



Learning Through Critical Reflection

What is critical reflection?

Critical reflection is more than just 'thinking about' or 'thoughtful' practice. It is a way of 'critiquing' our practice in a systematic and rigorous way – helping us to carefully consider what is good and what could be improved.

Why is critical reflection important?

If we are to create cultures that are more caring, this might require changes in individuals and teams. Critical reflection is a key activity in creating caring cultures because it can enable individuals to develop greater self awareness by helping them to:

- Evaluate their current practice
- Think about what is desirable
- Consider what is possible
- Develop new understanding that informs actions

Engaging in critical reflection enables practitioners to 'continue to learn, grow and develop in and through practice' (Jarvis, 1992).

How do I begin?

A number of models and frameworks are available that can help you to reflect on your experiences i.e. 'reflect on practice'. This can be things that have gone well, helping you to understand how you can make this happen more often; or things that haven't gone so well, helping you to think about how things could be different in the future.

Most models will guide you through a number of phases, helping you to:

- Describe the experience/situation
- Acknowledge your feelings and thoughts
- Evaluate the experience – what was good/bad?
- Analyse the experience – make sense
- Identify new learning and actions

Should I reflect on my own or with others?

You can reflect on your own, with someone else or in a group. There are possible advantages and disadvantages to all of these approaches. If you reflect with others, these could be informal e.g. buddy relationships, or formal e.g. supervision relationships.

To start it is probably best to reflect on your own, trying out a few of the models (see pages 3 - 5), finding out what works for you. You could then begin to share your reflections with someone else, opening yourself up to new perspectives and also challenge and support. You may want to enter a formal relationship through clinical supervision (which uses critical reflection as a structure), either individually or as a group.

References

Jarvis, P. (1992) Reflective practice and nursing. *Nurse Education Today*. Vol. 12. No. 3. pp 174-181.

Wider Resources

Rolfe, G., Jasper, M. and Freshwater, D. (2010) *Critical Reflection In Practice: Generating Knowledge for Care*. (2nd edition). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Reflective Writing: A Basic Introduction.

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<https://myport.port.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-10/reflective-writing.pdf>

**Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*.
Oxford: Further Education Unit.**

Gibbs discussed the use of structured debriefing to facilitate the reflection involved in Kolb's "experiential learning cycle". He presents the stages of a full structured debriefing as follows:

Describe

Initial experience

Description

What happened? Don't make judgments yet or try to draw conclusions; simply describe.

Feelings

What were your reactions and feelings? Again don't move on to analysing these yet.

Evaluation

What was good or bad about the experience? Make value judgments.

Analysis

What sense can you make of the situation? Bring in ideas from outside the experience to help you.

What was really going on?

Were different people's experiences similar or different in important ways?

Conclusions (general)

What can be concluded, in a general sense, from these experiences and the analyses you have undertaken?

Conclusions (specific)

What can be concluded about your own specific, unique, personal situation or way of working?

Personal action plans

What are you going to do differently in this type of situation next time?

What steps are you going to take on the basis of what you have learnt?

Johns, C. (2000) Guided reflection. In Palmer, A.M., Burns, S. and Bulman, C. (Eds.) *Reflective Practice in Nursing: The Growth of the Professional Practitioner* (2nd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

Stage 1: Describe the event/experience

What happened?
Who was involved?
What part did you/others play?
What was the result?

Stage 2: Thinking and feeling

What was significant about this experience to me?
What was I thinking and feeling during the experience?
What was I trying to achieve?
How do I feel about the outcome of the event?

Stage 3: Evaluation

What was good and bad about the experience?
What were the consequences of my action/actions of others?

Stage 4: Analysis

What sense can I make of the situation?
What factors (e.g., values, assumptions, meaning perspective, experiences) influenced my feelings, thoughts, and actions?
What sources of knowledge influenced or should have influenced my actions?
How did others feel and how do I know?
What could I have done differently?
What would be the consequences of those other actions?

Stage 5: Conclusion and action plan

How do I now feel about the experience?
What have I learned about my practice/myself/my organisations?
What would I do now in a similar situation?
What factors might get in the way of me applying my learning from the experience?

