

What is Reflective Practice?

Reflective Practice is the foundation of professional development; it makes meaning from experience and transforms insights into practical strategies for personal growth and organisational impact.

It involves integrating activities into daily life on a routine basis which raise awareness, prompt critical analysis and aid self-management and decision-making. It means:

- Learning to pay attention – listening to ourselves
- Coming face to face with our assumptions
- Noticing patterns
- Changing what we see
- Changing the way we see.

We often assume learning is a discreet activity which involves reading books, attending courses, perhaps participating in action learning or working with a coach. But we are learning all the time; from everything we do, every conversation we have, every strand of information that comes our way. Reflective Practice is a way of recognising and articulating what we're learning on a moment by moment basis.

Children learn by creating new connections in the brain and putting them together in sequences. Adults, however, already have a brain full of connections, and reorganising existing knowledge – sometimes referred to as unlearning – is an essential component of the process.

Each adult learner has a unique set of experiences, mental models and assumptions. Restructuring and re-ordering what is known requires active, engaged participation in the learning process, relating ideas and concepts to personal experience. Research shows that for this to happen the new knowledge needs to be of practical and personal value to the learner. Adults commit to learning when they can connect it to their goals and aspirations.

What is the role of reflection in professional learning?

Reflection deepens learning. The act of reflecting enables us to make sense of what we've learned, why we learned it, and how each increment of learning took place. Moreover, reflection is about linking one increment to the wider perspective of learning - heading towards seeing the bigger picture. Through reflection, learning is integrated, internalised and personalised.

Thinking about an experience is essentially a cognitive activity, but reflection is also emotional and physical, and is linked with our values and social identity. Viewing issues from different perspectives challenges assumptions and established patterns

of behaviour, and encourages the development of new ways of seeing. Transformational theories suggest that adult learning is principally a meaning-making activity; that acquiring job-specific skills and spending time on continuous professional development creates the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of self as learner as well as acquire a body of knowledge. This is often referred to as double loop learning.