Reflective Practice

[00:00:04] **Atif:** Okay. Um, so hello everybody. Um, we thought that we would use this session to have a chat. Really with Robin and I about reflective thinking and reflective practice. What does that mean for a practitioner? Uh, I think we just thought we'd have a chat about it in our experiences as needs assessors in the case of Robin and myself as a trainer and an, and someone who organizes training on such a national level and to ask some questions, really, and these questions are going to be questions that there are no right or wrong answers to, but they are time and space to think about them.

So we thought we'd have a conversation with ourselves, with you guys to listen to, but what we think reflective practice is and where the challenges are and why it matters so much to the work that we do. You've seen in the other videos where we talked about it and touched on it. But then this one, we want to explore a bit more. So I'm just going to sort of bounce some questions over to you Robin and, um, and I guess we'll see how this goes.

So Robin. Well, I guess, without thinking about needs, assessing or training, but what do you see reflective practice as?

[00:01:29] **Robin:** Well, it's kind of many respects to sort of in the title really isn't it. So yeah, it's

seeking to be aware of what works and what doesn't in, what you're doing and so then to build upon identify the things that work and build upon them, um, systematize them to a degree, you know, kind of weave them into the fabric of, of what you're doing so that you know, where there were incidences of, you know, good work

they don't exist in isolation. They become a methodology, parts of your message. Hmm.

[00:02:13] **Atif:** Okay. Yeah. I guess it's slightly different. I think they're reflective for me and it's, as it should be, I'll be surprised if anyone sees reflective practice in the same way. And that's the wonder of it really? Um, I think reflective practice is really about, um, the phrase I use when I'm teaching it to my own internal team is you shaking off things, you know?

Um, often when we think about children, they're learning their environment, they're learning their space and how it connects. As adults we have largely accomplished a lot of that learning, but we realize that we have some unlearning to do so. We have to shake off things that have the world is this because we're all experiencing the world in our own personal set of experiences.

And we made up these experiences, all of us. These experiences aren't neutral, uh, in fact, the far from it. And so what they could end up doing is creating biases, what they call cognitive biases. When we meet people, they create biases. When we think about our personal values and wherever we insist that they should be everyone's values, and that can have a big role in the work that you do as practitioners, um, and being aware

that the way you see the world may not be the only way the world is or the way you see the world may have a lot of power over someone and that person doesn't necessarily have the power back and so it's thinking about what is your role as a practitioner, but what is the reflective learning think? And I think it's, I, I sometimes say there's no destination.

It's just a journey that you've been on. But in terms of reflective practice, would you say. In the role of AT training or your experience as a needs assessor it's, it's a big position or, or would you say it's, it's, it's important, but not everything I would. How would you frame it?

[00:04:19] **Robin:** I think, yeah, I think it's very important.

Um, I think it's something that. Uh, some people they kind of do by default, if you know what I mean? So, um, but a lot of people may find that, that these are practices that they already follow without kind of really realizing that they're doing it, you know, and it's just second nature, uh, to be quite, um, introspective

and one thing I always, uh, tend to phrase, I always used to use was that. A healthy level of self doubt know, cause obviously too much self doubt can be, it can stop you moving forward, you can second guess everything you're doing and you can find it difficult to see, you know, what's good. What is it? You know, if you have too much of it, but if you are too sure of yourself, then you are going to overlook

your weak spots, your flaws, the gaps in your knowledge and your understanding of things. So I think parts of it is, or very large parts of it is being very aware and alert during an interaction with somebody, you know, particularly say, you know, during a needs assessment, um, being very keenly aware and alert of

the three-dimensional individual in front of you and what they're bringing to that needs assessment and it's where I've talked about anticipating difficulties and things like that. It's something that's quite important to the work of a needs assessor, and it's very helpful.

Um, it helps to part from kind of streamlining a lot of the needs assessor's work. It helps the needs assessor to cut to the quick, during the needs assess assessment, um, quite quickly, you know, and, and, uh, conduct the assessment with insights. Um, but at the same time, you have to be aware of the limitations of your ability to anticipate.

And, uh, predict what someone's issues going to be. You know, so if you, you enter the assessment, say you've been given a full compliment of needs, assess pre-assessment information beforehand. Um, and you enter the assessment with a very clear idea of what you, uh, what do you think the person's difficulties are going to be,

um, I mean the, the activities of the person may be, you know, they're kind of more logistical, they're less ambiguous perhaps. Um, so if you have clear information on that, that's fine. But with regard to the person's experience of their condition and related difficulties, it's fine to enter an assessment, and a good idea with that with, uh, with a clear uh, uh, idea of the avenues of the, whether the discussion is likely to go down, but you have to also be prepared to have all of your expectations completely turned on their head.

[00:07:24] **Atif:** Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, one of the challenges we have is, um, and I think that it's not new, it's not new, but one of the challenges we have is where, you know, a lot of this work is time pressured, it's sensitive work and then we can say like, supposedly someone has a needs assessor, and they've used to working with people that are blind.

They can immediately say, well, I often give this technology and that technology to this person, it could be JAWS. It could be something. You're meeting somebody who, yes, they all blind or they have additional needs. It could be the, that the hand coordination isn't there. It could be things that says, look, the technology that worked for one blind person isn't necessarily going to work with this person

and sometimes we use this phrase and I've done it earlier in the other videos, keeping the individual in the room. And when we think about the individual, we think, why are they here to see you? What are their aspirations as an individual? What do they want out their lives? How do they access employment if that's what they want or higher education and understanding that sometimes what works well for one person just is not going to work well for this person,

despite the two people, same similar discipline.

[00:08:39] **Robin:** It also speaks to the difference between the social and medical models of disability. Um, well, you know, the social model is, is placed in the individual center of the process and it's looking at their needs and the needs of the individual may not be entirely consistent with the, the difficulties that are associated with the condition that they have.

So to give an example of this, it's not very common, but I have, uh, in the past, I've seen people with dyspraxia or dysgraphia who have trouble with handwriting and handwriting slow, it's painful. It's barely legible at times the individual wants to continue writing by hand because they're familiar with it,

maybe it helps them retain things in memory. Maybe they employ a lot of visual note-taking strategies, so it may be difficult for them, but it's valuable for them to retain, and they, you know, that's sort of individual doesn't necessarily want to throw all of this, you know, a lifetime's worth of experience.

And, um, you know, refining of a strategy, just throw that out the window and then try something completely different.

[00:09:57] **Atif:** That's a really good example. And sometimes people are, um, you know, you, it's very, it's, it's a one, for example, it often in, in certain cultures, microculture where I'm from in Southeast Asia, you are seen as

what you write is intelligent or not intelligent, and it's important that academic information is you've written it or you've typed it, but just because you say it really well, isn't necessarily legitimate. So it can feel like you're cheating. If you are mind mapping the, the work, rather than doing an essay or cheating by using voice input technology, rather than.

So some people may have a, a real hard rigidness to move into that different space because they feel like, oh, it's not legitimate if I do it that way. Despite you, despite feeling like in the case of dyspraxia, it would be useful to try and use voice technology, but it might not feel legitimate to the person.

Um, and yet it works really well. And how do you safeguard your own enthusiasm ? I suppose to not trample on a person that isn't yet sharing that isn't yet. comfortable. Yeah.

[00:11:11] **Robin:** And I I've that it's, it's not to say that, um, the way in which a person, the way in which they want to approach the issue is, is therefore the way in which it should be approached

because for example, given another example, let's say, you have somebody who has developed a very, very profound visual impairment, but who has historically not really got on very well with, uh, having information read back or listening to auditory sources. They like reading. But if you're, you know, if your sight deteriorates to a point where you functionally cannot read, you don't have any choice, you know, your choice is taken from you by the nature of your condition.

Right. So there, there is, there is a balance here, but I think it's a vision impairment is a very good example here because it's a very functional, you know, it's an organic disability, it's a problem with the body. Right. So, and that can impose restrictions on you that you can't escape. But at the same time, there are, you know, the individual, uh, there's still choice in how you navigate through those difficulties, but then you set it against something like autism, which is more, um, I suppose for the large part, I kind of call it an experiential condition really, you know, in that, um, there are some sort of functional elements to it that it's, uh, it's predominantly

determined the details of it are determined by the perceptions of the individual who is experiencing the condition. So with something like autism, um, it's very easy as a needs assessor to go into that. Um, Not, uh, make whole lot of presumptions or anticipations because you'd be on very unsteady ground

if you attempted to do that. Before I began work as a needs assessor, I did some voluntary work with an elderly man with autism when I was training for that, uh, the guy who was training me said, okay, in preparation for this go away and read up about autism and then forget everything you've read because

every person you'll make with autism is completely different. There's a wide array of different things they might experience, but, uh, it's yeah. It's a very, very different perceptual experience from person to person. So,

[00:13:49] **Atif:** yeah, that's the wonderful thing, I mean, that brings me on to, I guess I think the point that actually brings me nicely onto it.

I think reflective practice is it's a really wonderful example. It is when you're reflecting on your life journey, your life, as well as the interactions you're having with people. Um, if you think about it. Yeah. It, the idea of books, book learning versus life learning. Is a good, it's a really wonderful example of reflective learning.

Are you open to life learning, even when it challenges things you read in books and are you able to think about it and not the delegitimise , what you've learned in school books, rather think, how do they inform your process? How do they inform you of the participation for the person you're working with or trying to support.

Um, let me ask you, do you think, um, yeah, I said, one I think about quite often, do you think that a good reflective practitioner can be taught?

[00:14:54] **Robin:** I see. Can you be taught to be reflective?

[00:14:57] **Atif:** Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Can you, can you be taught to be reflective? It's a bold question.

[00:15:07] **Robin:** Yes, I think, yeah. If you gave someone a very clearly defined process, such as, you know, the Gibbs approach that we talked about before, um, then you have a system to follow, but

it's obviously it's going to be harder for you if. If you, if you, if you're not kind of compelled to, to approach things, reflectively, uh, just intuitively you know, it, because it happens all the time. It's woven into everything you, you do lots of it, you will do without realizing. So if you're having to rely on applying a process that you've been taught or what at the time, then the chances are, they will be times where you are

you're missing things and you don't realize that you're missing them.

[00:16:04] **Atif:** Yeah, I guess it's.

[00:16:08] **Robin:** I wonder there, whether in terms of learning how to be reflective, you would be better starting with a, attempting a shift in perception rather than attempting to learn a process. You know, it's a shift cause it's ultimately reflection is born of awareness.

You know, you, you have to be aware uh self-aware and aware of your surroundings, your environment in order to, to, to reflect with, with any degree of competence or efficacy so, you know.

[00:16:44] **Atif:** Perhaps it goes back to that and learning aspect. So I very much think you can teach it, but it's not, the reason I think we actually can teach is that's what we're doing here today.

We're exploring it and I think it would be odd if we didn't say that we do we teach it, but it has to be a bedrock of things. And I think everyone doing this particular course. So all of you watching this video, you have this, you are here because you want to work. To support marginalized people. You want to change the life experiences.

Um, so you have it in bundles, but you'll find yeah.

[00:17:19] **Robin:** Yeah, I would, I would add that. I think that lots of the people that would be drawn to this type of work would be cut from that type of cloth. You know, it's similar to empathy, really. You know, you could, you can teach people empathy as a process and we've given it a name, but for a lot of people, this is just going to be giving a word to something that, you know, that the person lives every day, you know, and it's just in the same way, it's just kind of interwoven into everything. They do all their interactions with people.

So, um, yeah,

[00:17:55] **Atif:** I think that you, it requires emotional intelligence, but we need to define that. We need to say, well, what, what does that mean? And I think that really can mean a lot of things separately, but most of the intelligence for me is about listening to ourselves. It's about hearing ourselves recognizing patterns that we get into noticing the patterns that they may be helpful for us.

But they may not be useful for the another person that we're meeting. It may not be useful to us as parents. We've all been there, perhaps we're angry at times and we got used to have a pattern of shouting, rather than parenting and I would apply that to thinking of assessments that people do, where they get used to doing them quickly.

That doesn't mean they're noticing themselves, not noticing the person in the room. Very very important. So it's coming to face to face with um, so I guess if I summarize it, it's listening to ourselves. It's about coming face to face with our assumptions. Um, it's understanding whether we are seeing these patterns and if we are, how do we, how do we reflect on that?

How do we see and notice these patterns and decide, okay, this is actually not cool. And therefore I can alter it, by slowing down, I can alter it by asking myself as myself am I under too much pressure? Am I not getting to exercise, curiosity andenthusiasm that I have for this role and this interaction with this human being, who's sharing so much with me

and that's, that's the times when you're challenging the work, because certainly in the UK, it's very time pressured and is often pressured on people are having to get this done in order and a particular template. And, um, and that, that itself can often prevent people from, from becoming reflective learners because they're being timed and pressured and often you'll see very good needs assessment as in the UK copying and paste-ing.

So much they're copying, pasting over and over and over again. And they're essentially copying and pasting what they did with one person with cerebral palsy and adding it to the next person's cerebral palsy and that next person, next person, or somebody with dyslexia and the next person.

But it's not, it's useful because it's faster. But is it reflective? Is it individualized? Is it meaningful? These are important questions to ask. If we don't ask that question, then why are we doing it?

How does it make you feel evaluating those feelings, maybe analyzing to see wherever they're helpful or not. And coming to your conclusions as a practitioner and building an action plan. So I'm just gonna sort of use what I would call the four R's about reflective practice.

One is we Re-inhabit. The other one is reflect. One is review and the other is reframe number four. Reframe. Now I'll explain those. And then I'm just going to invite Robin to sort of add to that. I suppose reinhabit for me is doing a needs assessment when you're with somebody and you're trying to write your notes as best you can, but you may find it hard to really focus on the individual whilst you're constantly writing notes.

So you need to be present with that individual. So it's a real skill to be able to write those notes, but you may find that you will read some, write some of your notes afterwards, or you may find that you need to reorganize what you took in those and put it into a formal assessment. But when you do that, you need to sort of reinhabit what was happening in that room.

Reinhabit what do you think was happening for the person as they were sharing their life stories and their needs with you? It's like one of these four R's. First is reinhabit the second is reflect, reflect what you learned, um, and how it made you feel, uh, reflect on your power in that relationship.

Just a little, enough to exercise some self doubt, to make sure you get it right then to review what you've written and what you've come across and to see where those patterns are and whether they're healthy. Even things like a term we often use unconditional positive regard. Do you have positive regard without condition for the person you've met?

Do you recognize wherever they have structures and concerns that are challenging to you personally? So to review that, to really think about that, and then once you've done that, the fourth R R is to reframe it, reframe all of that information and put it onto that template and keep it as meaningful and as agile as possible.

It's a lot to ask you yourselves, especially when you're having to think about, you know, the cognitive biases that we have, the assumptions that we build, the speed in which we can feel we can easily do it, but it is important that we get it right and to understand that we're not neutral people, we are all made up of experiences.

They're our experiences and they make us very good at this work, but if they're not reflected on, they can make us also very distracted as work. What would you, would you agree with? Yeah,

[00:23:18] **Robin:** so it's a very fine balance. Um, so let me, for example, with, uh, the process of a needs assessment, uh, and, and re writing a report, um, systematizing elements of it, um, is helpful to, um, tell to really kind of crystallize and repeat elements of best practice to, to give the, the working experience of the assessment and the report writing structure direction.

But you systematize too much. You make something too rigid and then you lose the ability to be agile. So for example, in a needs assessment, I have a, it's not, I suppose, a set process that I follow exactly the same way every time. Sometimes I will change up elements just to keep things fresh for myself, but

you have to be prepared to drop everything. And on the fly, develop a bespoke process for an individual that's sitting in front of you, who for whatever reason is, is not going to work with the process that you're trying to follow. It's particularly true of people with very, uh, Acute problems with say, uh, post-traumatic stress disorder or something like that.

You enter an assessment and suddenly become very, very overwhelmed by the experience. Um, you know, you, you can sometimes then have to strip the process right back to it it's foundations and almost start again from a, you know, with a completely different tone and, and tack and, and approach you completely differently.

Um, you can also be true with people that are ADHD sometimes as well you know, that people, they actually can sometimes like to be, to feel like they're offering the direction of, uh, of, uh, of a discussion in which within a needs assessment, you know, You're kind of comparing it. You, you know, the process that you have to follow the objectives that you've got to meet.

So, um, but trying to force somebody to, to follow your process, uh, when they're not inclined to want to do that and they, they want to approach it more organically um, it's not going to be effective if you're trying to force a square peg into a round hole. So it's always a balance between applying structure and, uh, identifying things that repeat and solidifying them

and, um, so you can devote your focus and attention to the things that really require you to, to, uh, you know, think on your feet during an assessment. Um, and so then you're not thinking about the things. Uh, the odd, more repetitive, you know, you've kind of got them down, but, um, but yeah, you have to be a prepared to throw the inside thing out of the window and, and, you know, and start from fresh with the person.

Um, so yeah.

[00:26:37] **Atif:** And that, that really sort of summarizes, I mean, I guess we come to the end, but it really comes to summarize the, the need for agility, the need to always respect the importance of your role, your power in that. And the individual, not the disability or just the disability, but the individual in the room with you.

Um, it's very important. Um, I'm sure all of you who are listening to this video will have some thoughts about how you exercise agency or voice and personal control in the work that you do. Some of you are working at SEN schools. Working with young people, um, filling out reports. Um, and some of you are working as teachers and some of you are working in the NGOs.

How about, I mean, I guess I hope from this video, there's a moment to think about what assumptions you may be carrying with you in your day to day work, whether that's helpful or not. Sometimes it probably is and maybe less so. And are you making time to be able to reflect on your work,the importance of it.

Are you able to recognize how is it that your own biases, your own cognitive biases or your cultural biases are preventing you from being self-aware and whether that's making you good at your work or not good enough, or how you can change those patterns that you can see a reoccurring it's not easy.

And then in essence, as a needs assessor, and as a trainer, you are the person who's going to be very involved in making life changing differences with somebody who shared a lot with you, the intimacies of their lives, the strengths, the vulnerabilities they share. When they're taking the time to share that with you, you often, it's not likely that you be sharing it back to them, but you must take stock of it and recognize, well, how can I share it with myself?

I take time to recognize that actually I'm not necessarily stopping long enough to feel that am I really reflecting and reviewing, reframing, and even reinhabiting the importance of this work and the wonder that's happened because this person has shared so much of their life with me and their need for a great chance.

Anyway, I think that's sort of, before we finish on that, we're going to give you a reading list, as well as the Gibbs cycle of, of a reflective practice. There are no hard and fast rules here but if anything is not about books, it's about you feeling things and thinking about your life experiences to do that.

So we we'll give you a little bit reading list to help with that, but it's exploring it more. It may require more meditation. But we hope you enjoy it and I'm very much hope that you make it your own within this process. All right. That's it for me. Thank you. Okay. Take care everybody.