



Measuring Thinking Worldwide

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Reflecting on Practice: A Workshop Exercise

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Background on reflection

Current thinking in nursing advocates the need for nurses to be educated in ways that develop their autonomy, critical thinking skills, sensitivity to others and their open-mindedness (Reid and Ground, 1997). I have found that teaching students reflective thinking strategies is one way of achieving this. Reflection is concentration and careful consideration, and reflective practice is the mindful consideration of one's actions, specifically one's professional actions (Osterman, 1990). The term 'reflective practice' was popularised by Schön (1991). He suggests that coaching can help students learn "the artistry of practice." Schön sees the coaching process as a "ladder of reflection" where students and faculty reflect on their actions, and where a key consideration is balancing challenge and support during reflection. The idea is that one develops the habit of mind of carrying out a focused and critical assessment of one's own practice behaviour as a means of developing one's own craftsmanship.

Reflection is often prompted by a problem, a perceived discrepancy between the real and the ideal, or between what occurred and what was expected. One steps back to examine one's actions as a way of trying to understand the discrepancy. One's task is to reflect on the effectiveness or legitimacy of one's chosen action and to use this new

perspective as a means of developing alternate strategies. The entire exercise is an exercise in critical thinking. Johns (2000) suggests that reflection provides nurses with a vehicle through which they can communicate and justify the importance of practice and practice knowledge, thus legitimising the knowledge that derives from the realities of practice. Nursing education has subsequently integrated reflection-on-action into nursing preparation programs and continuing professional development programs for nurses.

The argument that reflection is a critical step in professional development is historically rooted in learning theory. Kolb argued that experience was the basis for learning and that learning could not fully take place without reflection (Kolb, 1984). Kolb described the process of experiential learning as a four stage cycle involving four learning modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.

Because I think of reflection as a dynamic process, I also like Gibb's reflective framework (1988). This framework offers a series of questions to structure an experience in reflection. Gibb suggests that one should begin by asking, "What happened?" and then proceed with questions that help one to reflect on any important experience. These elements of the reflective process are echoed by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1988): *the returning to experience* (what happened?); *attending to feelings* (how did I feel, why did I act or react this way?); and *re-evaluating experience* (what does it mean?). Figure 1 lists some of the questions proposed by both of these authors for a successful reflection exercise.

1. What happened ? (interpretation)
2. What where you thinking and feeling? (interpretation)
3. What sense can you make of that? (analysis and inference)
4. What else could you have done? (inference and explanation)
5. If the situation arose again, what would you do?

Figure 1: Questions for Reflection

Class session and students

This session would fit well in a staff development programme as an introductory thinking experience within an undergraduate course requiring participants to think critically and reflect on prior learning. I teach the session as part of a module in the School of Human and health Sciences entitled Reflecting on Practice. This honours level workshop permits each student to undertake a different menu of learning and comprises two hours of a 6 hour workshop for students who wish to accredit learning that is not already certificated. The resulting certification can be used to build up credit towards obtaining a degree qualification.

Additionally this module meets the criteria for the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements of the Nursing and Midwifery Council in the United Kingdom and can be taken by Practitioners to undertake additional study around their specialist area and to maintain a professional portfolio to support their practice.

Goals and objectives for this lesson

One goal for this session is to teach participants to use critical thinking skills to reflect on their learning and to evaluate reflection as a tool for improving their clinical practice. The session takes the form of a independent workshop. The assigned work is aimed at guiding them to think critically about their prior learning and to demonstrate their understanding of some material applicable to clinical practice. Participants carry out an exercise in reflection over a two hour period guided by a packet of assigned materials. Later they undertake a written assignment through which I can assess their ability to use critical thinking skills.

Durghie (1996) argues that through reflection, one is able to analyze clinical situations by breaking them down into significant components and integrating them to achieve patient focused goals. Enthusiastic advocates claim that reflection is generally beneficial to practitioners to optimize their situational awareness, and that it enhances critical thinking, listening and observation skills.

I help the workshop participants to link the reflection lesson to a previous critical incident or significant clinical event. The issues related to a critical incident may have been recorded by the student retrospectively in a reflective journal and subsequently utilized to enhance their learning and to achieve the objectives of this workshop. Participants are encouraged to think critically and utilize the critical thinking skills of analysis, evaluation and self examination.

But no proposed strategy for better thinking should be accepted without careful evaluation of its utility, so one of my goals is to guide the workshop participants to take a fair-minded look at the value of reflection to provide value to their practice. Although reflection has become a major feature of many programmes of adult learning, it is still found to be time consuming and difficult at times, challenging an adults' previous experiences of what learning involves (Dewey, et al., 1994). Perhaps more importantly, others have viewed the reflective process as potentially flawed. Newall (1992), for instance, argues that reflection relies on memory, which may be a major source of practical difficulty because inaccurate recall and anxiety could alter the individual's account of prior events.

Learning Objectives

By the end of Workshop students should be able to:

- Define reflection as it applies to reflective practice.
- Describe and discuss the critical thinking skills of analysis, evaluation and self examination as they apply to effective reflection on practice.
- Critically evaluate the positive and negative aspects of reflection.
- Analyse and explain how a practitioner would encourage other staff to reflect on practice.

Material needed for the session

A range of reading materials could be used to prepare workshop participants for this session in reflection on practice. One example would be, "An Introduction to Reflection, the first chapter of "*Reflective Practice in Nursing*" by Bulman and Schultz (2004). The material you select should include a section describing and defining reflection. Usually this includes a discussion of types and models of reflection as well as the processes involved. There should also be a discussion of the varying perspectives as to the value of reflection to guide learning about practice in the health sciences.

I forward the assigned readings to the students two weeks before the study session and we use this chapter as a framework for the session. I send them a worksheet to serve as a guide to the areas of reflection to be considered. Journal articles on reflection and reflective practice are available in a folder for participants to use as further reading (Figure 2).

In the workshop I expect all the students to work on the four areas of investigation with a partner. This often increases motivation as they are able to share ideas and discuss options. It also facilitates analysis and evaluation.

<p style="text-align: center;">Reflection Worksheet</p> <p>This exercise is to be completed in small groups or pairs. The exercise focuses on developing your skills in reflection as a clinical reasoning tool. In the course of this exercise you will also be called upon to use your critical thinking skills to analyze the following four areas, interpret the significance of each and explain how it is important to your clinical practice. You and your study partner will have about one hour to complete the questions and tasks on this worksheet. Use the reference file available to you in class to gather evidence together to support your conclusions about the use of critical reflection in practice.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Define reflection.2) Discuss/describe the thinking skills that are required to be able to reflect effectively. You can use everyday language about thinking and decision making in relation to this aspect.3) What are the positive and negative aspects of reflection?4) As a Practitioner how would you encourage other staff to reflect?

Figure 2: The Worksheet

What I do before the class begins

It is important to prepare all the materials in advance and I always reread the papers I've asked students to read for the session. I think of the workshop as happening in three stages: 1) giving relevant information, 2) working on the task, and 3) providing feedback to the group. I usually know how many students will attend the session, as well as their area of specialisation. This gives me some insight into their background and their learning needs. I use this knowledge of the group to prepare a range of questions to ask during the feedback stage. I also clearly verbalize my expectations for the Workshop, explaining why each assigned task is being given. This way the students are in no doubt about the significance of the work to be undertaken.

How do I facilitate this session

I explain that there are four areas of investigation for this worksheet exercise, and ask them to work in pairs. Following my introduction to the content of the workshop I give the students one hour to investigate the four areas under study. I want them to engage the questions energetically and to work in an organised and systematic way to develop the critical thinking dispositions of 'inquisitiveness' and 'systematicity.' In addition to the introductory reading on reflection that they have read before coming to class, I expect students to use other articles on reflective practice that I make available in a resource file in the study area. As they examine these resource materials in light of their experience as practitioners, one person from each pair records key findings and insights on a piece of flip chart paper. Later the large sheets of paper will be fixed to the wall within view of all students, and one student from each pair will provide feedback to the group.

It is my intention to encourage participants to think critically using their skills of analysis, evaluation and explanation, and to exhibit the affective dispositions of self confidence, trust and understanding. The class participants often demonstrate a wide range of ability and are able to work well together by sharing ideas while working in twos. Workshop participants who are new to reflection, especially those who are students early in their studies in the health sciences, may be limited in their ability to carry out the exercise. Some students need quite a lot of support and guidance from the teacher. I work with each of the student groups to monitor their progress and I answer any questions they may have. Just as with any small group exercise, I check at about the half way stage to ask how they are progressing and remind them of the time and the expectations for an oral presentation of their work in the second hour of the workshop.

On completion of the workshop we will have taken time to interpret the meaning of the questions on the Worksheet related to reflection and to discuss the key areas from each group's perspective. I also take time to note the responses and the meaning of each student's contribution as a way of building their self confidence, their trust in their own work and that of their collaborating student. Those who are more experienced with reflection can be expected to carry out this exercise more independently, integrating their knowledge of reflection and its application to practice.

During the second hour of the session I facilitate the feedback from the students. Every student is expected to offer some contribution during this feedback session. Occasionally I add to and support the discussion by my comments and clarifications of areas of difficulty but my primary role is to act as a resource and support the students when they seek clarification in the areas under discussion. As a part of this feedback, I ask the students to talk a bit about their thought processes during the exercise. This request helps to train metacognition and also assists me in making a judgement regarding their critical thinking skills development. Finally, I collate all the comments and let the students have a printed copy of feedback which includes the feedback overall from each of the pairs.

The Final Work Product

I often conduct this workshop for students who are authenticating learning experiences that they have completed, so a written component of the lesson is appropriate. There are three main sections: an introduction discussing reflection, and two writing tasks that involve a description of their learning experiences and an analysis and evaluation of a critical incident or significant clinical event.

In the first section I ask the participants to think critically about reflection and to write about their analysis of the relevance of reflective practice for themselves as practitioners and how it may enhance the quality of the care they provide. This portion of the assignment asks that they reference relevant literature in the field. This section is brief, perhaps no more than 250 words.

In the second section the students authenticate twenty hours of learning that has not been previously accredited. They must provide evidence that they have undertaken the learning by including a copy of the related transcript. They must also discuss the nature of the learning activity, giving a well written description of the activity and the outcome of the activity. Again this section can be brief (250 Words).

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Facts related to the Critical Incident / Significant Event.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What happened? (Interpretation and Analysis)• What about it made it "Critical" or "Significant" (Evaluation and Explanation)• Where and when did it happen? (Description)• How did it happen? (Analysis and Explanation)
2) Reflect on these associated aspects:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your immediate feelings...• The questions raised by yourself/others...• What you have learned (Analysis)...• Your identified additional learning needs (Evaluation)...• The application of this reflection to your practice...• How you implemented this new learning into your practice... |
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Figure 3: Format for Writing about a Critical Incident / Significant Event

The third section of this exercise is a piece of academic writing that is an exercise in reflection about a particular clinical episode that they believe provided them significant learning. This episode may be a critical incident or some other significant clinical event. Figure 3 is a suggested format for this part of the written assignment. I expect that

students will demonstrate evidence of critical thinking (analysis and evaluation of their current practice) and that they will cite relevant references. I have indicated in brackets the critical thinking skills emphasized when focusing on a critical incident/significant event. This reflection is suggested to be about 1500 words in length.

Student Response

Students produce the written response to the assignment two months after completion the workshop. The students overall respond well to this type of Workshop. Some do however experience some difficulty in writing reflectively. In evaluating their written response to the introduction and the written analyses of research findings or critical incident, I look for evidence of reflection. I also identify examples of where they have demonstrated the critical thinking skills of analysis and evaluation in all sections of the assignment. Overall the students comment that they appreciate this type of assignment as the experience gained helps them demonstrate the development of both their critical thinking skills and their ability to reflect on learning from experience. Some students, however, find this assignment most challenging – perhaps indicating a need for more practice explaining their thinking processes to others.

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