

## Reflective Practice

Practice experience can be a particularly rich source of learning. You may have worked with people who never seem to learn from experience and despite years of practising frequently seem to make the same mistakes.

Experiences must be processed as soon as practical after the event. Ways to assist memory include:

- Keeping diaries
- Taking part in group discussions
- Clinical supervision
- Using a checklist
- Using a model of reflection (such as Jones 1995)

Experience alone is not enough. Practitioners need tools to facilitate learning through practice. One such tool is reflection.

Schon (1983) considered two kinds of knowledge:

1. Technical rationality: Is associated with empirical science. Nursing is more than technical rationality.
2. Tacit knowledge: is a way of knowing and understanding that which cannot be articulated, but which guides practice and is linked to experience and expertise.

### What is RP?

RP is learning about and developing practice through the analyses of events

Boud et al (1985) consider that: 'Reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understanding and appreciations'

Numerous differing definitions of RP contain some characteristics common to all, particularly RP should:

- Be based on practice
- Be capable of delivering new knowledge
- Be consciousness raising
- Help turn experience into learning
- Raise self-awareness
- Develop intellectual skills
- Liberate individuals from conventional, traditional ways of thinking
- Be creative
- Be both an adult and experiential learning technique.

Reflection is a process of deep thought; both a looking backwards to the situation being pondered upon and projecting forward to the future, being recall and reasoning

Two types of reflection:

- Reflection-in-action means to think what one is doing while one is doing it

Reflection-on-action involves a cognitive post-mortem; the practitioner looks back on his/her experiences to explore again the understandings brought to the practitioner in the light of the outcome.

### Skills for RP

Developing skills for reflection and using reflection in learning, takes time and energy.

Skills required to engage in reflection have been identified as self-awareness, description, critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

*Self-awareness* is about knowing yourself: being conscious of your personality, beliefs and values, feelings, qualities, abilities and limitations.

*Description* is vital starting point to learning through reflection. Needs to be able to describe accurately thoughts and feelings, both verbally and in writing. Good description is about giving a comprehensive account which captures the essence of the situation.

*Critical analyses* involves

- Examining the components of a situation

- Identifying and scrutinising existing knowledge and how relevant this is to the situation

- Exploring the feelings you have or had about the situation

- Challenging any assumptions you have made

- Imagining and exploring alternative knowledge and actions

*Synthesis*: The integration of new knowledge with previous knowledge.

*Evaluation*: Enables you to make a judgement about the value of the knowledge you have achieved.

### Requisites for reflection

Open-mindedness is necessary to enable the individual to recognise personal biases and to be receptive to new ideas.

Confronting one's feelings, and challenging attitudes and practices may be difficult and uncomfortable. A supportive environment is therefore crucial.

Availability of comfortable environments and the setting of mutually acceptable rules

Time is the main constrain – time for reflection competes against other priorities  
Reflection needs time if the recollection, sharing and discussion of stories and clinical encounters are to be undertaken seriously. As much time as is currently allowed for managerial administrative meetings would be good as a beginning.

Individual and managerial commitment is vital – must get used to examining situations in a conscious way

Writing about experiences in the form of a diary or journal may be useful for developing reflection, in that it can record and describe events in your professional practice, and be helpful in articulating thoughts and feelings.

The process of RP can be guided by the use of a form of supervision.

Participants will also need safe and non-judgemental space for reflection  
RP seminars or groups are not just chats where anything goes, and need to be taken seriously as learning experience that will change expectations, practices and visions of possibilities.

#### Drawbacks for RP

- Some might lack understanding and be confused by the meaning of RP
- Some may view RP and clinical supervision as a management tool, closely linked to appraisal and disciplinary procedures
- Some may initially fear exposing themselves.
- Reflection can also trigger uncomfortable feelings. This requires skilled facilitation from someone who evinces trust.

#### Benefits of RP

Organisational benefits of a reflective culture could include:

- Decreased levels of burnout
- Decreased levels of sickness
- Increased morale
- Improved staff recruitment and retention

Other areas that could benefit include:

- Risk management
- Interprofessional and interagency working
- Change management process

William (2001) suggests that RP could help nurses develop skills in the current climate of rapid change

Reflecting on practice can give us the chance to share the times when our nursing made a real difference to someone's life or to consider the times when our caring did not go as planned. Both lessons have their value

#### RP and Clinical Supervision

Although RP and clinical supervision are not the same, it is acknowledged that clinical supervision could be used as a framework for reflection

Promoting RP is an important component of clinical supervision

(From 7<sup>th</sup> R C N Jo in t E d u c a t i o n F o r u m s ' C o n f e r e n c e h e l d i n F e b r u a r y 2 0 0 5 )

### **Framework for reflection**

PREP offers a framework for a lifetime of continuing professional development. Your portfolio provides a structural format for documenting and reviewing your reflections on your practice.

Professional development, such as study days, workshops and the use of education resources like CPD articles should be included in your portfolio. This provides evidence of learning and a vehicle for reflection, if you try to summarise your learning in your own words.

Please use this framework to help you assess what you have gained from attending this event. Once completed, keep your reflections, together with the relevant documentation, in your personal professional portfolio.

### **Now write your own notes using the following prompts:**

What have I learnt from this event that maintains or develops my professional knowledge and competence?

What do I know or can I do now that I couldn't do before attending this event?

What I can apply immediately to my practice and client care?

Is there anything I didn't understand or need to explore further, or read more about in order to clarify my learning?

What else do I need to do/know to extend my professional development in this area?

What other professional development needs have I identified? This may be as a result of reviewing a work situation or incident in the light of the learning gained.

How might I achieve the above needs? It may be helpful to convert these needs into short, medium and long-term goals in an action plan. This can then be included in your portfolio.

### **Here is some useful further reading:**

Johns C. (1995) Achieving effective work as a professional activity in Schober J. and Hinchliff S. (eds) *Towards Advanced Nursing Practice* London: Arnold.

Barber P. (1998) Developing the 'person' of the professional carer in Hinchliff S., Norman S., Schober J. *Nursing Practice in Health Care* London: Arnold.

Hall C., Redfern E. (1996) *Profiles and Portfolios: A Guide for Nurses and Midwives* London: Macmillan.