

Reflective Practice and Professional Development

by Peter Tarrant

Publisher: Sage Publications, UK, 2013

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Accepted for publication: September 29th 2017

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STATEMENT ABOUT THE BOOK'S PURPOSE

The book aims to encourage readers to reflect on their professional teaching practice, drawing on a range of models and techniques. It discusses a range of approaches to reflective practice, contextualising these to the classroom and discussing ways in which the effectiveness of reflection can be enhanced. It goes on to discuss ways in which reflective practice can improve the achievements of staff and students.

The book is approachable and engaging, containing a range of case studies and examples from practice in primary schools and Initial Teacher Education, together with a range of useful resources and tools.

Introduction

Reflection is an important tool in professional development in many careers, and can be used to enhance and develop learning in a range of occupations. This is particularly important in the field of education, where learning and enhancing practice from experience is a fundamental skill.

The ability to reflect does not come naturally to some and so, to make the most of the reflective process, ensuring that it has depth and promotes real change to enhance practice, texts about reflective practice are very helpful to enable professionals and their teachers make the most of the reflective process. This text discusses extensively the role of peer support, contributing a plethora of suggestions of how to promote and develop reflective practice in a variety of ways for those in primary education.

Context

The book is primarily written for the teaching profession and those aspiring to be members of the profession, but could prove useful as a reference text for anyone who is involved in teaching or educating others at any level. The book initially reviews the theoretical underpinning of reflection and relates this to the meaning of professionalism. It then goes on to suggest ways in which peer supported reflection can be encouraged and supported, drawing on the experiences of students and teachers and providing a range of useful resources.

The author, Peter Tarrant, is an experienced educator, who has longstanding experience in primary education. It is evident from the book that he has used his experience in schools to develop courses to support those who wish to enter the teaching profession. The examples and case studies within the book are drawn from the context of primary education and for some this may be a limiting factor.

Genre and Significance

The book firmly focusses on the use of reflection to develop professional practice of educators in schools with an emphasis on peer supported reflection. In this sense, the title could be thought to be a little misleading from two perspectives: professional development exists in many sectors and the title implies a wider perspective than the narrow field of (primary) education and there is a clear emphasis on the promotion and discussion about peer supported reflection. Thus, the focus of the text is quite narrow, in comparison to the very broad title.

The book draws on the key theories of professionalism in education, such as Eraut (1994), Moon (1999) and Ghaye (2011) as well as those that relate reflection to professional practice; most notably the work of Schon (1983), but there is little consideration of the growing body of academic literature on reflection for professional development from outside the world of education. For example, the work of Raelin (2008) is not mentioned here and his wider perspective from outside the world of education could potentially have been useful to draw on excellent practice in other professions. Nonetheless, the depth of critique, analysis and application in the practice setting is very good and provides thought provoking examples and concepts for use by those both within and outside the teaching profession.

Evaluation

The book is intended as an aide to developing more effective reflection in itself- as well as discussing this from a theoretical perspective. Each chapter concludes with a summary, and a list of helpful questions to reflect on the contents and how they relate to the reader's own practice. In addition to the reference list, there is also a helpful list of additional reading, linked to the promotion of reflection on professional practice.

There is extensive discussion about approaches to promoting reflection that involve collaboration with others to support the process such as learning conversations; professional dialogues; coaching and peer supported reflection with and without observation. Indeed as noted earlier, this would seem to be the focus of the text. For those who have not previously used or considered peer supported reflection this is an interesting perspective on the reflective process, which is often criticised as a solitary process, lacking in criticality and depth. Some of the approaches mentioned here would be very useful to use to encourage depth of engagement with the reflective process and to embed it within routine practice.

The need for reflective practice is discussed in chapter 4, however, could have usefully been discussed earlier, adapting Kolb's (2014) learning cycle to link reflection to the development of practice. This is the only model of reflection drawn upon in the text, which I do feel is significant omission. From my own experience of working with adult learners, Kolb's cycle can be difficult for some to engage with initially, and other models such as Rolfe,

Freshwater and Jasper (2001) "What? So What? Now What?" may be a more useful introduction for those who struggle with concepts of reflective practice. These models could also easily be used with the peer supported approaches discussed.

Accountability and the professional review process is usefully discussed. For many professions and professionals who are required to record continuous professional development (CPD) activity, reflection on and for learning is a useful way of demonstrating engagement with new and emerging theories. Linking reflection into the review cycle is a useful way of emphasising the need to embed reflection within practice, so that the annual review could be based on a series of reflections, from practice and from learning experiences, such as courses or conferences. Again it may have been useful to draw on examples and literature from outside the education sector (e.g. health) to provide a different yet valuable perspective on this. This very pragmatic discussion is a refreshing suggestion to approach the somewhat dry annual review process, and provides an essential link between process and practice. The appendices contains some useful templates that could be adapted to record reflections and monitor progress of actions, which could be used to inform the review process.

The final chapter, reflects on the reflective process and the learning during the book and summarises the key discussion points. One of the key messages is to invoke criticality as a tool to unlock reflection. Honest critical thinking in reflection is vital if practice is to move forwards and develop, as Tarrant suggests, looking back in a manner that influences how we look forwards.

Summary

In reading this book, concepts of reflective practice and the way in which it is promoted and supported are challenged and stretched beyond the more traditional approach of self- reflection. The use of peer supported reflection in particular, has value in assisting novices to engage with the reflective process, and many of the suggestions are transferable outside the primary or even education context to develop and enhance practice.

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