paper examines ways in which the authors 'crossed the border' between the relatively comfortable space of discussing teaching practice with a colleague to the more uncomfortable and potentially risky space of confronting emotions and questions of identity informing one's practice.

**Background**
*Judy*
As a primary school teacher new to the role of teacher educator, I was keen to examine ways in which I could make sense of my new professional identity, and contribute to my learning about my practice teaching prospective teachers. In particular, my involvement in self-study was a means by which I felt I could explore the literature in this area, and interrogate some of the issues and concerns I had as a beginning teacher educator. One self study activity in which I had participated was a workshop conducted by Fred Korthagen and Angelo Vasalos on *core reflection*. This workshop and the principles underlying core reflection had a significant impact on me, and strengthened my belief that acknowledgment of emotions in the work of teachers and teacher educators, and one's search for authenticity in practice, are keys to effective learning (and teaching). Learning about core reflection lead me to consider how I might use this approach to examine my practice, and to collaborate with colleagues in ways that would help in the construction of my new professional identity as a teacher educator, a concept that I had been struggling with during my initial period as an academic (Williams, 2008). Fortunately, I was able to establish a trusting relationship with Kerith, who was eager to trial the core reflection model in relation to her own teaching. This experience helped us both to develop our skills in, and understandings of, this particular method of professional reflection, and to more critically identify and reflect on issues, concerns and dilemmas in our practice.

**Literature review**

The process of reflection or 'reflective practice' in education generally, and in teacher education in particular, is well documented in the literature. The seminal work of Schon (1983) provided a conceptual understanding of reflective practice on which many later researchers have based their work. For example, Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) took Schon's notions of technical rationality, knowledge-in-action and reflection-on-action to produce an 'enabling' model of reflection-on-practice, leading to decisions and actions that help teachers to understand teaching and learning. Ghaye and Ghaye argued that by reflecting on their practice, teachers are enabled to make "wise and principled decisions" (p. 3) that are based on self-knowledge and experience. These decisions lead to improvements in teachers' practice, and in their understanding of the complexity of their students' and their own learning. Ghaye and Ghaye also argued that professional reflection should not only be a solitary practice, but that it should also be a social endeavour, in which the knowledge produced "has the potential to enlighten and empower teachers" (p. 3). Such reflection may be reflection-*in*-action (rapid interpretation and action in the moment) or reflection-*on*-action (after the event). The latter type of reflection is perhaps the most common in the literature, where researchers, particularly self-study researchers, reflect on their professional practice in hindsight, and often with trusted colleagues. Ghaye and Ghaye promote the idea of 'reflective conversations' which move the reflective process away from the private and to the public domain, and broadens the emerging learning from the individual to the wider education community.

In recent years, the teacher education literature has placed increasing prominence on self study as a means of facilitating professional learning in teacher education. Loughran (2004) argued that self study was a means by which personal reflections could be made public, much the same as Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) argued that reflection should be as publicly accessible as possible. Many self studies examine the importance of reflection for teacher educators individually and with colleagues, and for their students. Trumbull (2006) discussed the 'dialectical' notion of reflection, as a means by which a teacher educator's ideas about teaching and learning are examined and reconstructed through recourse to personal experience and the experiences of others. She argued that "this transformative process enables one to surface and question previously taken-for-granted assumptions about the self…" (p. 73). The importance of the emotional dimension of reflection was highlighted by Moore (2003) when he argued that "…by addressing, including and putting us more in touch with our *'feelings'* [reflection] is a vital tool in broadening our perspectives…[and] is arguably a prerequisite to becoming not just 'better'…but happier and more fulfilled in the work that we do" (p. 581). Views such as these promote reflection as more than a cognitive process that is undertaken within a rational academic context, but rather as a process that involves the 'whole' person, including emotions. As Trumbull suggested, it is not just an examination of *practice*, but an examination of the *self* and how this is an integral part of one's practice.

Loughran and others (see for example, Loughran, 2006a; Loughran & Russell, 2002) have argued that reflection can help to promote a *pedagogy* of teacher education by making the underlying principles of teacher educators' practice explicit to students of teaching. By reflecting on their own practices, beliefs and assumptions teacher educators are better placed to understand these practices and to make them clearer to their students. Student teachers in turn have an opportunity to gain insights into teaching and learning by participating in such processes rather than being 'instructed' by 'expert' teacher educators. Loughran (2006b) argued that "modelling, reflection and inviting critique of one's own practice are all issues that should drive the manner in which teaching about teaching is conceptualised so that students of teaching are able to see that which they are being encouraged to do in their own teaching is central to their teacher educator's practice" (p. 170). The value of reflection is, therefore, not only for teacher educators themselves, but also for their students, as the reflection process can lead to improvements in the ways in which students of teaching are educated.

In her self-study, Brandenburg (2008) uncovered hidden *assumptions* in her teaching of student teachers and unpacked these using structured self reflection, and through promoting self reflection in her students, drawing heavily on Korthagen's (2001) ALACT framework. Brandenburg found that through reflection (her own and that of her students) there emerged a "reconceptualised approach to learning and teaching [and that] more has been exposed about how examining the ordinary can lead to extra-ordinary insights about teaching and learning about teaching" (p. 179). She argued that reflection for teacher educators, and for teacher education students, is a powerful way to research the teaching and learning nexus, and to improve the professional practice of both teacher educators and prospective (and future practicing) teachers in schools. Like Brandenburg, Berry (2007) examined her own teaching practices but rather than unpacking assumptions, she framed her practice from the perspective of *tensions*. By reflecting on her practice in teacher education, Berry identified several tensions that were inherent in her work, and that had implications for her own learning and for that of her students. Tensions identified by Berry included those between *telling* students about learning and teaching and allowing them to explore these concepts through their own experiences (*growth*); between providing students with *safety* in the classroom and *challenge* to confront difficult and stressful issues related to learning and teaching; and between *valuing experience* that student teachers bring to teacher education and challenging them to *reconstruct* such experience in order to reconceptualise their personal theories of learning and teaching. By reflecting on her practice privately, and publicly with her students and a trusted colleague, Berry was able to 'reframe' her 'taken-for-granted assumptions' about teaching and learning (drawing on the work of Schon, 1983), and to respond more appropriately to the needs of her teacher education students. She also "learn[ed] about my 'self' through developing my self-understanding and self-awareness [as] a prerequisite to helping others see themselves in ways that enable them to help themselves" (p. 163). Here, the importance of the *self* emerges for Berry, as it did for Moore (2003) and Trumbull (2006), and again, emphasises the value of a holistic approach to self-reflection.

Studies such as those above, including the increasing number of self-studies, point to the value of reflection in teaching and teacher education. Whether these are examples of reflection-in-action or reflection-on-action, or personal or collaborative reflections, it appears that the practice of reflecting on one's own beliefs, assumptions and practices in teaching is essential if teachers and teacher educators are to advance their own work and that of the profession more broadly. To be most effective, it appears that some type of structure or systematic process is important to guide the reflection and to ensure that it does not merely become "navel-gazing" or "just thinking about what you do" (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p.3) Brandenburg (2008) found that the use of a structured reflective process can overcome situations such as those that she encountered, where many pre-service teachers believed that "open and unstructured reflection tasks [were] difficult, irrelevant and generally written for a specific audience" (p. 34). In the reflective process on which the current paper is based, a structured model of reflection was used which built on the early ALACT model developed by Korthagen. This model is described in the next section.

**Theoretical framework**
While the notion of reflection in and on practice is examined extensively in the literature, the model of *core reflection* was more recently developed by Korthagen and Vasalos as an extension of Korthagen's earlier reflective model, known as the ALACT model (Korthagen, 2001). In the ALACT model, Korthagen proposed that teachers follow a five stage, cyclical model when reflecting on their practice. This began with stage one: **A**ction, and was followed by (2) **L**ooking back on the action; (3) **A**wareness of essential aspects; (4) **C**reating alternative methods of action; and (5) **T**rial of new practices. This then lead back to a new Action phase, and so on. While maintaining a belief in the value of this particular way to reflect on teaching experiences, Korthagen reconceptualised his model, claiming that the original ALACT model focused too much on how teachers *think* about their experiences and not enough on how they *feel* about these experiences and

their responses to them. The core reflection model incorporates deeper levels of reflection that implicate the teacher's sense of *mission* in their work, and their perceptions of professional *identity*. This approach, argued Korthagen, develops a greater awareness of the "less rational sources of teacher behaviour" (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p.5) and provides a more holistic approach to teachers' reflective practice.

To illustrate the levels on which reflection can take place, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) provided the analogy of an onion. In this model the concentric circles or layers of the onion represent the various depths of a person's qualities, starting with the more 'superficial' layers of *behaviours* and *competencies*, followed by *beliefs*, *identity* and *mission*. Korthagen and Vasalos argued that much teacher reflection involves the outer layers of behaviour and competencies, and it is at this level that teachers are often evaluated in respect to their teaching 'quality.'

[Insert Figure 1 here – Onion model]

Korthagen and Vasalos (2004), however, maintained that it is at the deeper levels, particularly those of identity and mission that the true 'essence' of a teacher resides. Core reflection aims to explore and examine a teacher's/teacher educator's practice both at the outer level, but more importantly, at these deeper levels. Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) also argued that:

> by formulating the ideal situation, together with the factors experienced as inhibiting the realisation of that condition, the person has become aware of an inner *tension* or *discrepancy* (italics in original)…The essential thinking here is for the teacher to take a step backward, and to become aware of the fact that she has a choice whether or not to allow these limiting factors to determine her behaviour. (p. 10)

[Insert figure 2 (CR model) here]

According to Korthagen and Vasalos (2005), awareness of such a choice contributes greatly to a person's professional and personal growth and autonomy. Core reflection aims to bring the teacher's *core qualities* to the fore, so that these can be identified and utilised to overcome obstacles and to achieve their ideal teaching situation. Core qualities may be constituted as blends or intersections of three elements: *thinking* (for example, clarity, creativity, objectivity); *feeling* (openness, sensitivity, care, compassion); and *wanting* (strength, commitment, intention, initiative), and can be used to explore the authentic self, or the 'real me,' that teachers invest in their work. This aspect of Korthagen and Vasalos' work draws heavily on the work of so-called positive psychologists such as Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) who focus on people's strengths rather than their problems or deficits. The core reflection model was used as the theoretical framework for analysis of the data in the current study, and enabled 'reflective conversations' (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998) to be better understood and the implications for teaching practice to be examined.

**Context of the study**
*Judy*
The self-study that is featured in this paper was undertaken following my attendance at a self-study retreat at Warrenmang winery, Victoria, Australia in February 2008, at which Fred Korthagen and Angelo Vasalos presented their core reflection model. I was interested in pursuing the idea of emotions within the context of reflection on practice, as in my experience as a beginning teacher educator, conversations involving a deeper level of reflection, particularly that which tapped into the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning, were not commonplace among teacher educators. After considering how I could apply Korthagen and Vasalos' model in my own work, I

decided to propose a trial of the use the core reflection model with a teacher educator colleague, Kerith.

*Kerith*

For me, the reasons for participating in the study were to explore and improve my practice through conversations with Judy, mainly about my teaching in a Literacy Education unit for first year undergraduate students in a Bachelor of Education (Primary) course, and postgraduate mature age students in a Graduate Diploma (Early Childhood) course. When Judy first approached me with the idea of engaging in a structured reflective process about my teaching in semester one, 2008, I believed that the timing was excellent. I had just completed my first year of teaching in a new institution and my confidence about teaching was low. In this new position I had co-taught the large first year cohort in literacy education mentioned above, and the unit evaluations had scored in the low range compared with the same unit of study taught on a different campus by different lecturers. While I knew that I was not personally responsible for the design elements of the low score, I was concerned that my inexperience in the unit content and novice level institutional knowledge could have contributed to students' low estimation of the quality of the unit. I understood the core reflection model was to reflect in a structured way about my teaching at the beginning, middle and end of the semester. I chose to reflect on the large first year unit, because my responsibilities had increased and I was to co-ordinate as well as teach the unit in 2008.

**Methodology**

The self-study presented in this paper occurred over the course of first semester 2008. Our conversations consisted of three, one hour reflections about Kerith's teaching over the course of the semester – in February, May and July. For the purposes of this paper, only data from the first session is included. There was no formal interview schedule, but the foci of discussion were: teaching background, beliefs about learning and teaching that influenced Kerith's practice; her 'ideal' teaching/learning environment (that is, what was important to her in her pedagogy); and possible obstacles and problems that might be preventing Kerith from achieving her ideals. These elements of the core reflection workshop model (see Figure 2) were referred to in order to take the conversation towards uncovering how these components influenced Kerith's perceptions of her teaching practice.

*Data*

Data included in this paper consists of notes taken during the first session, an entry in Judy's research diary in which personal reflections after the session were noted, and Kerith's reflections on her experience of the core reflection process, which were emailed to Judy at the end of the semester. These data were elaborated into full written text, and analysed with reference to the literature, in particular to Korthagen and Vasalos' various writings on the core reflection model. The text was coded according to references made to essential concepts of the core reflection model, and links made to the wider literature on reflective practice. This analytical framework enabled ideas to emerge that were grounded in the data, but also strongly focused the analysis on the key ideas of *core ideals* and *obstacles,* which are central to the core reflection model.

**Results and discussion**

In this section the results from the first core reflection session, and subsequent personal reflections are presented and then discussed by each participant. Firstly, Judy presents her findings from the perspective of facilitator, based on notes taken during the session. This is followed by the corresponding entry in her research diary which was written after the session. Next, Kerith's thoughts on the core reflection process are presented. These were emailed to Judy after the three sessions had been concluded but before she had read Judy's interpretation of the data and her diary entries. At the end of the section, final thoughts about the core reflection process are presented by Judy and Kerith.

***Session 1- Judy's interpretation of the data***

In the first session, Kerith expressed concerns about her teaching practice due to student evaluations of the same unit the previous year  not being as good as Kerith had hoped. Her aims for the first semester of 2008 were to improve her pedagogy and her relationships with students. It emerged that one of Kerith's core beliefs concerned the importance of the students, and their experiences and voices, in the learning process. When asked what her 'ideal' learning environment was, Kerith responded that this would involve student teachers making their own links between theory and practice, and between what they were presented with at university and what they experienced in the field on practicum. Unfortunately, Kerith did not have great "faith in students making their own links" so she felt that she had to make some of these links for them. This was, however, contrary to her ideal of foregrounding students' own voices and experiences, and appeared to be a tension of which  Kerith was aware in her teaching and that caused her some anxiety. While she believed that learning should be student centred, she often felt that she had to 'teach' them in a transmissive way rather than enable them to take responsibility for their own learning. This appeared to be a barrier or obstacle to Kerith achieving her ideal teaching situation.

When asked what she would like to achieve in the first semester of teaching,  Kerith responded that she "wants a safe learning environment, where students take intellectual and emotional risks." Her ideal was to "achieve a safe learning environment for all and to get to know students early in the semester." She said it was important to get to know students early so that she could incorporate who they were into her teaching. She expressed a very strong belief that students' voices and experiences should form the basis of their learning about learning and teaching, and she was "already doing this through thorough planning, and changing my previous approach." When teaching in the unit previously, Kerith felt that she did not have the opportunity to make getting to know her students part of her pedagogical approach. This year  she was "attempting to incorporate students' experiences into my teaching" as she was aware of, and had empathy for, students with diverse backgrounds. She felt, however, that she "doesn't always do this in practice." From my perspective as facilitator, it appeared that Kerith was having difficulty resolving some of the tensions she felt in her teaching at the outer layer of Korthagen's onion model, that is, environment, behaviour and competencies, and that she felt the need to address  these dimensions of her work, so that she could then focus on the inner dimensions of beliefs, identity and mission.

When discussing her teaching practice, Kerith used several words that uncovered the emotional level at which she engaged with her students and in her practice. For example, when asked how she felt about teaching in teacher education, Kerith responded that she doesn't feel comfortable improvising and that she needs to know what she was doing. In the Primary Literacy unit the previous year, Kerith was working with another lecturer who coordinated the unit and provided readings and most lecture content. Therefore, she has little sense of ownership of the content of the unit, and she stated that she felt "embarrassed" and "anxious" in teaching situations such as these. When the teaching and learning situations for students are not managed by Kerith herself she feels a certain lack of control over her pedagogy, and a consequent uneasiness in her teaching and in her relationships with students. She "feels obliged to project an image" of having a certain expertise, but it appeared that in this situation, there was a degree of 'unauthenticity' which made Kerith feel anxious, embarrassed and uncomfortable. This seems to be a result of the teaching context not being her ideal, that is, she felt the need to create a sense of ownership rather than to "project an image" of someone who she was not.

***Reflections on session 1: Judy (immediately following the session)***

*Kerith is a very open and supportive participant in this research. She is willing to talk openly about her teaching experiences, and to expose vulnerabilities and feelings e.g. in the use of words such as*

*"I feel embarrassed, anxious when teaching" and the fact that she thinks students find her intimidating. In my experience, this is unfamiliar language in teacher education discussions*

*I felt quite comfortable using the core reflection model, although I should have delved a bit more deeply when Kerith used 'emotion words' such as those above. I will try to tease these ideas out more next time, as I think that her lack of confidence in the teaching role could be a key to some of her difficulties in teaching – needing to be well organised and prepared to avoid having to improvise, although she believes that this alienates some students. I think that if Kerith can identify this for herself, (which seem to be located within the outer layers of the onion) then she might be perceived by students as being more approachable – perhaps let students get to know her better, as she intends to get to know them better (one of her goals). We identified similar concerns in this area – I am often anxious and lacking in confidence in teaching, even after all these years. So this process might be good for me too in terms of my own teaching, and how I perceive myself in my role as teacher educator. I can perhaps gain some insights from Kerith's experiences to understand my own.*

*I can see a clear connection between self-belief, emotions, ideals, identity, and teaching practice (all the layers of the onion) – so much of who we are goes into our teaching. If Kerith is hesitant to let students know who she is, then maybe this is an obstacle that she needs to overcome. This is my perception after just one session – to what extent do I let my perceptions lead the way in the discussion, rather than let Kerith find these connections for herself? This is one of the questions that will guide me in the core reflection process over the next few months. I found this first session to be very positive, and hopefully will be of benefit to both of us, and to our students.*

### Reflections on session 1: Kerith (at the end of the process)
*The initial session was very helpful to me as some of the questions were about my feelings and I had not really realised the extent of my fear of being negatively judged and the low level of my confidence. It also helped me in planning terms, as I think having a sympathetic professional listener is a really effective way to elicit good planning. It seems a bit like having a clinical supervision session. I'm not sure where the cut-off is between Judy's personal qualities as a good listener and the structure of the questioning process, that is, the specific questions she asked. It was really good value for the effort it took, it seems like a very low key 'natural' process for the participant.*

### Outcomes of the study – professional learning and identity
*Judy*

When reflecting on her participation in the core reflection process a couple of months after the last of the three sessions, Kerith responded that it was "good to be listened to" and that it had shifted her thinking about herself as a person and a teacher. She also raised the issue of needing to be aware of the boundary between core reflection and counselling, an issue also raised by Korthagen and Vasalos (2005). They noted that "core reflection will sometimes inevitably touch upon issues beyond the professional domain" but that while professional learning via core reflection does aim to go deeper it should not emphasise negative feelings such as those "connected to traumatic childhood experiences." Rather, core reflection should focus on "the richness of one's inner potential [and] one's inner sources of inspiration" (p. 20). Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) argued that teachers naturally reflect on their practice, but that often the prevailing teaching context and pressures of work "encourages a focus on obtaining a 'quick fix'…rather than shedding light on the underlying issues" (p.4). It appeared from Kerith's experiences that core reflection helped her to shed light on the underlying issues of lack of confidence and the importance of authenticity in her teaching. It also highlighted the fact that the layers of the onion model are all interrelated and that functionality at one level is often connected to functionality at other levels. For example, when Kerith felt confident in her teaching environment (outer layer) and in her teaching competencies

(third layer), then she felt that her beliefs (fourth level) and mission (inner layer) in teaching could be more fully realised. The core reflection sessions provided collegial support for both Kerith and myself to talk about issues that we were not comfortable discussing, or did not have the opportunity to discuss, with other colleagues in a more public environment. This socially supportive context helped us to explore notions of professional identity, that is, our sense of who we are as teacher educators, in a trusting and open way. It is not just about what we *do,* but who we *are.*

*Kerith*
After reading the Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) article expanding on the 'ALACT' model of reflection to include core reflection, and having more comprehension of what Judy was trying to achieve in my professional development, reading Judy's interpretations using the 'onion' metaphor of levels of reflection makes more sense. While I have some reservations about the concept of a 'unitary self' implicit in psychological explanations of human behaviour and would rather subscribe to concepts involving multiple re-positionings in response to changing contexts, the core reflection technique seems to have helped to improve my teaching. While I was not explicitly aware of the model Judy was using during our three discussions, I think the fact that similar questions were repeated in each of the three sessions set up a cyclical process that allowed my reflections to 'deepen' more towards the 'core' of the onion. Her skill as a facilitator set up a safe interpersonal environment in which I could take risks, without being drawn into revelations that were so personal that they might later lead to embarrassment. Increased confidence seemed to contribute towards my ability to relate more openly and less defensively in the classroom. During the semester in which we were carrying out the reflections I felt more confident in how the course and unit objectives and structures at the university intersected with my prior content knowledge and experience as a practitioner and lecturer. Unless I am aware of the specifics of the students' teaching contexts I have to work hard to establish my credibility with them. This is important if one's teaching depends, as mine seems to, on the relationships we construct together in the classroom. Core reflection helped me, in a socially supported environment, to examine some of the contextual issues that were troubling me at the time, and to improve my teaching in light of these new understandings. I was able to identify, in some instances for the first time explicitly, personal qualities that I have that impact on my practice in positive and negative ways. This awareness helped me to examine my practice in a new light, and to make changes that I believe improved my teaching and my students' learning.

**Conclusions**
The findings from this pilot study suggested that the core reflection model was a valuable tool for the participants in seeking to understand their practice and to improve their pedagogy, and in turn, to improve their students' learning in teacher education. The findings presented in this paper highlight several important issues. The main conclusions were that:

- *It is important to acknowledge the social dimension of reflecting on our work as teacher educators, and to create opportunities to engage in collegial conversations to establish trust as the basis for further discussions about practice and pedagogy. These conversations provide an opportunity to explore not only our teacher education practices but our teacher educator identity.*

The study illustrated the importance of opportunities for genuine reflective conversations (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998) and for teacher educators to be listened to by trusted colleagues. This is especially important for new and beginning teacher educators as they transition into the profession. Research has shown that there is a strong connection between professional identity, self-efficacy and collegiality (Dinkelman, Margolis & Sikkenga, 2006a, 2006b; Ritter, 2007, Williams, 2008), and that opportunities for collegial interactions are an important part of the development of a professional identity as a teacher educator. Results from the current study suggested that core

reflection was a valuable means by which Kerith and Judy were able to facilitate their learning and identity construction in a collegial context. The findings of this study support making deliberate efforts to establish reciprocal collegial conversations as part of our professional culture, and the 'core reflection' process as a valuable tool to do so.

As Korthagen and Vasalos (2008) argued, identification of a person's core qualities or 'character strengths' function as a link between the individual and their learning context or environment, and promotes a sense of "this is who I am" (p. 5). Such a sense of authenticity is a vital ingredient in the mix of experiences and processes that characterise a person's journey of becoming a teacher educator, and this was particularly evident in Kerith's experiences.

- *Identifying particular core qualities that impact on our practice and identity as teacher educator is an important aspect of our professional growth. In Kerith's case, the qualities of 'confidence' and 'authenticity' were particularly important to her professional identity, and an awareness of these helped her to explore and improve her practice*

This self-study provided evidence that identification of core qualities can help in examining one's practice in teacher education. For Kerith, the importance of authenticity and confidence in her work, and how the connection between one's teaching and research interests intersect to inform her pedagogy, provided a platform on which to build more meaningful practice for herself and her students. The study highlighted the importance of Kerith's need to be "who I really am," which is again, closely linked to the notion of authenticity. Kerith's reflections regularly returned to notions of authenticity, confidence, trust, risk-taking and relationship-building, which for her are central to good teaching practice. The core reflection sessions provided an opportunity for her to critically examine some of her beliefs, values and emotions, and to approach her teaching in a somewhat different way as a result. The opportunities for Kerith to examine her core beliefs and practices, and the extent to which she was being 'true to herself,' or authentic, was a key benefit of using the core reflection model. The structured model, and the trust and openness between facilitator and participant, made a valuable contribution to both our understanding of their practice as teacher educators. We would therefore argue that core reflection is a value way in which to explore our identity and practice as teacher educators.

### Implications for teacher education
The use of core reflection in teacher education foregrounds the importance of the 'whole person' in the learning and teaching process, and how it is vital to enable teacher educators to tap into their emotions and values in positive ways that enhance the authenticity of their work. While such opportunities are not to be seen as 'quasi-counselling' sessions, this study has shown that exploring practices within teacher education not only from a rational/technical perspective, but from a more holistic, humanistic perspective are essential if teacher educators are to be empowered in their practice. The literature suggests that professional learning opportunities for teacher educators are relatively limited, and our experiences strongly support the use of structured reflection processes, built into the work of teacher educators. As teacher educators we want our student teachers to understand their students as individuals with unique 'funds of knowledge' and personal qualities that they bring to the learning context, and for these understandings to inform their pedagogy. The research discussed in this paper highlights the importance of 'practicing what we preach' by recognising the funds of knowledge and unique individual qualities that teacher educators also bring to their work. It recognises that teacher educators are learners too, and that the principles of learning through reflection that we encourage in our student teachers should be applied to our own professional learning and identity. By acknowledging and exploring our vulnerabilities and beliefs, and our core qualities and the obstacles that prevent us from engaging in authentic teaching, it is possible for teacher educators to continue to construct an authentic professional identity, and to more closely examine and improve their teaching and learning practices.

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Figure 1: Core reflection 'onion' model (copyright IML, Amsterdam, 2001.)

## The onion model

Environment — What do I encounter?
(What am I dealing with?)

Behavior — What do I do?

Competencies — What am I competent at?

Beliefs — What do I believe?

Identity — Who am I (in my work)?

MIssion — What inspires me?
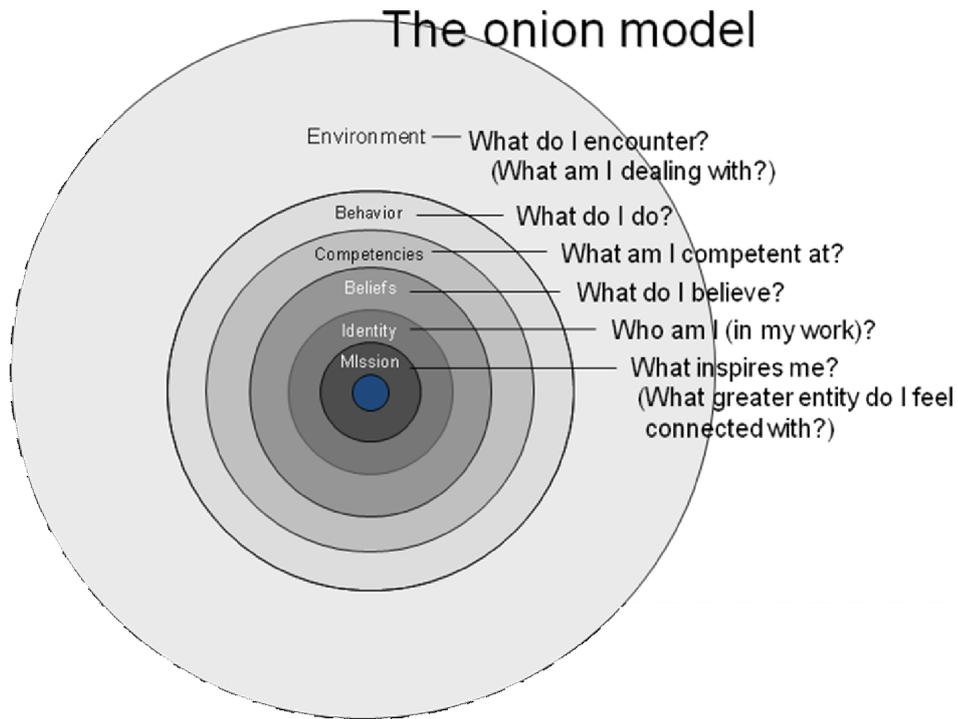(What greater entity do I feel
connected with?)

Figure 2: Core reflection workshop model  (provided by Korthagen and Vasalos)

**Ideal**

*Flow*

**Core qualities**

**PROBLEM**

**SITUATION**

**OBSTACLE**