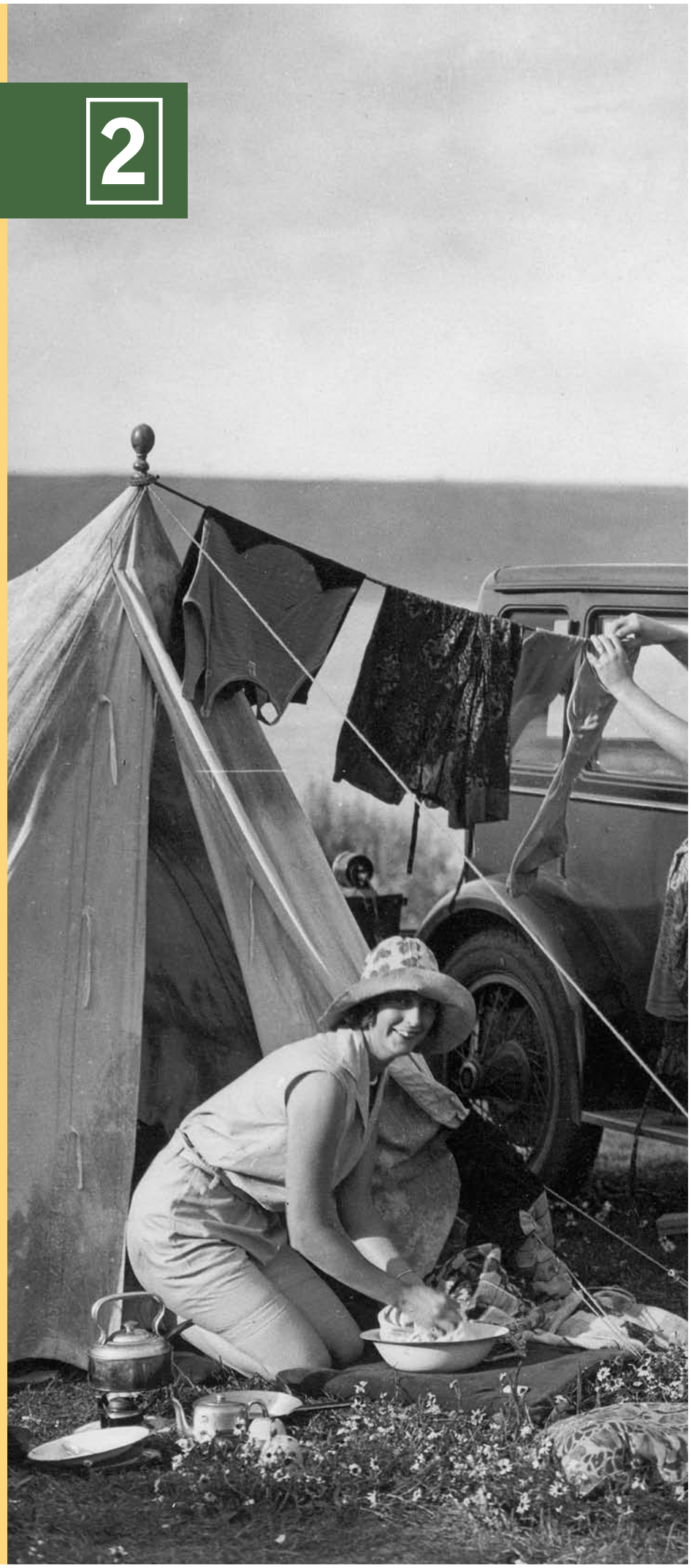
Reflective Social Studies Teaching 2

Sarah Suez had a great plan to teach her first-grade class about the concept of time: She asked her students to construct a large timeline about recreation in the 20th century. Each student was responsible for depicting some form of 20th century recreation. She provided them with construction paper and picture clues such as this photo of auto camping in the 1920s.

At the end of the project, students answered questions about the timeline. Ms. Suez covered up parts of it and prompted students to remember what happened in that time period. She also had students turn away from the timeline after studying it and try to recall the order in which things occurred. Students had success with these informal assessments, and Ms. Suez felt comfortable that her instruction was working until the next part of the activity.

Ms. Suez next asked students to pick their favorite item from the timeline and compare it to another item from the timeline. Students selected the second item by counting backward or forward about seventy-five years from the date of the first item. She wanted them to be able to describe how life had changed over the seventy-five-year period, which is an average life span. Students had significant difficulty with this task, particularly with conceptualizing a seventy-five-year period of time.

Ms. Suez realized that she would have to provide students with tangible examples of "seventy-five years" in order for them to understand the concept. She decided to use her mother's life as an example. Ms. Suez recalled research suggesting that students begin to develop temporal understanding around the first grade, but they need concrete examples to support their developing understanding. Her reflections on this research caused her to change her lesson plan and construct another activity focused on temporal understanding. She made the adaptation because her students struggled with the assignment, demonstrating how important it is for teachers to reflect during instruction.



CHAPTER OUTLINE

Ms. Suez's experience teaching her students about the concept of time demonstrates that effective teaching is a process that requires consistent reflection on practice and a willingness to act on one's reflections. Acts of reflection, such as Ms. Suez's realization that her students needed help understanding a seventy-five-year period, are most appropriately embedded in the pedagogical practices of planning and teaching. As teachers implement their plans through acts of teaching, they are establishing contexts for **reflection**. Whether a teacher reflects during or after a planning and teaching period is not central to the process. What is central is that the reflection take place and that teachers act on their reflections in some meaningful and productive manner. This chapter argues for consistent and deliberate reflection and provides examples of how reflection informs social studies planning and teaching. Given the nature of the subject matter in social studies, reflection is particularly important. Elementary social studies curricula tend to be vague and less emphasized than other areas such as math and language arts. Elementary teachers must think very carefully about how to teach and integrate social studies in their classrooms.

Reflection To reflect or think about something carefully; formal reflection may include the use of particular repeatable procedures for careful thinking.

What Is Reflection?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Identify the need for reflection in everyday teaching.

Distinguish between reflection in action and reflection on action.

Analyze how reflection fits into the teaching cycle.

In the 1980s, Donald Schön introduced the idea that reflection is a critical component of professional practice in education and other professions. Schön (1983) suggested that professionals should consistently and systematically reflect in action and reflect on action. Reflection in action might be thought of as thinking on your feet. We certainly can appreciate the importance of this in an elementary classroom. A class full of energetic children might be one of the most dynamic and fluid professional environments that exists. Without the ability to "think on her feet," a teacher would be severely limited, but professional reflection includes more than just thinking on your feet. It must also include a reasoned post-event action. In other words, teachers must also reflect after they teach—what Schön called reflect on action. Reflection in and on professional practice in education allows teachers to adapt to changing educative conditions and account for new ideas and unforeseen circumstances.

REFLECTION IN ACTION

How can teachers actually reflect during their instructional practice? Often teachers will pause, physically or mentally, to rethink something that is not working. This kind of adaptation is in fact a hallmark of good teaching. Essentially, it means that teachers understand that action in the classroom is not static and can never be perfectly predicted. Instead of trying to predict what will happen in a class, reflective teachers maintain flexibility by preparing a variety of options for what they plan to teach. This allows teachers to choose what will work best in their classroom.

The most common forms of reflection in action are informal. We expect teachers to respond to new conditions as they emerge in the classroom, but at the same time we do not want teachers to just react to problems. Reflection is not simply putting out fires. Instead, reflective teachers need to expect the unexpected during their teaching. As is illustrated in FIGURE 2.1, reflec-

FIGURE 2.1

The teacher in Figure 2.1 is willing to listen to her student as he tries to make sense of a story in his textbook. Why is it important for the teacher to reflect as she works with her student?

tive teachers can solve teaching problems in a positive and productive way by opening themselves to the idea that teaching can be adaptive and even experimental.

REFLECTION ON ACTION

After a teaching and learning episode, one of the most important intellectual tasks confronting a teacher is systematic reflection. Reflection on action allows teachers to consider what went right and what went wrong. Far too often teachers get stuck in the rut of looking ahead and planning for the next lesson without considering where they have been. In order to prepare for the next day, teachers have to consider what their students have achieved to date, and that requires reflection. Meaningful reflection on action should include a deliberate effort to see the teaching and learning events that just unfolded as a narrative, or story. Just like the events in a story, teaching and learning episodes are full of unexpected occurrences, twists, and turns. When teachers reflect, they are thinking about unforeseen events, mistakes, or unresolved problems from a classroom teaching experience and trying to generate some resolution (just like the resolution to a story!).

What does reflection on action look like? Read the following internal monologue of a student teacher thinking about teaching and consider the purpose of the reflection and what this teacher resolved through reflection.

Leaders and Followers: Coaxing Participation of Shy Students, by Jenelle Smith

I thought my students were going to love my lesson on colonial Georgia. I developed what I thought was an interesting and personal lesson on comparisons between life in colonial Georgia and life in Georgia today. I planned for students to learn about clothing, housing, schooling, and employment and to think about the advantages that they may have today over children who lived in colonial times. First, I gave students a letter written by a young girl named Elizabeth who lived at that time. In the letter, Elizabeth talks about colonial schools, transportation, clothing, and housing. The students answered questions comparing Elizabeth's life to their own everyday lives today.

For the main activity, students sat in groups. I gave each group a laminated card, which displayed a colonial item they were to assemble. The items included a horn book, a quill pen, a pomander ball, and a whirligig, along with assembly instructions. Each group took turns describing their object to the other students. They appeared to really enjoy this lesson, but that is not to say it went over without incident. As happens often with group work, there were students who completed the majority of the work for the group, and students who sat back and let the others finish the task. I thought this happened because my grouping strategy did not compel shy students to participate.

In an attempt to adjust this lesson for the following periods, I selected the groupings before the students came to class. These groups were based on the students' personalities and work habits. I placed students that were less likely to take charge with those I was certain would do just that. In a further effort to guarantee participation of all students, I assigned a group leader, based on past behavior and participation habits. The leader was in charge of making sure each group member had a job in the activity. I hoped that this would improve participation for those students who were more likely to leave the work to others, whether it was through laziness or shyness. I found that participation

was much higher with the prearranged grouping and the group leaders. The students I selected as leaders did a great job at keeping their classmates motivated.

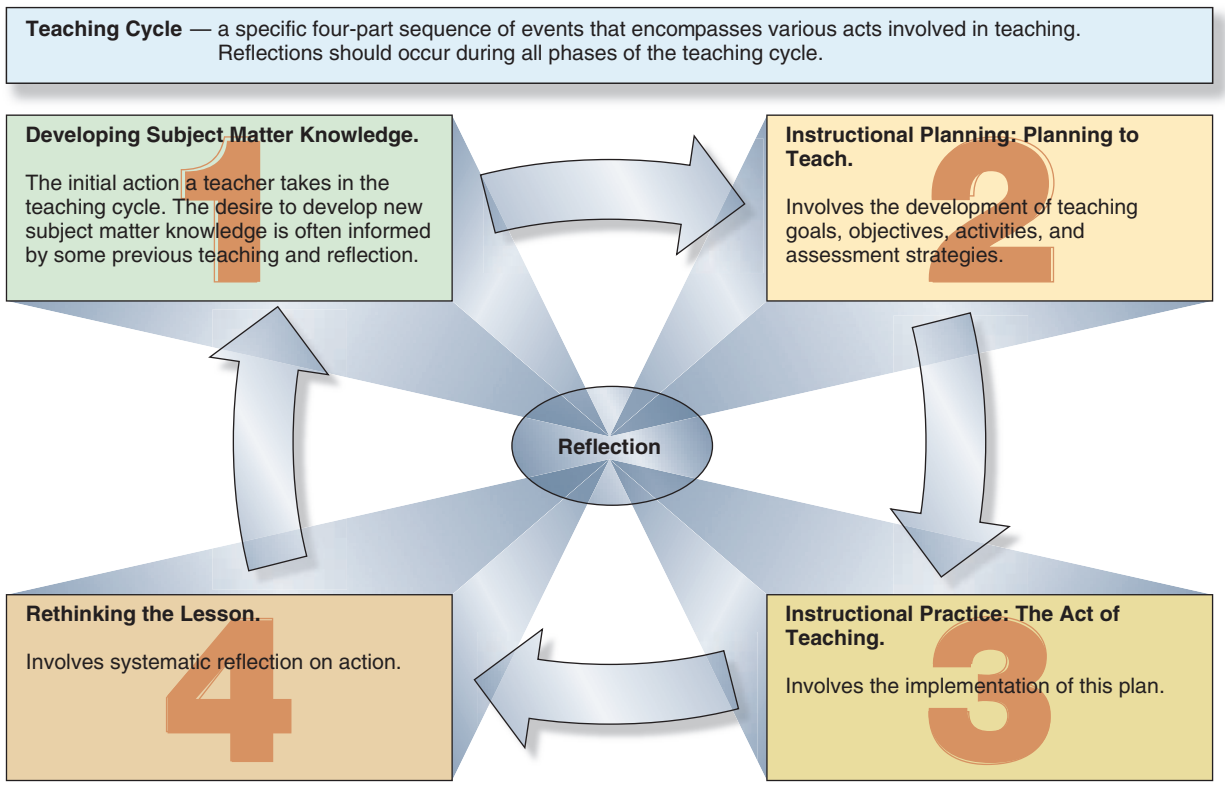
In a further effort to ensure equal group participation, especially from those who were shy, each student was to complete a step in the construction of their assigned item. The instructions I gave to each group were arranged by steps, so this adjustment was an easy one to make. To avoid bickering over the steps, the students counted off. Their number was the step assigned to them. Giving each student a specific job really helped ensure participation. Ultimately, I found that what I tried worked pretty well, and I really learned how important it is to constantly think about my teaching.

Schön's ideas about reflection in and on action are only two ways to conceptualize the act of reflection. We might also think about reflection as being part of a cycle of thinking. Reflection is one critical component in the development of knowledge about how to teach—what we call pedagogical knowledge. In fact, pedagogical knowledge cannot be developed or sustained without reflection. The **reflective teaching cycle** Process Diagram, FIGURE 2.2, describes a process for teaching with reflection.

Teaching cycle
A specific four-part sequence of events that encompasses various acts involved in teaching.

Process Diagram

The reflective teaching cycle FIGURE 2.2



The teaching cycle displayed in the diagram includes four major phases: developing subject matter knowledge, planning to teach, the act of teaching, and rethinking the lesson. Reflection should occur during all four phases of the teaching cycle. Developing subject matter knowledge is typically the initial action a teacher takes in the teaching cycle, but these learning experiences are often informed by some previous teaching and reflection. Instructional planning involves the development of teaching goals, objectives, activities, and assessment strategies. Instruction involves the implementation of this plan, and rethinking involves systematic reflection on action.

CONCEPT CHECK STOP

Imagine you are teaching about 1950s culture in the United States. The image of this Washington, D.C., diner represents this unique period of time in American cultural life.

How might students with different cultural backgrounds react differently to the image?

How might reflecting on possible student reactions play out in a teaching episode?

What adjustments might you make if not all students recognize this image as a soda shop?

What if some students have never heard of a soda shop or a diner?

Reflection Prior to Instruction

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Identify how to reflect on subject matter knowledge derived from personal interests.

Distinguish between curricular and personal subject matter.

Analyze the reflective process as it relates to subject matter misunderstandings.

Identify the role of reflection in instructional planning.

One specific form of reflection for all teachers occurs in the process of developing **subject matter knowledge**. For example, teachers often reflect on their personal interests in the process of learning new subject matter. Think about your favorite topic in social studies and why you are interested in the topic. Your interests can serve as a starting point for reflection. Think about why people who live in your city would be interested in the history of the area. Your thinking about those interests is reflection on subject matter. At the same time, teachers must develop curricular-based subject matter knowledge regardless of their personal interests. The interplay between personal interests and the demands of curriculum is also a subject of reflection for teachers. Teachers constantly make decisions about how to spend their time learning new material. These decisions occur during and after reflection.

Subject matter knowledge
Understanding about content in a specific academic area, such as history.

Reflection on subject matter presumes that we are always seeking to enhance or improve our understanding of some topic. Reflection on subject matter focuses not just on what we know and what curriculum requires us to teach about, but also our misunderstandings of that subject matter. These reflections on misunderstandings allow us to improve our knowledge about what we teach and thus be better able to teach. One commonly misunderstood area is the causes of the American Civil War. Often people try to distill these causes to a short list or even a single cause. Reflection generally leads people to a realization that the causes of the Civil War were complex and, as historian Edward Ayers has said, emotional and uninformed.

Reflection allows teachers to consider what they know about their students, the curriculum, and the community in which they teach. Through reflection, teachers begin to reshape and reform their knowledge of subject matter for pedagogical contexts. Knowing about the American Civil War is one thing, but knowing how and what to teach about the Civil War is another. Reflection on what you know about the Civil War given a need to teach about the subject should change what you know about the subject.

PERSONAL SUBJECT MATTER INTERESTS

Each of us has a set of personal likes and dislikes, experiences, and interests that drive our personal quests for knowledge. Professional growth is dependent on using our personal interests of subject matter to motivate us to continually develop our knowledge. Unless we have some well-developed context, such as personal interests, into which we place our new understandings, we will most likely be limited in our opportunities for growth. Consider planning for a lesson on space. A teacher who is interested in space or space travel will be compelled by his or her interest to study a wide range of topics related to space. Absent that personal interest, teachers must rely on external motivators such as curriculum, parental expectations, or school administrative requirements for turning in lessons.

Sometimes our quest for new knowledge is driven by a desire to address a subject matter knowledge deficit. There are many events that might help us realize our subject matter deficiencies. Often these events are social or academic. For example, we might have a conversation with another teacher or a friend and realize that our knowledge is limited. Or, we might take a class in college and find out that there are large gaps in our knowledge of content. As teachers, we should continually give ourselves opportunities to find out what we do not know. These opportunities to grow in our knowledge of subject matter will make us better teachers.

FOCUSING ON CURRICULAR SUBJECT MATTER

Teachers have a professional obligation to continually develop their knowledge of curricular subject matter. Teachers who are employed by a school system are contractually obliged to "know" what they are teaching about as well as morally responsible to not mislead their students and others about the subject matter. Elementary teachers have considerable responsibilities with regard to what they know. They must develop knowledge in all academic areas and consider how these bodies of knowledge interact. Given these conditions, reflection on understanding of curricular subject matter is particularly important in elementary settings.

How can teachers enhance their knowledge of curricular subject matter through reflection? First, the process requires engagement with curriculum at local, state, and national levels. Let's look at a specific example of how teachers might reflect on some curricular subject matter. Consider the curricular requirement that social studies should include instruction about major world religions. One way to approach religion in elementary social studies is to focus on the three major world religions, which were all founded in the Middle East and, in some way, owe their origin to Abraham (see "Lesson" on pp. 38–39). A lesson on a topic such as religion will often generate questions from students. Such questions can promote reflection and, if engaged, should lead to a deeper understanding of the pedagogy of the subject matter.

REFLECTING ON SUBJECT MATTER MISUNDERSTANDINGS

We all have misunderstandings about subject matter. We considered misunderstandings about the causes of the Civil War earlier. Think of a subject matter misunderstanding you might have corrected at some point in your life. For example, maybe you could not remember the original 13 American colonies or confused the dates of historical events. If you have corrected these misunderstandings (or when you correct them!), it will probably be because you were either unsatisfied with your knowledge or unsure about what you knew. Being unsatisfied or unsure usually results from reflection, or taking the time to think about what we know and do not know. Too frequently, teachers develop subject matter knowledge at a hurried pace—without enough time to reflect. It is often an unfortunate reality that teachers are trying to stay a day ahead of students. Reflection can help ameliorate the problem of limited or shallow subject knowledge that results from teaching conditions in which teachers, particularly new teachers, have to learn subject matter as they teach.

Reflection aimed at uncovering misunderstandings requires that teachers are willing to recognize their limitations. When working with children who are developing new knowledge, teachers must have confidence in

their own subject matter knowledge, but of course there is a danger with not being open to our knowledge limitations. Accepting what we do not understand and then considering why we do not understand something can lead us to the pursuit of new knowledge, which might correct a misunderstanding or extend our knowledge in unforeseen ways.

For example, it is not uncommon for people to misunderstand regional climate due to mistaken generalities about expected temperatures. A teacher might encounter this misunderstanding when planning to teach or while actually teaching. The goal is not to get everything right the first time, but to be reflective enough to realize when something is wrong. Let's consider one specific misunderstanding about climate in the United States.

If we look at a map such as the one in FIGURE 2.3, we might expect places such as Flagstaff, Arizona, and Charlotte, North Carolina, to have similar climates.

Both cities are about 35 degrees north of the equator, but Flagstaff has much colder winters with an average temperature that is 10 degrees colder than that of Charlotte. Flagstaff also averages over 100 inches of snow per year, while Charlotte only averages 6 inches. So, if the two cities are at about the same place relative to the equator, why are the climates so different? The climate difference between the two cities is due to Flagstaff's elevation at 6,905 feet above sea level. In this case, the simple application of the principle of climate similarity based on latitude resulted in a misunderstanding. As this example illustrates, we must always be willing to consider new knowledge.

Climate in the United States FIGURE 2.3

Common misunderstandings about climate can occur due to mistaken generalizations. When viewing this map, students might assume that Flagstaff, Arizona, and Charlotte, North Carolina, have similar climates, but that is not the case. Other factors affect the climate.

LESSON

The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

INTRODUCTION

The three religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share a striking similarity. All three religions believe in the same God. Despite this similarity, many people think of these religions as being different or even in conflict. In fact they have not always lived easily together, but there were times of harmony—most notably in Islamic Spain, when the three religions mostly coexisted side by side. All three religions trace their spiritual heritage to one person named Abraham and all share a belief in one God—the God of Abraham. In this activity, children will describe the genealogical relationships between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Consider the following fourth- or fifth-grade lesson on the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). As you read the lesson, reflect on the complications that accompany teaching about religion.

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of this lesson is to identify events relating to similarities between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students will use this information in either a story or a series of illustrations to show the relationships between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

PROCEDURES

In this lesson students will develop a timeline of events related to the origin of each of the Abrahamic religions. Students should incorporate the events listed below into a timeline. Also, all of the dates for these events are based on a Christian calendar. Students should know this and should be challenged to consider why we use a Christian calendar.

- Abraham is born in Ur, a city in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq)—about 1991 B.C.
- Abraham has two sons, Isaac and Ishmael—about 1905 and 1891 B.C., respectively
- The Jews, who were Abraham's descendents from his son Isaac, travel to Egypt and are enslaved—1500 to 1300 B.C.
- Abraham's descendents from his son Ishmael settle to the south of Mesopotamia, establishing Arabia—1500 to 1300 B.C.
- Jewish exodus from Egypt led by Moses—1300 B.C.
- Saul, David, and Solomon establish the Jewish Kingdom of Israel—1000 B.C.
- Jesus (the founder of Christianity) is born in Israel to a Jewish family descended from Isaac—1 A.D.
- Jesus dies—33 A.D.
- Roman Empire adopts Christianity—300 A.D.
- Muhammad (founder of Islam) is born in Arabia to an Arab family descended from Ishmael—570 A.D.
- Muhammad dies—632 A.D.
- The Crusades—1095 to 1291 A.D.
- Islamic Spain—1150 to 1492 A.D.

When the timeline is complete, students should study their work and answer the following question:

> *Given your timeline, what are the connections between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?*

To some degree, all of the events in the timeline are controversial and unsettled. For the most part, the closer in time an event is to today, the more evidence we have to support that event. For example, we have plenty of evidence from various sources to verify that the Crusades occurred from about 1000 to 1200 A.D. and that Muslims controlled Spain from 1150 to 1450 A.D.. We have much less evidence about Abraham's birth and the lives of his sons Isaac and Ishmael. After

La Mezquita Mosque in Cordoba, Spain. Originally built as an Umayyad Islamic mosque in the 9th century, it represents a unique and historic confluence of Islamic, Christian, and Jewish culture. After over 400 years as a mosque, a Christian church was built inside; all the while Jews dominated the intellectual and cultural scene in Cordoba. For centuries, these three religions existed and in many ways thrived side by side in Cordoba.

students complete the timeline, they should write an explanation for why the older events are less historically certain than the more recent events and also should explain the consequences of the uncertainty of the older events.

After students have completed their work on this question, the teacher should lead a class discussion about the similarities between the religions and introduce other similarities including the following:

- All three religions are monotheistic (belief in one God).
- The story of creation is consistent in all three religions.
- All three feature basic laws, given by God.
- They all describe a route to personal salvation.
- All three religions include ideas of heaven and hell.

ASSESSMENT

The primary assessment should be a separate activity in which students write a story or draw an illustration that describes how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are similar. The teacher should give students very clear expectations about what to write or draw. One possible criterion, which could be provided to students, might include the following:

> *Your story or drawing should include a main idea and at least three pieces of evidence supporting your main idea.*

The teacher can also assess the timeline for accuracy (was the event copied correctly) and event placement on the timeline (was it placed in the correct proportion to other events).

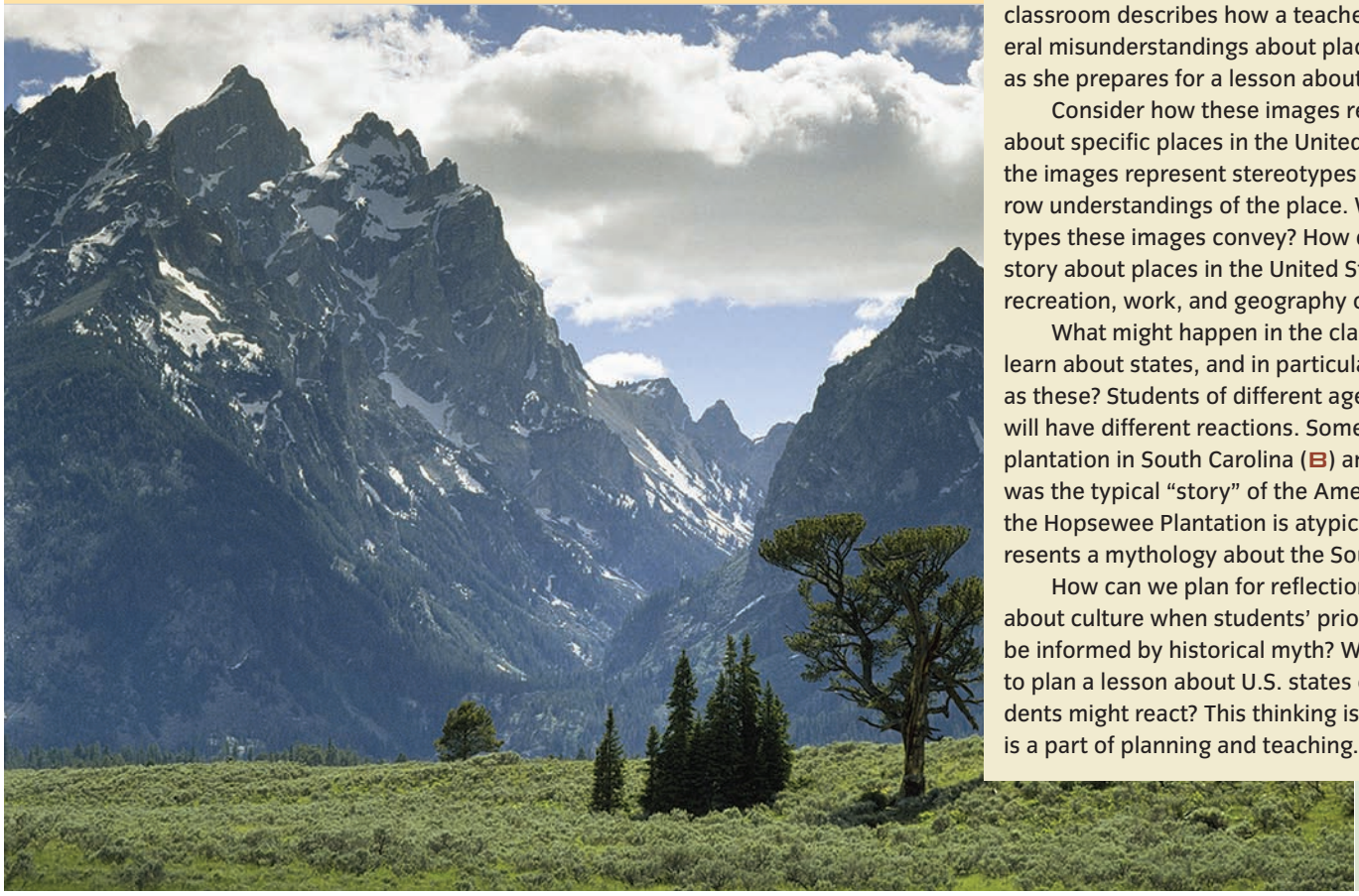
TRANSFORMING SUBJECT MATTER INTO PEDAGOGY

The processes involved in transforming subject matter into pedagogy should include opportunities for reflection. Lee Shulman calls the results of this transformation **pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)**. Pedagogical content knowledge consists of understanding how to teach certain subject matter. PCK is professional knowledge, but it is not necessarily in the form of a lesson plan. For example, a teacher may know that some parts of the story of Cinque, a North American slave who led a slave rebellion in 1839, are not appropriate for younger learners. Before a certain age (perhaps fifth grade) the story of Cinque often takes shape as a heroic tale of a group of people who refused to be enslaved. Later, children might learn more about the conditions that led to the rebellion or may study the legal struggle that resulted from Cinque's capture and subsequent trial for murder.

Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)
Unique forms of knowledge about how to teach that take into account a teacher's knowledge of subject matter, curriculum, learners, and communities, as well as contexts and ends for education.

As teachers transform their knowledge of subject matter into pedagogy, they have to reflect on what they know and why they know it. Teachers might reflect on the students who will be involved in the lesson about Cinque. Should the teacher make any specific adaptations for students? Younger learners might focus on the wrongness of slavery and the struggle of slaves to improve their condition. Older children might study about the complexities of the social system that supported slavery and resisted efforts to end the practice of slavery. These considerations are important because

A Grand Teton, Wyoming.



This visual narrative from a third-grade social studies classroom describes how a teacher might reflect on general misunderstandings about places in the United States as she prepares for a lesson about states in the U.S.

Consider how these images represent knowledge about specific places in the United States. In some ways, the images represent stereotypes and communicate narrow understandings of the place. What are some stereotypes these images convey? How do these images tell a story about places in the United States? Consider climate, recreation, work, and geography of each place.

What might happen in the classroom when students learn about states, and in particular, look at images such as these? Students of different ages and diverse places will have different reactions. Some may see the image of a plantation in South Carolina (B) and think plantation life was the typical "story" of the American South. However, the Hopsewee Plantation is atypical and in some ways represents a mythology about the South.

How can we plan for reflection in action in a lesson about culture when students' prior knowledge stories may be informed by historical myth? What changes are needed to plan a lesson about U.S. states considering how students might react? This thinking is a form of reflection and is a part of planning and teaching.

they cause teachers to think about the scope of their knowledge and the extent to which students should possess the same forms of knowledge.

REFLECTION WHEN PLANNING FOR INSTRUCTION

Meaningful reflection when planning a lesson allows teachers to rethink the fundamental purpose and shape of an instructional lesson. We typically think about instructional lessons as a plan for action in a classroom. They are often written to include certain parts, such as procedures and materials. These lesson parts can be generally applied to multiple classroom settings. This approach to lesson planning is easy to learn and is in fact often distilled into routine procedures.

Some of the more common components of a lesson plan include a lesson opening, a listing of behavioral objectives, connections to standards, procedures, materials, and assessment. All of the information in these categories is essential to quality instruction, but when teachers think in the boxes that confine the categories, they often lose a dynamic character in their lessons. When the planning process is more open and active, lesson plans can be adapted and take shape as learning conditions change.

Reflection during lesson planning should result in lessons being more of a plan of action than a recipe for action. A recipe prescribes a how-to procedure, with little room for adaptation. A reflective lesson plan is structured without closing avenues to possible alterations in the plan. See FIGURE 2.4 "Visualizing: Reflecting on Stereotypes of Places in the United States" for an example of reflecting on teaching students about states in the United States.

Visualizing

Reflecting on Stereotypes of Places in the United States FIGURE 2.4

B Hopsewee Plantation, South Carolina.

C Craftsbury Common, Vermont.

CONCEPT CHECK STOP

Given your knowledge of South Africa,

How do these images of Ndebele men compare with "typical" representations of South Africa?

What misconceptions could arise if one of these pictures were used as a sole representation of Ndebele men?

Reflect on the differences between the two images.

How might these images, if viewed separately, lead to an incomplete understanding of the Ndebele people?

S.S. Skosana was chief minister in the 1980s of KwaNdebele, a region of South Africa inhabited primarily by Ndebele people.

Young Ndebele men in South Africa after a traditional rite of passage: a two-month initiation marking their passing into manhood.

Reflection During and After Instruction

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Recognize the importance of reflecting during instruction.

Identify formal and informal means for reflection during instruction.

Consider how and why teachers should reflect after instruction.

Teaching can be a solitary endeavor. During a lesson, the teacher might be the only adult in the classroom. In elementary classes, teachers have very few opportunities to talk with others about the progress of their lesson. Consider other professions—how many of them require that practitioners operate in such an isolated setting? Can you imagine an accountant who could not immediately consult with another accountant when preparing a tax return? How about a lawyer who would be made to argue a case in a courtroom without assistance or opportunities for on-the-spot professional consultation? Teachers, typically, do not have such luxuries, so they have to develop routines and habits of mind that enable them to support themselves while acting without other professionals in the room. An important part of this procedure is developing the habits of reflection.

REFLECTING DURING TEACHING

Earlier in this chapter, we learned about Schön's notion of reflection in action. Schön imagines that professional practice is "artful doing," a particular way of thinking about professional action. For teachers, this means that instruction can be envisioned as a performance, where teachers direct their actions for an audience of student learners. Of course, there are numerous nuances to teaching as performance. For

one thing, teachers interact with their students on a number of levels: individually, in small groups, or as a whole class. Reflecting during the act of teaching enables teachers to capitalize on the moment and to address many instructional concerns in the moment.

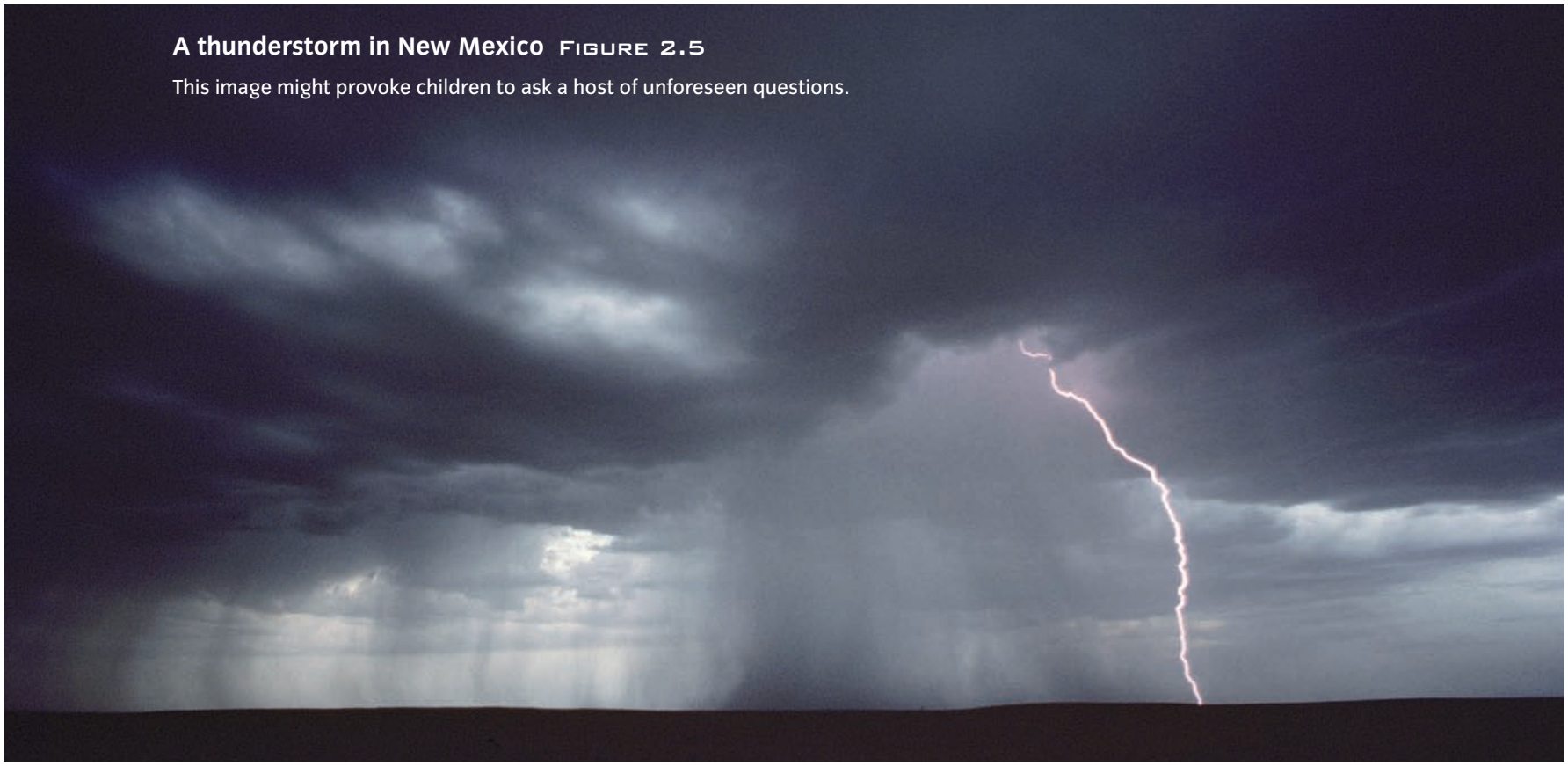
A significant part of reflection in action triggers a process that results in teachers developing new ideas about instruction. These instructional insights might result from a poorly conceived method or an unexpected amount of time being required for an activity. They might also be a product of an unplanned-for level of student misunderstanding or unexpected outcomes.

What do you think of when you see the image in FIGURE 2.5? In a second-grade classroom that is studying weather, children might ask for an explanation of how lightning works. A lot of good social studies teachers might not know the answer. A teacher who is not willing to reflect on this question might just say "I don't know."

A reflective teacher who takes time to think about the consequences of dismissing the question might respond that lightning is a common occurrence, but many people do not know how or why it happens. She might have to admit to not knowing the exact reasons why and how lightning occurs, but could tell students that since lightning is so powerful and potentially harmful, they should find out the answer. What other types of questions would you expect students to ask about lightning in that second-grade class? In a classroom where reflection is not valued, specific facts are taught and questions rarely emerge. Children in classrooms where reflection is valued learn that it is acceptable to explore and ask questions even when the teacher might not know the answer.

REFLECTING AFTER A LESSON

Reflection after a lesson allows teachers to rethink how and why a lesson went the way it did. The most important thing to remember during reflection is that a good lesson plan should look different after it has been taught compared to before. No matter how much teachers know about their students, no lesson can actually predict learning circumstances. It is vital to the process of professional and pedagogical growth for teachers to think about what went right and what went wrong in a lesson. Too often, teachers are unwilling or even afraid to think about what went wrong. But considering the limitations of a lesson does not have to be the same as admitting failure. Most often, problems in the implementation of a lesson are the product of not anticipating some circumstance of learning. Rethinking the lesson plan with knowledge of what happened should result in new pedagogical understandings and growth. In fact, reflection often prompts teachers to seek out new knowledge.



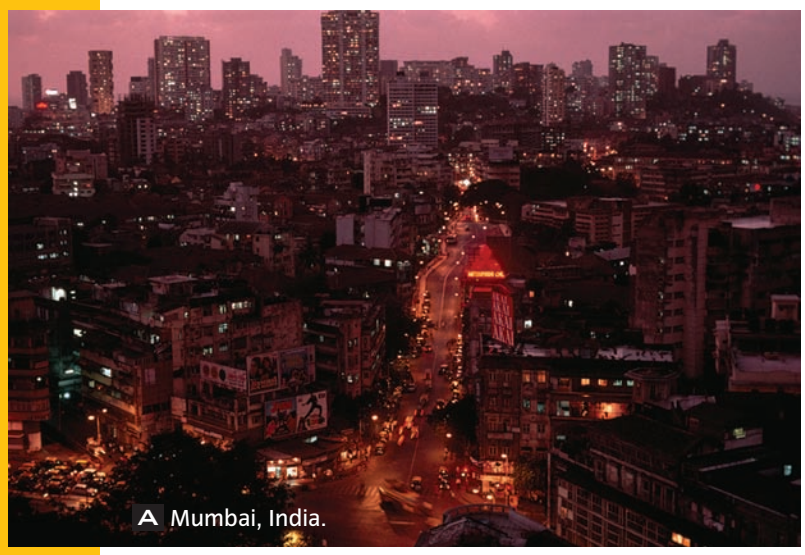
A thunderstorm in New Mexico FIGURE 2.5

This image might provoke children to ask a host of unforeseen questions.

In the Classroom ACCOUNTING FOR STUDENTS' PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

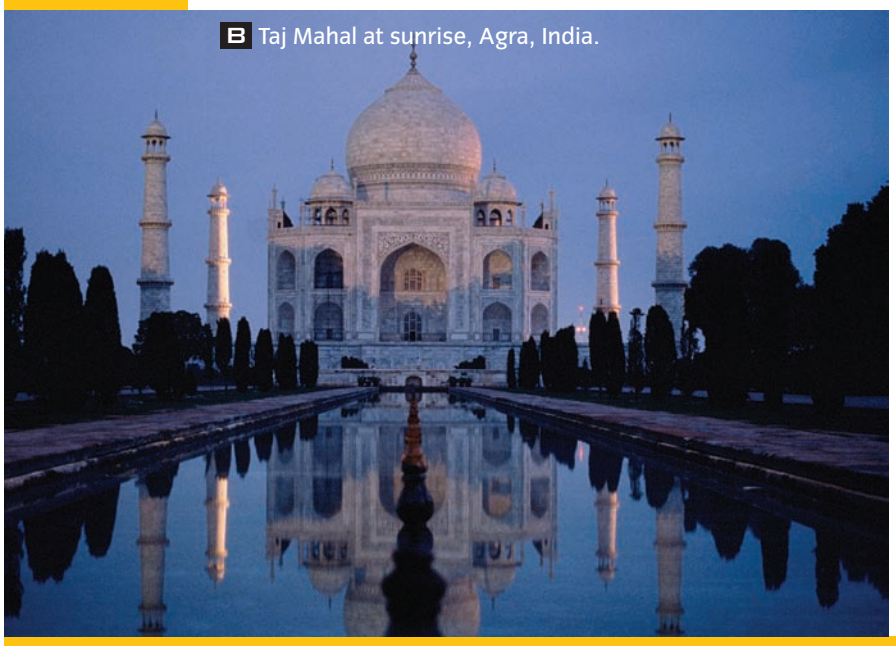
Valeria June's fifth-grade social studies class was studying India. To help her students understand the diversity of life in that country, Ms. June showed her students three images of India. Each image represented something that Ms. June wanted the students to learn about—the modern India, the historical India, and the traditional India.

The first image (A) was of modern Mumbai. Most of her students thought this image of Mumbai was of New York City. The students thought that India did not have high-rise buildings or metropolitan cities like the United States.

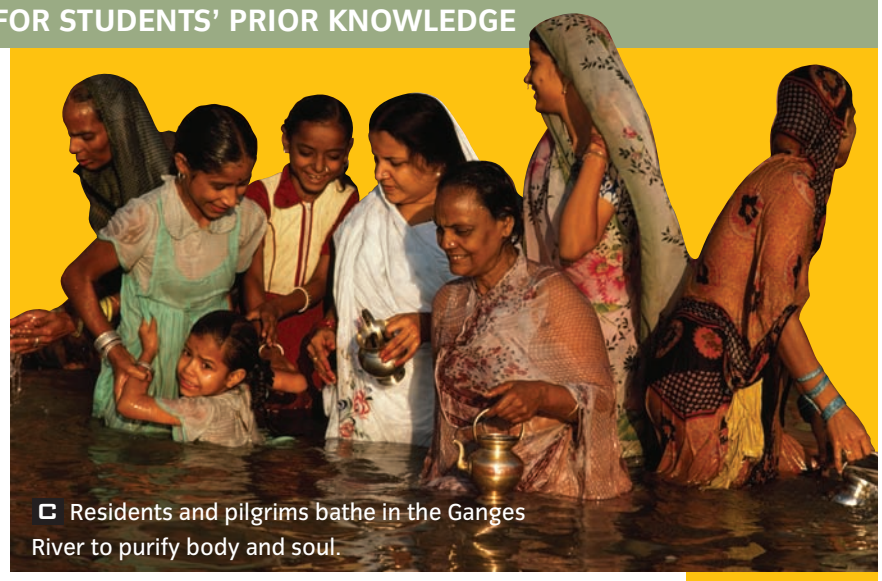


A Mumbai, India.

The next image (B) represented India's past. Most students recognized the Taj Mahal and were either able to name it or place it in some location outside of the United States.



B Taj Mahal at sunrise, Agra, India.



C Residents and pilgrims bathe in the Ganges River to purify body and soul.

The third image (C) was of a ritual Hindu cleansing in the Ganges River. Many of Ms. June's students thought the people in the photo were caught in a flood, and very few were able to place the people in India.

Ms. June began to think about why her students had these impressions about India. She realized that they were informally learning about India outside the classroom. The fact that some of her fifth graders, who had never formally studied India, recognized the Taj Mahal and were able to place it in India was important. Ms. June began to think about how media in the United States create simple representations of places like India using iconic images like the Taj Mahal, but the Taj Mahal by itself gives only a narrow view of India's long history. The building was built by Shah Jahan, a Mughal (Mongolian Muslim) ruler of India. The Mughals ruled India for just over 200 years of India's rich 3,000-year history. During the instruction, Ms. June realized that she needed not only to teach her students something new, but also to help them expand their prior conceptions and ideas about India. This type of reflection was a product of Ms. June's direct and purposeful reflection on her students' actions during class.

Ms. June quickly adapted her lesson to address students' prior misconceptions of Indian culture. She started with a simple graph that illustrated the percentage of Hindus and Muslims, which is about 80% and 14%, respectively. Ms. June had recently read Salman Rushdie's book *Midnight Children* in which two children, one Hindu and one Muslim, are switched at birth and grow up in opposite cultural environments. She shared a simple version of the story with her students and also reviewed the division of Pakistan and Bangladesh from India and noted that both Pakistan and Bangladesh are over 90% Muslim. Her goal was to provide students with an opportunity to explore the diversity of the Indian subcontinent and to expand on students' prior knowledge.

CONCEPT CHECK STOP

Think about "artfully doing" a lesson on community services.

What community services must be in place for the girl in the photo to safely push her baby carriage down the street?

Reflect on your own experiences with community services. How might your experiences with community services influence a lesson on the topic?

Using Reflection to Increase a Teacher's Professional Knowledge

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Describe how reflection relates to the development of professional teacher knowledge.

Compare various forms of reflection that increase professional teacher knowledge.

Being a teacher demands knowledge in areas other than subject matter and pedagogy. Teachers must possess professional knowledge about the learners in their classes, the communities from which these learners come, the curriculum for the classes they teach, and the broad purposes of education. Each of these areas provides context and opportunities for deliberate reflection directed at purposeful growth in **teacher knowledge**.

Teacher knowledge
A formal body of information that comprises our understanding of how to teach.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFLECTING ON THE LEARNER

When we think about children in our classes, we are confronted with a wide range of considerations. Teachers must determine the prior knowledge of their students, the skills they possess, their dispositions to learn, and the sociocultural contexts within which they live. Teachers, schools, and school systems try to systematically collect this information through surveys, assessments, counseling, and conferencing, but teachers can never have too much information about the students in their classroom. For this reason, teachers must reflect on the specific needs of the learners in their classes. This type of reflection is, in practice, a reconsideration of what teachers know about their students in the context of classroom activities.

A teacher may develop an activity, for example, designed for a child or group of children who are interested in a particular subject—say, airplanes. In the pursuit of these students' interest in airplanes, the teacher might develop a small activity related to a unit on inventions. The teacher could provide pictures of various airplanes, such as the one in FIGURE 2.6, and

The "Silver Dart" FIGURE 2.6

The Silver Dart biplane 6, in Hammondsport, New York, was designed by Douglas McCurdy of the Aerial Experiment Association and was the first airplane to fly in Canada.

ask her students to draw their own picture of an airplane and write a description of how the airplane manages to stay aloft.

The teacher could extend the activity by working with students to consider how air transportation changed life in the United States in the 20th century. The lesson has curricular relevance (the importance of air travel) and came about as a result of the teacher's knowledge of her students' interest. She could have chosen a number of different inventions on which to focus, but selected airplanes upon reflection on the learners in her class.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFLECTING ON COMMUNITY NEEDS

Teachers must also reflect on the needs of the community at large. As is the case with learner needs, schools typically make a deliberate effort to engage communities through focus groups and advisory councils. These vehicles provide school personnel with valuable insight into what the community wants and expects from their school, but teachers must do more. Teachers must continually think about their actions in community contexts.

Each community has unique needs and wants. Teachers should be aware of these needs and wants and should try to address them through their teaching. Consider a community with a high immigrant population. Teachers in such environments must provide their students with special opportunities to learn what we may otherwise take for granted with our students. These children and their parents may need special help getting around the community or learning how to get services from the school or other agencies.

Other communities have special needs that result from patterns of development or historical inequities. Jonathon Kozol's powerful book *Savage Inequalities* details the problems ingrained in poor communities all across the United States. Teachers in such environments must know about the conditions in which their children live, how these conditions emerged, and what they can do to support children who are trying to learn there.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFLECTING ON CURRICULUM

Every day, teachers wonder how they will facilitate **curriculum** through their teaching. This planning is very important and time consuming. Social studies scholar Stephen Thornton talks about this process as "gatekeeping" (Thornton, 2004) and suggests that teachers must make active and informed decisions about how to implement curriculum. When teachers reflect on curriculum, they are essentially assessing the extent to which a lesson meets particular curricular goals. This type of reflection can help a teacher make adjustments to a lesson given the requirements of the curriculum. Far too often, we think about curriculum as being received from authorities (the school district, for example) and unable to be altered or reworked. However, most curriculums leave significant room for interpretation. For example, the National History Standards state that students in grades K through 4 should be able to "describe local community life long ago, including jobs, schooling, transportation, communication, religious observances, and recreation."

Curriculum
Courses of study in an academic discipline or the scope and sequence of specific subject matter within a single academic course.

How might a teacher encourage students to consider transportation or recreation among the Eskimo Indians? Consider the picture of Inuit Eskimos from the early 20th century in FIGURE 2.7. Look at the dress and consider what you already know about the climate of the Eskimo Indians' homeland. For example, the climate would limit year-around water transportation. If we add information about the learning context, such as a first-grade class located in the Deep South, how does your curricular thinking change? The changes that you are thinking about are a product of reflection, which occurs as new contexts and information are added to the thinking process.

Inuit Eskimos in 1909 FIGURE 2.7

A mixed group of Inuit Eskimo men, women, and children pose for this informal group portrait taken by Robert Peary in front of Red Cliff House in McCormick Bay, Greenland.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFLECTING ON THE PURPOSES OF EDUCATION

Conversations about the purposes of education take place in multiple contexts. Teachers talk with colleagues at their schools and in larger professional communities. These conversations enable us to expand our beliefs about the purposes of social studies. Some teacher leaders might serve on curriculum or textbook selection committees charged with making important decisions based on beliefs about the purposes of education. All of these activities should occur through dialogue and as such are a form of public professional reflection. For example, the last several years have seen a dramatic decrease in the amount of time spent on social studies instruction in elementary school. Discussions about the consequences of these changes are influenced by public opinion and public discourse.

In early 2006, the Center on Education Policy released a study that found that almost three quarters of schools nationwide had cut back on social studies instruction. Some schools, according to the study, allocated as little as 30 minutes a week to social studies. Conversations about the purpose of education and specifically the purpose of social studies became national news with the release of this report, and elementary school teachers across the country played (and continue to play) an important role in the national dialogue over the proper place of social studies in school.

CONCEPT CHECK STOP

Reflect on a common topic in elementary social studies, such as farming. How has farming changed in the last hundred years?

How might a lesson on changes in farming relate to community interests?

This threshing machine is in cornfields in the hills above the Platte Valley north of Shelton, Nebraska. How does the context of this photo shape our understanding of the needs of children who live in Platte Valley?

Reflection as Inquiry

Learning Objectives

Recognize the relationship between inquiry and reflection.

Describe ways that inquiry can be informed and enhanced by reflection.

Analyze case studies of teacher knowledge using reflective inquiry methods.

Reflective inquiry A process of developing new knowledge, which is contingent upon a procedure that assumes knowledge is ever changing and evolving.

Reflective inquiry combines the inquiry approach to learning with the idea that reflection is a way of knowing things. In his 1910 book *How We Think*, John Dewey talked about reflective inquiry as "the elaboration of an idea, or working hypothesis, through conjoint comparison and contrast, terminating in definition or formulation." In other words, Dewey thought that reflective inquiry in a democracy was a process that enabled learners to learn something given ever changing conditions related to that knowledge. For example, students in social studies who learned about space and time in the early 20th century learned that space and time were absolute. After Einstein's theory of relativity, we now learn about time as relative to motion. Other forms of knowledge change over time due to changing perceptions. In the past, some teachers taught about slavery as a benign parochial system that was eventually dismantled

through a natural course of events. Today, students learn about the brutality of slavery and the struggles (including the Civil War) that resulted in the end of slavery.

We can even reflect on the purposes of social studies. Consider the democratic purposes of social studies that were suggested in Chapter 1. What does the image in FIGURE 2.8 of an Iraqi woman voting suggest about the purposes of social studies? Given the complexity of democracy and various global experiences with democracy, what do you think are social studies educators' responsibilities in preparing young people to participate in democratic life? Consider what changes you are making in your thinking about social studies as you read and learn more about social studies.

FIGURE 2.8

An Iraqi woman puts her vote into a ballot box.

LEARNING ABOUT TEACHING FROM CASE STUDIES

One condition for reflective inquiry is that there is a body of knowledge upon which to reflect. Unfortunately, we do not have a formal body of knowledge about how to teach. Other professions—for example, the professions of law, accounting, and medicine—have this formal body of knowledge. However, an emerging body of knowledge taken from case studies of teaching practice can be used as a source for reflective inquiry.

In the last twenty years, cases of teacher practice have been assembled as a foundation for general knowledge about how to teach. Cases on teaching are most appropriately what social studies scholar O. L. Davis calls "wise practice" (Davis & Yeager, 2005). These "wise practice" **case studies** are exemplars that entail elements of successful teaching in local situations, and also enable us to explore how the teaching episode can be extended or even improved. When inquiring using these cases, teachers transfer meaningful knowledge about how to teach from the situations described in the case to their own teaching situations. The "In the Classroom" feature on page 50 describes a case study of a first-year fifth-grade teacher's efforts to teach about the Constitution. Consider what you and other social studies teachers can learn from this case.

Case studies
Descriptions of professional action, such as teaching, that have some explanatory qualities.

By reading case studies, teachers can begin to learn about common problems such as the one Joan faced. What did Joan learn that might be useful in other situations? Perhaps Joan's experience adapting her lesson given her students' interests can be transferred to other teaching and learning situations. As teachers read more case studies, they begin to form generalizations, which in turn inform their planning and teaching. Although case studies can be powerful, we have to be careful not to directly apply the lessons learned in a case. Rather, the key is to transfer the knowledge gained by reading the case into a personal body of knowledge that we can then apply in new and unique settings.

A

Joan Childress finished an undergraduate teacher education program and started her first teaching job four months ago. She has a passion for teaching that is partly driven by her love for children as well as her insatiable appetite for learning new things. On this day, Joan was teaching about the United States Constitution. She provided students with visual prompts to get them to think about how the Constitution addressed particular actions.

Joan became interested in the case of Elian Gonzales, a young boy from Cuba living in the United States who was about the age of students in her class. Elian was being deported as an illegal alien against the wishes of some of his family who were legally in the United States. Elian was ultimately returned to Cuba, which angered some of his U.S. supporters, who are shown in the photo (A) of protestors in front of the White House. Joan used this photo to illustrate protected rights in the Constitution; most students can readily identify the rights to free speech and assembly. Her students not only successfully identified these First Amendment protections, they also were able to describe why we need such rights. Joan extended the discussion to talk about the limits of free speech and the consequences of restricting free speech. Joan was so confident in her students' responses that she continued to teach about additional constitutional rights.

On the next day, Joan introduced the topic of constitutional rights for undocumented workers in the United States.

Unlike the previous day, Joan was not very successful in encouraging student discussion about the Constitution. Instead of thinking about how the Constitution deals with issues related to the rights or lack of rights for undocumented workers in the United States, students simply wanted to give their opinion of immigration. To complicate matters, several students had politically divergent opinions about immigration and, in fact, two of these students were themselves recent immigrants. Joan suspected that since students were so personally involved in the new subject matter, a new instructional approach was needed.

Joan decided to develop an additional context or scaffold to help her students understand the complexities of the rights of undocumented workers in the United States and to help her students use their personal interests to develop new knowledge. Scaffolds are tools that enable students to consider new information and develop new knowledge. Joan decided to refocus students on a series of imaginary events such as the one depicted in the border patrol photo (B). This enabled her to explore some of the constitutional issues she wanted her students to learn as each event unfolded in the imagined series of events. Joan learned that her students' interest in subject matter was important, but such interest required a different instructional approach than when students might not be as personally interested.

B

A Vietnam War protester holds a flower at the tip of a soldier's gun. The protester is a participant in a "flower power" protest.

CONCEPT CHECK STOP

What Constitutional rights are in play in this image of a Vietnam War protester?

How might students respond to a discussion on freedoms depicted in this image of protest?

What is happening in this picture ?

Reflect on this image of children in Afghanistan.

- **Where do you think the picture was taken and when?**
- **What do you think these two children are doing?**

Ask someone else what they think of the image and compare your reactions.

- **Consider what life experiences and prior knowledge informed each of your reflections and how these contexts might continue to impact your professional reflection on teaching.**

Two Afghan children, wearing traditional dress, ride a donkey.

VISUAL SUMMARY

1 What Is Reflection?

Good teaching requires reflection. Without reflection, teaching can become stale and stagnant. Donald Schön classified reflection as occurring during an event (reflection in action) or after (reflection on action). Reflection can occur during all thinking about teaching. The processes involved in teaching can be thought of as a teaching cycle. This cycle includes developing subject matter knowledge, planning to teach, teaching, and reconsidering what was taught. Reflection can and should occur during all parts of the teaching cycle.

2 Reflection Prior to Instruction

In order to be effective, teachers must continually develop their subject matter knowledge throughout their professional career. Given the interdisciplinary nature of teaching, elementary teachers have a particular need to stay on top of subject matter. When developing subject matter knowledge, teachers must consistently reflect on their personal interests, the curriculum, and the misunderstandings that emerge from teaching and learning.

Teaching is a process that might be compared to artistic performance. Donald Schön called this artful doing. As teachers "perform" they must give themselves opportunities to grow. This is best achieved through reflection.

3 Reflection During and After Instruction

The delivery of meaningful and effective instruction also requires consistent reflection. Reflection during instruction enables teachers to be more dynamic and enables them to better meet the needs of learners. Reflection on teaching is part of a teaching cycle that includes the processes of learning new subject matter, planning for instruction, teaching, and deliberate reflection.

4 Using Reflection to Increase a Teacher's Professional Knowledge

Teachers must reflect not only about subject matter and instruction, but also about other elements of teacher knowledge. Teachers must consider their learners, the curriculum, the community, the contexts for education, and the ends of education. All of these areas are part of what is called teacher knowledge.

5 Reflection as Inquiry

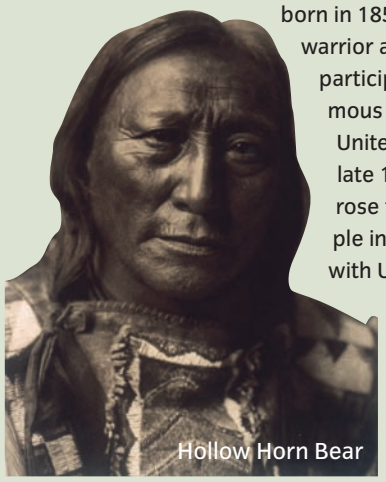
As we reflect on teaching and in teaching experiences, we must plan our reflection to achieve the most desirable outcomes. John Dewey suggested that we can inquire through reflection, but cautioned that the circumstances surrounding our reflections are in constant flux. Given that there is not a formal body of teacher knowledge, a good source for learning about how to teach is case studies of teaching episodes. We can use these case studies to conduct reflective inquiries aimed at further developing our teacher knowledge.

KEY TERMS

- **reflection,** p. 32
- **teaching cycle,** p. 34
- **subject matter knowledge,** p. 35
- **pedagogical content knowledge (PCK),** p. 40
- **teacher knowledge,** p. 45
- **curriculum,** p. 46
- **reflective inquiry,** p. 48
- **case studies,** p. 49

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING QUESTIONS

Mato-hehuloghecha, or Hollow Horn Bear, born in 1850, was a Brule warrior and chief who participated in many famous conflicts with the United States. In the late 1860s, he quickly rose to lead his people in many conflicts with U.S. troops along the Bozeman Trail, including the Fetterman massacre of 1866.


Hollow Horn Bear

In the 1870s, Hollow Horn Bear moved onto a reservation and became a captain of the Indian Police at Crow Agency. Instead of fighting U.S. authorities, he began to help them. He was responsible for the arrest of Crow Dog, the murderer of the famous Sioux chief Spotted Tail. Later in life, Hollow Horn Bear took on the role of conciliator between his people and the U.S. government and was selected as one of the Native Americans to ride in Theodore Roosevelt's inaugural parade in 1905. Hollow Horn Bear died in 1913. His portrait was later used on a 14-cent U.S. stamp that was issued in 1922.

- How do we reconcile these two distinct life roles played by Hollow Horn Bear?
- Have other figures from the past fought an enemy and later turned to work with them?
- Are there inconsistencies in Hollow Horn Bear's life story that need to be reconciled?
- If Americans honor Hollow Horn Bear, do you think Native Americans should do the same?

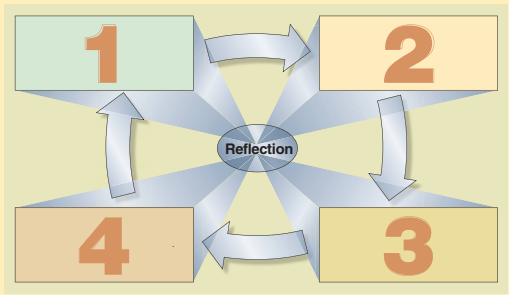
All of these questions emerge from reflection on the story of Hollow Horn Bear as presented here. Reflect more on his story and consider what else we do not know or might want to know about this person.

SELF-TEST

1. Why is reflection important in social studies?

2. Which of the following statements is correct?
   a. Reflection on action should only occur after teaching.
   b. Reflection in action should occur after teaching.
   c. Reflection on action should only occur before teaching.
   d. Reflection in action should occur during teaching.

3. Label the four-part sequence of events in the reflective teaching cycle in the figure below:



4. What do we call knowledge of how to teach?
   a. Pedagogical knowledge
   b. Content knowledge
   c. Subject knowledge
   d. Curricular knowledge

5. Which of the following is not a major consideration when teachers reflect on their subject matter knowledge?
   a. Personal interests
   b. Curriculum
   c. Misunderstandings
   d. Political interests

6. What is the distinction between reflection during and after instruction?

7. Reflecting is part of what cyclical activity?
   a. Lecturing
   b. Studying
   c. Teaching
   d. Explaining

8. When teachers reflect about professional knowledge, which of the following would they be less likely to consider?
   a. Learners
   b. Facilities
   c. Community
   d. Purposes

9. What did John Dewey argue were the benefits of reflection as inquiry in a democracy?

10. How do case studies aid in the development of our knowledge about how to teach?