

Learning from practice - the reflective process

Reflection consists of

Thinking critically about an experience and learning from it by:

- exploring that experience in terms of feelings and significant features
- processing the significant features and identifying learning
- finding new solutions to dilemmas
- using the process as a tool to help develop future clinical practice

This can be broken down into five stages:

- actively focusing attention on an event on the ward or a clinical situation
- being aware of the range of feelings and thoughts that emerge
- analysing the situation (acknowledging stakeholders' interests, balancing both positive and negative aspects, analysing who gets what and why, examining power relations)
- engaging in interpretation and creating further options
- engaging in innovation and action with a commitment to change

Whitehead and Mason in their *Study Skills for Nurses* (2003) suggest some **activities a student might engage in to achieve more effective reflective practice**

- develop self-awareness by taking time to consider and understand your own thoughts and actions
- reflect on critical events on a regular basis, so that it becomes integral to your thinking
- practice new clinical skills and apply methods of reflection to develop your learning experience
- spend time with your mentor to work towards learning being a joint venture
- gain new knowledge of reflective practice through reading, attending seminar and conferences
- learn from feedback from supervisors
- address particular challenges which may arise through discussions and tutorials
- discuss informally the experiences of reflective practice with fellow students

So the basic skill involved in reflection is to develop self-awareness based on attending to feelings and attitudes by dealing with negative feelings and building on the positive – **and this is a cyclical process**. There are a number of different frameworks commonly used to provide a structure for writing reflective pieces.

Examples of schemes/cycles of reflection concerning a critical incident

The Gibbs reflective cycle (1988)

Description (what happened ?),
Feelings (what was I thinking and feeling?)
Evaluation (what was good and bad about the experience?)
Analysis (what sense can I make of the situation?)
Conclusion (what else could I have done?)
Action plan (if it rose again what would I do?)

from Burns and Colman (2000).

Marks-Maran and Rose reflective cycle (1997)

The incident (describe what happened)
Critical reflection (thoughts and feelings arising from this incident)
Information (analysing the related theory)
Future action (what has been learned? If the incident arose again what would you do? How will this influence future practice?)

Marks-Maran and Rose (1997)

A reflective cycle adapted from Burns and Bulman (2000)

Self-awareness (examination of one's own values and how others 'see' you)
Description (accurate description of an event)
Analysis (critical examination of factors relating to an event)
Synthesis (new interpretations)
Evaluation (making judgements)

(Whitehead and Mason 2003 p.187)

And **Driscoll** (1994 in Maslin- Prothero p.238) nicely sums up the reflective process by suggesting 3 crucial questions:

What?- returning to the situation and describing it

So what?- understanding the context-feelings and effects of the different actions

Now what?- modifying future outcomes- what would you change?