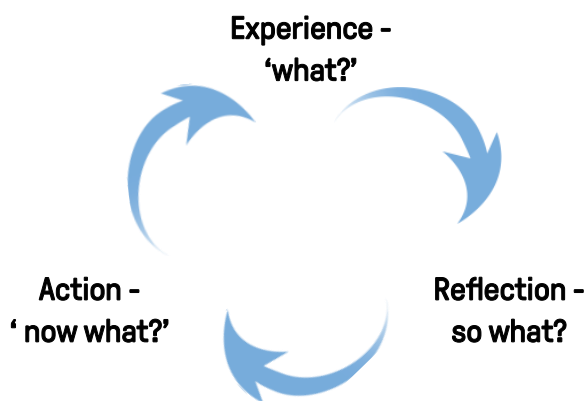# WolfWorks Reflective Practice

What is Reflective Practice?

It is an opportunity to review your actions and thoughts and, based on how they make you feel in the present, enact plans for the future. It is about learning from real life experiences, rather than just repeatedly doing something without thinking about what might happen if we did it differently. Reflection is personal; it cannot be prescriptive as it will depend on your circumstances. The two main types are reflecting **on** an action afterwards in order to prepare for the future; and to reflect **in** action to adapt when things aren't going to plan.

Reflective practice is:

- Concerned with thoughts and feelings

- Subjective

- Making connections between past, present and future experiences

- About both positives and negatives

Combining the ERA cycle (Jasper, 2013) and 'What' model (Driscoll, 2007).

Driscoll, J. (ed.) (2007) Practicing Clinical Supervision: A Reflective Approach for Healthcare Professionals. Edinburgh: Elsevier.
Jasper, M. (2013). Beginning Reflective Practice. Andover: Cengage Learning.

How to reflect

There are different ways to reflect. For some it is easiest out loud: think of a time you have talked to a friend about how well something went or when you felt that you'd had a bad day. Or you could vlog about it to share with others at a distance.

For others, it is deeply personal and then a diary or blog may help you get your thoughts in order.

However you do it, the more regularly you reflect, the better. You can keep on top of your thoughts and feelings, make plans and then see if you stuck to them. If things didn't work out how you expected, why was that?

Ask yourself:

- What was effective and why?
- What can I repeat?
- What was ineffective and why?
- What have I learned?
- Did I enjoy it?
- What would have happened if...?
- How can I improve?
- What does it mean?

Benefits

- Helps you take a step back and look at the bigger picture

- Puts into action internal responses to real-life situations

- Identifies areas to develop

- Can lead to innovative ways of trying things

- Helps you find constructive ways to move on

Overcoming barriers to reflection

Time

Set aside regular time to reflect, minimise distractions when you're trying to get into the reflective mood.

Culture

It is easier to reflect if you have others to share with and who share with you. Try to make it a regular occurrence.

Lack of skills

Remember that reflection is a very individual process and there is no one 'right' way of doing it. Try different approaches until you find one that suits you.

Environment

Experiment to find the right environment for you to reflect or you might find that you need different spaces to think about different things.

Motivation

Remember why you started to reflect in the first place. Write your goal on a Post-It note and stick it to your computer or next to your bathroom mirror – wherever you are likely to see it more. Focusing on why you began reflecting in the first place can help to keep you motivated when it feels tough to keep going.

Yourself

Being reflective takes a certain level of self-insight which can be uncomfortable for some people, especially if you are not used to it. The good news is that this can be achieved with some practice.

Free writing

Reflective writing is in first person. It is an effective way of recording your thoughts and feelings so that you can refer to them at a later date.

However, sometimes it is difficult to know where to start. Free-writing can help with this. It is unstructured, flowing and uninhibited; you don't need to stop to check spelling or grammar. It doesn't need to be perfect first time. Set yourself a short period of time (depending on how much you want to reflect) and stop after that. Leave the writing for a day or so and then come back to it later to review what you've written and improve the style.

If you prefer some structure, use these prompts:

Look back and reflect on:
> your expectations before the experience
> how you approached it
> which parts you found easy/hard

Think about what you learned as a result:
> how did your knowledge and understanding change?
> what would you do differently if faced with a similar situation?

Consider how you might use your learning in the future:
> how might you put into practice what you have learned?
> what challenges might you face?
> how would you deal with these?

Looking forward

Once you have identified what went well, it is important to make sure that you that repeat it. However, there may also be areas that you have identified as needing improvement. Think about how best to do this: read a book, listen to a podcast, meet with your Director of Studies, talk to friends, or attend a workshop. You might be able to do this straight away or need to set aside some time to develop skills, perhaps over the vacation when your workload isn't as heavy.

Wolfson College Cambridge