



The Learning Institute

What does it mean to be an Educational Professional?: Using reflective practice

Overview

This Professional Development task is designed to introduce the student to the concept of reflective practice. Reflection is a natural process. However, informed reflective practice is often argued as an ongoing constituent of being a “Professional”. It can enable practitioners to learn from experience about themselves, their work, and the way they relate to others. It can provide relatively safe and confidential ways to explore, examine and understand professional experiences in the quest for professional growth.

Being an Educational Professional demands that we are competent and confident wearing many hats. We must possess a range of skills, attributes and knowledge. Being human, we will be good in some areas and not as good in others. Being involved in “Education” demands that we are responsive change, hence the need for continued professional growth. Each of us are likely to need development in different areas. No matter what level we work at, it is important to regularly reflect upon our skills, knowledge and attributes. This activity is intended to help you explore and gain a better understanding of the range of skills, attributes and knowledge, relevant to you, in your quest to become a confident Educational Professional..

Target audience

Teachers and teaching assistants

Duration

Approximately 1 hour

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Introduction

A 'reflective practitioner' is someone who, at regular intervals, looks back at the work they do, and the work process, and considers how they can improve. Reflection allows us to explore who we are (*Our Real Self*) and who we want to be (*Our Ideal Self*). Some authors argue that there are some key personal attributes that are relevant to true professionally relevant reflection.

These elements are:

- honesty
- understanding yourself
- accepting feedback
- seeing you as others see you.

There are many different models of reflection. The structure and format of these models will vary, but they often share many common features. These are:

- Reflection usually begins with a description of what happened.
- The next stages of reflection often requires you to relate what you already know to the situation.
- The final stage of reflection is one of change.

The benefits of being a reflective practitioner are often claimed as increasing professional self-awareness, and developing a better understanding of practice. It is also claimed that it can help to develop creative thinking skills, and encourage active engagement in our own work processes (Schon, 1983). Boyatzis (2002) argues that it not only helps us identify *our real self* and *our ideal self*, it also allows us to own and manage our own professional development. These aspects are explored in more detail in the pages below.

Objectives

- To further explore the concept of reflective practice
- To identify areas that can be targeted for Continued Professional Development (CPD)
- To reflect upon the exercise and set targets for development

Resources

Pen and paper for note taking, and colouring pencils

Internet access to the following:

- Boyatzis, R. E. (2002) 'Unleashing the power of self-directed learning' [book chapter], available at: http://www.eiconsortium.org/reprints/self-directed_learning.html

Task 1: Understanding the concept of reflective practice

Often a negative or uncomfortable situation (a 'critical incident') prompts reflection. A teaching episode might not have gone as well as you wanted. You might not have handled a behaviour incident as well as you would have hoped. You might have been asked to deal with something outside of your comfort zone and you could not say NO. It is often said that we learn from our mistakes. However, positive situations can also provoke reflection. Why did that teaching episode go so well? What worked? Why did I handle that behaviour incident so well? Being able to recognise what worked, in order to reproduce it again is a powerful learning skill.

Firstly: Choose a critical incident to explore.

What has happened? Why have you chosen this incident? What makes this incident worthy of reflection?

Secondly: Describe your chosen critical incident in detail.

This allows you to clarify the detail of the incident as best you can. You may come back to the description and add things as you remember them.

Thirdly: Question yourself - How can I relate what I already know to the situation?

What theories do I understand that I can bring to bear on this incident?

Do I have a lack of knowledge in this field? Who does have knowledge in this field?

How did I feel? Was I angry? Was I clear in what I said? Was I outside my comfort zone? Did I feel confident? Was my planning detailed enough?

What assumptions did I make?

What did I not bring to the situation? What did I do that made the situation better or worse?

There are many questions that will need asking. It will be important that you understand the correct questions to ask. Often the value of theory through the use of texts, helps in providing you with informed answers to your questions. Thus these informed, honest answers to your own key questions will allow you make sense of the incident and to recognise what has been learnt. Once you recognise what has been learnt you will be able to make changes for future practice.

Finally: Consider changes.

What needs to be done to make you a more informed practitioner? How will you change your plan? Will you change your strategy? How do you now see yourself? How do you want to see yourself? Have your values changed? Have your beliefs changed? Have your opinions changed? How do you see others? How do they see you? *What are you going to do about it?*

Task 2: Reflecting on a critical incident in detail

Choose another critical incident that you feel is worthwhile reflecting upon in order to understand it more clearly. Why have you chosen this incident? What makes this incident worthy of reflection?

Description

- Write a detailed description of the experience. Justify your selection.
- Ask yourself “What are the key issues within this incident that I need to pay attention to?”

Reflection

- What was I trying to achieve?
- Why did I act as I did?
- What were the consequences of my actions?
 - For the child/member of staff/ family
 - For myself
 - For people I work with
- How did I feel about this experience when it was happening?
- How did the child/member of staff/family feel about it?
- How do I know how the child/member of staff/family/participants, felt about it?

What were the influencing factors?

- What internal factors influenced my decision-making
- What internal factors influenced my actions?
- What external factors influenced my decision-making?
- What external factors influenced my actions?
- What sources of knowledge influenced my decision making and actions?
- What sources of knowledge should have influenced my decision making and actions?
- Where there alternative strategies I could have employed
- How could I have dealt better with the situation?
- What other choices did I have?
- What would be the consequences of these other choices?

Learning

- How can I make sense of this experience in light of past experience?
- How can I make sense of this experience for future practice?

- How do I feel about this experience now that I have reflected upon it?
- Have I taken effective action to support myself and others?
- How has this experience changed my way of understanding my practice?
- What information do I need in order to become better informed?

(Adapted from: Johns, C. (1994) 'Nuances of reflection', *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 3, pp. 71-75.)

Discuss these questions with colleagues in your setting if you feel comfortable doing so.

Task 3: Reflecting on the process of reflection

Note down your responses to the following questions:

- What knowledge did you already have that has been refreshed by this CPD?
- How has this CPD developed your knowledge and understanding of Self-evaluation?
- How can I apply what I now know to my practice?

Sources

Boyatzis, R. E. (2002) 'Unleashing the power of self-directed learning', in Sims, R. (ed.), *Changing the Way We Manage Change: The Consultants Speak*. NY: Quorum Books, pp. 13-32. Available at: http://www.eiconsortium.org/reprints/self-directed_learning.html

Johns, C. (1994) 'Nuances of reflection', *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 3, pp. 71-75. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2702.1994.tb00364.x

Schon, D. (1983) *The reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Further reading

Bolton, G. and Delderfield, R. (2018) *Reflective practice: writing and professional development*. 5th edn. London: Sage. [in particular Chapter 1 'Reflective practice: an introduction, pp. 3-24]

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