

Reflective Practice

Definitions:

Critical Thinking:

The ability to identify and challenge assumptions made by oneself and others; and then to explore and create alternative solutions, strategies or approaches.

Reflection

A process whereby the practitioner can consider, make sense of and learn, through their work experiences both as they occur, and afterwards.

Practice – based knowledge:

Knowledge from clinical experience cannot be applied to any circumstance; it is context bound. However, this knowledge can be applied within similar contexts. Nurses often tackle complex problems on a day-to-day basis. Reflecting on the process of this can identify knowledge that would be useful to other practitioners. Nurses have traditionally used “anecdotes” or “story telling” to recount incidents that they have learnt from, or have been unusual in some way.

Reflective practice formalises this process whilst taking it one step further; to systematically analyse what has happened or is happening.

Using Critical Thinking and reflection in Practice:

There are various methods that may help the practitioner. These include:

1. Reflective practice diaries or journals:

These do not have to take any standard format, for instance, in note form or long hand. Entries can be made regularly or as required. The idea of keeping a journal is for the practitioner to have a record of their thoughts and ideas on their own practice development. They may choose to share this, or aspects of it, in supervision.

2. Critical / Significant Incident analysis:

A formal way of analysing situations in our own practice, that may have gone well or badly, drawing out why they may have occurred, and what we might do differently.

The value of reflective practice:

Analysing our own practice allows for:

- Acknowledgement of feelings and emotions to reduce stress
- Self-awareness
- Clarification of roles: How have I developed, where do I fit in within a team etc.
- Monitoring one's own performance
- Practice development: Stimulating ideas for change and questioning existing practice.
- Identification of support systems or lack of them
- Challenging ideas and beliefs
- Valuing a broad spectrum of nursing knowledge: Practical knowledge as well as theoretical.
- Identifying gaps between philosophy of care and actual practice.