



Reflective Practice

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Reflective practice: has it really changed over time?

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This paper seeks to expose the definition of reflective practice from its seminal roots through the lens of a critical review underpinned by epistemological perspectives of the Vygotsky Principle, Temporality and Socio-Cultural Theory. The discussion includes the framing of reflective practice and the models that have been developed from discourse over time, concluding that reflective practice is a personal interpretation driven by the individual's choice of reflective practice model.

Keywords: reflective practice; reflection; learning; development; models

Introduction

Reflective practice is becoming more fashionable within the fields of professional practice (Cheatham & Chivers, 2001), human resource management (Andrews, Cameron, & Harris, 2008) and leadership (Densten & Gray, 2001). It is becoming a source of learning (Gibbs, 1988; Johns, 1995) and is becoming a tool of competency within the field of management (Andrews et al., 2008). This paper critically reviews the definitions of reflective practice from its seminal beginnings (Dewey, 1938) to determine if reflective practice has really changed over time and is underpinned by epistemological perspectives of the Vygotsky Principle (Peck, Gallucci, Sloan, & Lippincott, 2009), Temporality (Harré & van Langenhove, 2008) and Socio-Cultural Theory (White, 2010). It also examines how researchers have developed reflective practice models over time and establishes that reflective practice is a personal journey of learning and that both its definition and the models developed are of a personal choice.

The perception of reflective practice

Kinsella (2009) suggests reflective practice is one of the most popular theories of professional knowledge, yet current literature does not provide clarity on what we mean by the term 'reflective practice'. Whilst literature continues to direct its focus on Schön (1983, 1987) as being seminal work, there is continued paucity in the underpinning of reflective practice. This paucity infers that 'anything goes' within reflective practice due to confusion amongst researchers with Kinsella (2009), which suggests reflective practice is becoming a meaningless phrase. Freire (1989) suggests

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that if we enter into activity without having engaged in reflection, then the output may be meaningless, which adds confusion to the term ‘reflective practice’ and suggests that ‘anything goes’ as it becomes an individual pursuit, placing the emphasis on the value of the output. This suggestion that ‘anything goes’ lends itself to the notion that there is no requirement to underpin the absolute definition of reflective practice.

Epistemology of reflective practice

There has been widespread application of reflective practice theory (Kinsella, 2009), with Dewey (1938) and Schön (1983, 1987) proffering seminal theoretical concepts, frameworks and models within this field. This paper offers originality by applying epistemological perspectives of the Vygotsky Principle (Peck et al., 2009), Temporality (Harré and van Langenhove, 2008) and Socio-Cultural Theory (White, 2010) to underpin the perceived changing definition of reflective practice over a longitudinal timeline.

The Vygotsky Principle (Peck et al., 2009) is a conceptual framework that is also termed the ‘Vygotsky Space’. It is a representation of individual and collective learning within public and private contextual settings through four phases of interactions: appropriation, transformation, publication and conventionalisation (Peck et al., 2009).

‘Appropriation’ is defined as how the individual learns through observation of others, whilst ‘transformation’ is the individual adapting the knowledge to meet their needs; both of these stages occur in the ‘collective learning space’, i.e. learning from others. ‘Publication’ represents the individual rationalising the knowledge and capturing it formally, whilst ‘conventionalisation’ describes the individual demonstrating knowledge by sharing with others; both of these stages occur in the ‘individual learning space’, i.e. learning through oneself.

Harré and van Langenhove (2008) suggest that the Vygotsky Space demonstrates that personal skills are acquired from the ‘public contextual setting’, transferred into the ‘private contextual setting’ and back again and they are tempered by the concept of temporality. Temporality is a definition of an individual’s self at any given point in time with three temporal states identified: embodied self, autobiographical self and social self (Harré & van Langenhove, 2008). ‘Embodied self’ can be adapted to define the unity of an individual’s Vygotsky Space with respect to the material world at the time the experience takes place; the ‘autobiographical self’ defines the manner by which an individual captures the experience and develops a narrative; ‘social self’ describes how that narrative can then be shared with others. This concept of ‘social self’ lends itself further to the socio-cultural approach to learning.

White (2010) suggests that socio-cultural learning occurs in a ‘social framework’ as opposed to an ‘individual pursuit’. The social framework, according to White (2010), is defined as ‘situational learning’ whereby the individual learns from the social community by which the learning is taking place whereas ‘individual learning’ is constrained to the individual learning from oneself.

These three epistemological perspectives of Vygotsky Principle (Peck et al., 2009), Temporality (Harré & van Langenhove, 2008) and Socio-Cultural Theory (White, 2010) can be woven together to form an epistemological perspective, represented as four distinct paradigms that can evaluate the definition of reflective practice and the types of models that can be utilised, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Paradigms containing the Socio-Cultural Learning, Temporality and the Vygotsky Space lens.

Paradigm definition	Vygotsky Space Parameters			Temporality	Socio-Cultural Learning
	Interaction	Learning	Contextual		
Appropriation Transformation Publication	Appropriation Transformation Publication	Collective Collective Individual	Public Private Private	Embodied self Embodied self Autobiographical Self	Situational Individual Individual
Conventionalisation	Conventionalisation	Individual	Public	Social self	Situational

Reflective practice: definitions through time

Reflective practice has its seminal roots with Dewey's (1938) theory of inquiry which postulates that reflection is both emotive and impulsive, with Dewey (1938) describing reflection as:

Reflection is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealings with further experiences. It is in the heart of the intellectual organisation and of the disciplined mind.

Dewey's (1938) definition of reflection depicts an 'appropriation paradigm', an approach that is underpinned through observation and learning from others through 'intelligent dealings'. The learning style of Dewey (1938) is considered to be 'collective' in nature through the 'intellectual organisation', suggesting the contextual setting of reflection is 'public'. The temporality state can be defined as the 'embodied-self', recognising that 'intelligent dealings' take place within an 'intellectual organisation' and that 'net meanings' are the outcome, suggesting that the socio-cultural learning is 'situational', i.e. within the 'intellectual organisation'. An 'intellectual organisation' is actually a 'learning organisation' (Schon, 1975) that he described as:

Organizations are artefacts designed for human purposes. Their effectiveness depends on their continuing redesign in response to changing values and a changing context for action. Organizational learning would then refer to this process of continuing redesign.

Schon (1975) is suggesting that reflection is a state of learning that the organisation benefits from. Learning is described as a 'changing context for action', which could lend itself to a 'transformation' paradigm in the sense that the organisation adapts itself through the individual adapting knowledge to meet their needs. However, closer inspection of Schon (1975) suggests that the individual undertaking reflective practice is ensconced in a style akin to the 'appropriation' paradigm and that of Dewey's (1938) definition of reflection as defined below:

The environment in which human beings live, act and inquire is not simply physical. It is cultural as well. Problems which induce inquiry grow out of the relations of fellow beings to one another.

In this instance, it is evident that the 'appropriation' paradigm is still present and that learning through observation is present through 'inquiry grows out of the relations to fellow beings'. The 'environment' is contextualised as being 'public' in nature, which in turn suggests 'situational' socio-cultural learning is present through the 'culture of the organisation'. In addition to this an 'embodied self' temporality state is present through the term 'induced inquiry'. Dewey (1938) is suggesting that the organisation described by Schon (1975) is the environment and both Dewey (1938) and Schon (1975) are recognising the importance of the human being as being important. This establishes that reflection and organisational learning are concepts united by the human being, leading to Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) redefining the purpose and meaning of reflection to be:

Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull over and evaluate it. It is working with experience that is important in learning.

Boud et al. (1985) present reflection as a 'publication' paradigm through 'recapturing the experience' and the adjectives of 'think, mull and evaluate'. There is a sense of 'individual learning' being present through 'people recapturing their experience' and

there is no mention of working with others to capture the experience, which suggests that reflection, according to Boud et al. (1985), is more of a 'private' contextual learning experience, tempered by the idea that the individual 'works with the experience and learns from it'. This was the first significant paradigm shift in the definition of reflective practice, suggesting that it was no longer a 'public activity', one whereby observation of others was not seen as the key driver and the internalised thinking of the individual was present. It is possible to argue that the temporality state is 'auto-biographical self', through the 'evaluation' of the experience being an auto-biographical activity. This auto-biographical activity is further tempered by a socio-cultural learning of 'individual' through 'working with experience is important in learning'; the idea being that reflection is a personal activity and that personal reflections are an individual activity that only the individual can benefit from. The 1980s saw a paradigm shift in the definition of reflection, with Schön (1987) now proffering that reflection is: 'A dialogue of thinking and doing by which I become more skilful'.

Schön (1987) was depicting a paradigm shift from an 'appropriation' paradigm to a 'publication' paradigm. This paradigm shift was important because it moved the 'collective learning' style towards an 'individual learning' style, with Schön (1987) suggesting 'thinking and doing' was important because it leads to an individual 'becoming more skilful'. This idea of becoming more skilful lends itself to a 'private' contextual setting that is underpinned by the 'auto-biographical self' as a temporal state through 'thinking and doing'. The 'publication' paradigm continued into the early 1990s, with Louden (1991) postulating that reflection is; 'Reflection is a mental process which takes place out of the stream of action, looking forward or back to actions that that have taken place'.

Louden (1991) is depicting the 'publication' paradigm through the 'mental process which takes place out of the stream of action'. This in itself suggests that the individual is attempting to rationalise the knowledge through a mental process and demonstrates that 'learning' remains an 'individual' experience and not a 'collective' one. The contextual setting also remains 'private' with reflection considered to 'take place out of the stream of action' with an element of 'autobiographical self' present through 'looking forward or back'. The outcome of 'looking forward or backward' supports the idea that reflection is an 'individual' activity through the 'mental process'. A further paradigm shift occurred in 1993, with Reid (1993) proffering, 'Reflection is a process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and inform learning about practice'.

Reid (1993) presents a paradigm shift towards 'conventionalisation' with no obvious shift from an 'individual' learning style and a shift towards a 'public' contextualised setting through 'practice', espousing that reflection is a formal review of an experience through a 'process' that displays a temporal state of 'social self' through the need to share with others via 'informing learning about practice'. A reverse paradigm shift occurred in the mid-1990s, with Johns (1995) describing reflection as: 'It is a personal process that usually results in some change in their perspective of a situation or creates new learning for the individual'.

Johns (1995) depicts a 'publication' paradigm, describing that learning is 'individual' through 'personal process' and the context is considered to be 'private' through 'new learning for the individual'. The temporality state of 'autobiographical self' is present through a 'personal process' and the socio-cultural learning is considered to be 'individual' in that it 'creates new learning for the individual'. At the turn

of the millennium, the definition of reflection began to evolve again, with Tate and Mills (2004) describing reflection as a learning experience:

We learn through critical reflection by putting ourselves into the experience and exploring personal and theoretical knowledge to understand it and view it in different ways.

Tate and Mills (2004) depict a ‘conventionalisation’ paradigm through sharing of knowledge with others through ‘viewing it in different ways’. There is likeness to the ‘individual’ learning, with emphasis being placed upon ‘putting ourselves in the experience’; there is inference that by putting ourselves in the experience, we may be describing an experience that has happened to others, suggesting that the contextual setting is ‘public’. A temporal state of ‘social self’ is present through ‘exploration of knowledge’ and a socio-cultural learning experience that is described as ‘situational’, whereby the individual ‘views things in different ways’. However, De Dea Roglio and Light (2009) introduced another paradigm shift, underpinned by the need to simplify the definition of reflection to be: ‘To stop, think, and reflect profoundly on their experiences, as it is important to appreciate the past before using the present to obtain a better future’.

De Dea Roglio and Light (2009) proposed a ‘publication’ paradigm, espousing the concept that knowledge is captured formally through the ‘appreciation of the past’ and that ‘learning’ remains ‘individual’ rather than ‘collective’. The contextual setting remains ‘private’, with an ‘auto-biographical self’ present through the ‘appreciation of the past’ leading to a socio-cultural learning experience of ‘individual learning’ to be present. However, Hegarty, Kelly, and Walsh (2011) suggest that reflection should not be considered to be an individual pursuit, proposing a further paradigm shift by defining reflection as:

Reflection on activities undertaken in the workplace, that such activity can be deconstructed, to reveal the multi-layered character of knowing-in-the-world, and therefore the intrinsic sophistication involved in undertaking professional roles.

Hegarty et al. (2011) present an ‘appropriation’ paradigm, defining that reflection ‘takes place in the workplace’ and ‘reveals multi-layered character’ which suggests that ‘learning’ is ‘collective’. This ‘collective learning’ depicts a contextual setting of ‘public’ through reference to ‘professional roles’, with ‘embodied self’ being present through the ‘knowing world and its deconstruction’ underpinned by a ‘situational’ socio-cultural learning through the ‘workplace’. However, a further paradigm shift occurred in the 2010s, with Nilsen, Nordström, and Ellström (2012) describing reflection as:

Reflection is typically described as a mechanism to translate experience into learning, by examining one’s attitudes, beliefs and actions, to draw conclusions to enable better choices or responses in the future.

Nilsen et al. (2012) present a ‘transformation’ paradigm, whereby there is a change in contextual learning towards ‘private’ through ‘an examination of oneself’ and a socio-cultural learning that is placed within the individual domain.

Summary of reflective practice definitions

Literature suggests that the term ‘reflective practice’ has seen many paradigm shifts since Dewey (1938) developed the concept, presenting an ‘appropriation’ paradigm

until the mid-1980s before moving on to a ‘publication’ paradigm for the next 10 years. The mid-1990s and the 2000s saw multiple paradigm shifts across each of the four paradigms, which suggests that reflective practice is changing but it is not necessarily evolving; it is more of a dynamic definition that is open to personal interpretation to suit the individual undertaking reflective practice. Given that any of the four paradigms can be used to describe reflective practice, it is possible to suggest that ‘anything goes’ to describe reflective practice and that the emphasis is perhaps more akin to the individual’s reflective practice model delivering the desired outcomes, which is discussed next in this paper.

Reflective practice models

Reflective practice models represent both formal and informal reflection (Cheetham & Chivers, 2001). Informal reflection involves the use of self-questioning whilst formal reflection requires research and theory to underpin the frameworks that will be used for practice. Both formal and informal reflection have been critically reviewed within this paper using the four types of paradigm described in Table 1.

The seminal work of Dewey (1938) proposed a five-stage informal reflection model that represented an ‘appropriation’ paradigm through:

- (1) Problem identification
- (2) Problem observation
- (3) Develop hypothesis
- (4) Scrutinise the hypothesis
- (5) Test the hypothesis

Dewey’s (1938) model presents an ‘appropriation’ paradigm with ‘collective learning’ present through observations occurring within a ‘public’ contextual setting. There is evidence of an ‘embodied self’ temporal state being present through ‘development, scrutiny and testing of the hypothesis’, with a ‘situational’ socio-cultural learning present through ‘observation’.

Dewey’s (1938) model of reflective practice remained in place until the mid-1970s, whereby Kolb and Fry (1975) argued that ‘information is generated prior to knowledge being acquired’ through their model of transformation of information into knowledge via experiential learning. Kolb and Fry (1975) proposed a paradigm shift to both ‘publication and conventionalisation’. Unlike the definitions of reflective practice, where the paradigm shift was considered to be clear and understood, the paradigm shift for reflective practice models in the 1970s was considered to be a halfway-house, an element of holding on to the past to help inform the present.

Kolb and Fry (1975) argued that learning was a continuous circle made up of four different types of experiences and that learning could begin at any of these experiences, stating the four experiences to be:

- (1) Concrete experience – carry out action and see the effect of the action in a given situation.
- (2) Observation and experience – understand these effects to see if they are repeatable for future experiences.

- (3) Form abstract concepts – understand general principles by which situations the effects may fall under.
- (4) Test in new situations – test the abstract in the new situations, start again at 1.

Stages 1 and 2 represent the ‘appropriation’ paradigm with emphasis on ‘situational’ socio-cultural learning. There is inference that experiences have occurred in a ‘public’ contextualised setting, through the ‘repeatability’ of experiences for a ‘given situation’; that is to say that ‘observation’ is still present and that is considered to be a ‘collective learning’ experience in a public contextualisation. The ‘embodied self’ temporal state is present through ‘effects’ and also the need to adapt the effects for ‘repeatability in the future’.

However, stages 3 and 4 propose a shift towards both the ‘publication and conventionalisation’ paradigms. The first shift sees the ‘publication’ paradigm being adopted at stage 3, with the individual considered to be learning on their own through ‘abstract formation’; there is inference of the temporal state ‘autobiographical self’ being present through ‘understanding principles’, and given the individual nature of the ‘abstract formation’ it is possible to suggest that it is an ‘individual’ socio-cultural learning experience. In completing the ‘abstract formation’, the second paradigm shift occurs with stage 4, presenting a shift to ‘conventionalisation’. This paradigm shift is underpinned through the ‘testing of the abstract in new situations’; there is an inference that the individual will test this abstract in a ‘public’ contextualisation and exhibit a temporal state of ‘social self’ by sharing this knowledge with others, whilst the socio-cultural learning is taking place within the framework of the reflective practice through ‘repeatability’ and the instruction to go back to stage 1 and repeat the process.

However, it is noticeable that Dewey’s (1938) five-stage model and Kolb and Fry’s (1975) model are rigid. The models provide clear distinct steps and provide descriptions of what the outcomes should reflect. Kolb and Fry (1975) attempt to draw out Dewey’s (1938) lack of external environment through the paradigm shifts of ‘publication’ and ‘conventionalisation’ and there is a change in the outcomes too. Dewey (1938) suggests an individual reflects, learns and implements the outcomes to a given situation or experience, whilst Kolb and Fry (1975) suggest that learning is continuous and introduce the concept that the completion of stage 4 yields a return to stage 1 and a repeat of the process.

By the 1980s, reflective practice models began to incorporate cognitive behaviours of individuals. Whilst there was not a paradigm shift per se, there was a focus on re-defining the ‘publication’ paradigm through Schön (1983), who proposed that there are two types of cognitive behaviours that can be used to perform reflective practice:

- (1) Reflection-in-action
- (2) Reflection-on-action

Reflection-in-action is a process that enables an individual to re-shape their thinking whilst working. Schön (1983) simply states that reflecting-in-action is: ‘The spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life or thinking on your feet’.

Reflection-on-action relates to the seminal definition of reflection provided by Dewey (1938) and the element of ‘looking back’. Schön (1983) simply states that reflection-on-action is: ‘We reflect-on-action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our reflection-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome’.

Schön (1983) introduced cognitive behaviours through ‘looking backwards’, but there is also evidence emerging that the temporal state of ‘auto-biographical self’ is present through ‘thinking on your feet’ and ‘thinking back’ because there is always the opportunity of ‘an unexpected outcome’; it is the understanding of this unexpected outcome and the demonstration to others that suggests a deeper understanding of the ‘publication’ paradigm was present.

However, the mid-1980s saw a deeper understanding of the ‘conventionalisation’ paradigm and cognitive behaviours. Kolb (1984) went on to further develop the learning cycle of Kolb and Fry (1975) by identifying the learning styles that we adopt as part of reflective practice. In particular, Kolb (1984) identified that, as individuals, we adopt different learning styles and are influenced by:

- (1) Processing continuum – the approach to learning: thinking.
- (2) Perception continuum – the emotional response to learning: feeling.

Kolb (1984) said that the ‘conventionalisation’ paradigm could not allow a person to perform the processing and perception continuums at the same time because that involves thinking and feeling at the same time. The idea that you cannot think and feel at the same time suggests that one activity drives the other and produces a series of choices. Kolb (1984) reframed the Kolb and Fry (1975) model to become:

- (1) Concrete experience – still known as concrete experience (feeling).
- (2) Observation and experience – now known as reflective observation (watching).
- (3) Form abstract concepts – now known as abstract conceptualisation (thinking).
- (4) Test in new situations – now known as active experimentation (doing).

This reframing did not present a paradigm shift from the proposed model of Kolb and Fry (1975). There was still this hybrid of the ‘appropriation’ paradigm for stages 1 and 2 with a ‘publication’ paradigm for stage 3 and ‘conventionalisation’ paradigm for stage 4. However, Kolb (1984) attempted to overlay the stages of the proposed model with the processing continuums, which effectively saw a pseudo paradigm shift with the ‘appropriation’ paradigms now having a ‘conventionalisation’ paradigm overlaid on to them. This overlay served to confuse the paradigm state of the model and led to a complete reframing of the model and back towards the hybrid paradigm state of the model as follows:

- (1) Diverging occurs when concrete experience and reflective observation are combined. People with a divergent learning style view concrete situations from many perspectives, and they create relationships between all kinds of aspects and perspectives.

- (2) Assimilating occurs based on the combination of abstract conceptualisation and reflective observation. Assimilators incorporate contrasting observations and reflections into an integrated explanation or theoretical model.
- (3) Converging is the combination of abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. People with a convergent learning style combine theory and practice into opportunities for action.
- (4) Accommodating occurs when concrete experience and active experimentation are combined. Accommodators achieve practical results by trying out things and seeking new experiences.

Kolb (1984) now espoused that stage 1 was an ‘appropriation’ paradigm, with this particular stage enconced in observation with an ‘embodied self’ temporal state present through ‘viewing through many perspectives’ and an inference that a ‘situational’ socio-cultural experience is present through ‘creating relationships’.

Whilst this was not a paradigm shift from Kolb and Fry (1975), stage 2 saw a shift to the ‘transformation’ paradigm, with the contextual setting shifting towards a ‘private learning’ style with an ‘individual’ socio-cultural learning. Kolb (1984) was suggesting that ‘incorporating contrasting observations’ was a personal activity which helped to shape the ‘integrated explanation’. This then enabled the individual to move to stage 3 and to shift towards the ‘publication paradigm’.

At stage 3 the individual is beginning to seek ways by which the ‘abstract concept’ can be put into practice and there is evidence emerging that the individual is beginning to demonstrate an ‘auto-biographical self’ temporal state through the combination of theory and practice; there is an underlying assumption that this combination needs to be recorded and understood before the individual can move to stage 4 of the model.

Stage 4 of the model depicts a paradigm shift to ‘conventionalisation’. At this stage of the model, the individual is demonstrating a desire to share the knowledge with others, within a ‘public setting’ that enables them to demonstrate their ‘social self’.

By the late-1980s there was an attempt to simplify reflective practice models to have ‘short descriptive headlines’ for each proposed stage. There was also a paradigm shift back to a singular paradigm to describe the models, with Gibbs (1988) proposing a six-stage ‘publication’ paradigm model that included:

- (1) Description
- (2) Feelings
- (3) Evaluation
- (4) Analysis
- (5) Conclusions
- (6) Action Plan

Gibbs (1988) suggested that those engaging in reflective practice need to capture the experiences to learn from them, evidencing a temporal state of ‘auto-biographical self’. This ‘auto-biographical self’ extends itself to define reflection as a ‘private learning’ experience that is contextualised to a person’s self-learning within an individual socio-cultural space. Each of the stages infers that a narrative will be constructed and that a person ‘evaluates and analyses’ before drawing ‘conclusions’ that enables them to develop an action plan. There is nothing within Gibbs’ (1988) model to suggest that the action plan is implemented, suggesting that reflection stops

with an action plan; this is akin to Dewey's (1938) model which appears to just end and contradicts Kolb and Fry's (1975) model. However, Gibbs' (1988) model does fit the 'publication paradigm' and removed the mixed paradigms that appeared to precede it. This paradigm continued into the mid-1990s, with Johns (1995) depicting a five-stage model with a 'publication' paradigm as follows:

- (1) Description of the experience
- (2) Reflection
- (3) Influencing factors
- (4) Could I have dealt with it better?
- (5) Learning

Johns' (1995) model was developed to be carried out in the act of sharing with a mentor, but crucially Johns (1995) enhances the temporal state of 'auto-biographical self' through not only the mentor but his description of each stage; there is an assumption that each stage requires formal capture or narrative to be discussed with the mentor.

However, by the late-1990s, Brookfield (1998) returned to the mixed paradigm models by reframing reflective practice as an activity in which individuals view events through four succinct lenses:

- (1) Autobiography
- (2) Learner's Eyes
- (3) Our Colleagues' Eyes
- (4) Theoretical Literature

Whilst Brookfield (1998) remains mainly within the 'publication' paradigm, there is a paradigm shift at stage 3, which suggests an 'appropriation' paradigm is present. This 'appropriation' paradigm is underpinned by the individual's need to learn from 'the observations of others' and to present an 'embodied self' temporal state by ensuring those observations are contextualised within the 'public setting' they were observed in. The other three remaining stages present a publication paradigm, presenting an individual learning experience and an 'auto-biographical self' temporal state as the individual attempts to capture the experience.

The early-2000s saw a paradigm shift back to a singular paradigm model and back to the 'publication paradigm'. There was still a desire to present models in a simplified format with Rolfe, Freshwater, and Jasper (2001) simplifying the reflective framework model to:

- (1) What? – describe
- (2) So What? – discuss
- (3) Now What? – identify

Rolfe et al. (2001) introduced clarity to 'publication' paradigm with each of the three stages clearly showing an 'auto-biographical self' temporal state to be present. There is an inference that the reflections are individual in nature and that the outcomes are also individual in nature. The 'publication' paradigm continued in to the late-2000s with Francis and Cowan (2008) proposing a three-stage model that introduced clear overlaps between the stages as follows:

- (1) What?
- (2) What? How?
- (3) How? How Well?

Francis and Cowan (2008) argued that the ‘What?’ stage is the reflection for action and occurs prior to Schön (1983) reflecting-in-action and reflecting-on-action, depicting that a temporal state of ‘auto-biographical self’ is present. Francis and Cowan (2008) argued that this stage incorporates previous experiences and begins the process of enrichment, which suggests that ‘individual’ socio-cultural learning is present. This process of enrichment flows through to the ‘What? How?’ stage, which depicts learning is ‘individual’ and remains contextualised within a ‘private’ setting. The ‘How? How Well?’ stage depicts ‘individual’ learning is still present and that the temporal state of ‘auto-biographical self’ is present through evaluation of the reflective narrative. Andrews et al. (2008) summarise this style of reflection through four distinct learning processes:

- (1) Socialisation – exchanging knowledge
- (2) Combination – combining knowledge
- (3) Externalisation – sharing knowledge
- (4) Internalisation – disseminating knowledge into practice

Andrews et al. (2008) present a paradigm shift towards ‘conventionalisation’, proffering that the individual shares and captures knowledge with others, displaying a ‘social self’ temporal state within the situation by which the experience occurred.

Summary of reflective practice models

Literature suggests that reflective practice models have evolved over time and can be presented as a singular paradigm or multiple paradigms. In the formative years, reflective practice models were considered to be singular paradigms depicting an ‘appropriation’ paradigm.

From the mid-1970s through to the mid-1990s, the reflective practice models became more complex with respect to their paradigm, depicting mixed paradigms. The review of current literature did not reveal any specific types or trends of paradigms mixing, suggesting that ‘anything goes’ within reflective practice during this period.

The late-1990s saw a paradigm shift towards models of a ‘publication’ paradigm state which continued until the late-2000s when a paradigm shift towards ‘conventionalisation’ was noticed.

It was also observed that reflective practice models, with respect to their stages and definitions of those stages, have become more simplified over time. The findings of this paper suggest that this is partly due to reflective experiences becoming more individual in nature and the introduction of mentors, for example, meant that reflective experiences needed to be captured formally.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine whether reflective practice, its definition and models have really changed over time. The findings of this paper suggest that the term 'reflective practice' remained constant in its 'appropriation' paradigm state from 1938 until the mid-1980s. There is a suggestion that reflective practice is dynamic in nature and is open to interpretation because any of the four paradigms can be used to define reflection; it is wholly dependent on the individual and their perception of reflection, rendering the idea that the idea that reflection and its definition can be categorised as 'anything goes', so long as the definition fits one of the four paradigms.

However, reflective practice models have evolved over time and they can be presented as singular or mixed paradigms in nature. Reflective practice models have evolved from an 'informal state to a formal state' over the course of time. They have migrated towards the 'publication' paradigm and the need to formally capture experiences and learn from them. This suggests that individuals are perhaps less concerned with framing the term 'reflection' and are more focused on developing reflective practice models to help them capture experiences. The concept that 'anything goes' in framing the definition of reflection is underpinned by the choice of reflective practice model chosen. In choosing the model to determine how an individual wishes to capture the reflective narrative, they can then frame the term 'reflection' to justify the choice of model. This justification will support the idea that the outcomes from reflective practice are important to the individual, suggesting that a 'publication paradigm' is required for the model. The need for a publication paradigm is dependent on the need to create a 'narrative' that can inform future actions and predict future outcomes.

The findings of this paper suggest that reflective practice models are cyclical in nature; as such, the definition of reflective practice and the model paradigm chosen (singular or mixed) is dependent upon the individual and perhaps the fashionable models of the time. Literature suggests that the definition of reflective practice is 'anything goes' and that the choice of model is likely to have a 'publication paradigm'. There are no 'hard and fast' rules about what constitutes a reflective practice model nor is there a singular unified definition of reflection. This in itself suggests that reflective practice can be considered as a personal process, inferring that individuals can build a reflective model that works for them and the desired outcomes they wish to achieve.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

Alexander Finlayson is a DBA researcher, who works full-time as a Programme Manager for a multi-national engineering consultancy, and he is currently a part-time early career researcher. He has an active interest in reflective practice and is concerned with the advancement of knowledge within the field and how reflective practice can be adopted in leadership.

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