

## Developing yourself through reflection

Using a reflective process as part of your everyday professional practice can add an extra dimension to your development, particularly in increasing self-awareness, building self-confidence and learning from experiences. This short article will introduce you to the principles and benefits of reflective practice.

### What does reflection mean in this context?

For me, this quote sums up what reflection in a CPD context means:

*A reflection in a mirror is an exact replica of what is in front of it. Reflection in professional practice, however, gives back not what is, but what might be, an improvement on the original.*  
Biggs (1999)

Reflection is a purposeful thought activity that enables us to:

- Stand back and think about the impact of a situation
- Gain new perspectives
- Make sense of experiences
- Raise self-awareness
- Move from professional development to professional learning

In order to:

- Gain new insight
- Challenge assumptions
- Acquire new understanding
- Construct meaning and knowledge that guides actions in future practice

There are three types of reflection:

Reflection <i>before</i> action	Reflection <i>in</i> action	Reflection <i>on</i> action
Planning what you are going to do before the event	Thinking about what you are doing whilst you are doing it: - Stimulated by the unexpected in the moment - Thinking on your feet and redesigning what you do in the present	Thinking about what you did after the event: - Retrospective contemplation - Clarifying the meanings of experiences - Redesigning what you do in the future

Reflection *on* action involves reflecting on meaningful positive or negative experiences, for example:

- An event that highlighted the value of particular skills, knowledge and/or behaviour

- An event that had unexpected outcomes
- An event that went particularly well
- An event that frustrated you
- An event where you wanted to improve your knowledge
- An event that made you happy, sad, distressed or created a moral dilemma

### Tools to guide and capture your reflections

The most important thing is to find a method and tools that suit you and your particular context/learning preferences. There are many tools available, including **models of reflection** (e.g. Gibbs [see figure 1], Kolb, Johns, Atkins & Murphy), **journals** (e.g. handwritten, electronic, blog, voice recording) and **templates** (e.g. learning logs, reflection sheets).



**Figure 1, the Gibbs' model of reflection**

These tips will help you to get the most out of using reflection as a CPD tool:

- be spontaneous
- express yourself freely
- be honest and open-minded
- set aside time
- be prepared personally
- make it a habit

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