Reflective Practice: awareness and use within UHI

A research project funded by the Learning and Teaching Academy 2020-21

Webinar October 7 2021
Rob Bray, Argyll College UHI

This presentation will

- Outline the project aims and research questions

- Briefly explain the context

- Summarise the methodology

- Present the main results and …

- … their implications

- Discuss possible implementation and practical next-steps

Project Aim: To investigate teaching staff awareness and use of Reflective Practice (RP).

Four research questions:

1 To what extent are academic staff aware of the University's policy on Reflective Practice, and of the pedagogical theories underlying the relevance of Reflective Practice

2 To what extent do academic staff use Reflective Practice to reflect on their own learning and development as professionals,

3 To what extent to academic staff use Reflective Practice as a method of assessing students (for instance using diaries, journaling, logs, Critical Incident Analysis, Action Learning Sets.)

4 Is there potential for introducing new forms of Reflective Practice to enhance its uptake, for instance using video, audio, reduced, co-operative reflective records and digital methods such as apps.

Reflective Practice is …

Reflective Practice (RP) is the process by which individuals or groups consider their experiences and actions as part of their continuous learning in order to inform future action.

John Dewey: **reflective practice** refers to 'the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge …. enables us to know what we are about when we act' (Dewey 1910 p6)

Diverse methods tools include journals, diaries, logs, Critical Incident Analysis, Action Learning Sets, e-portfolios …

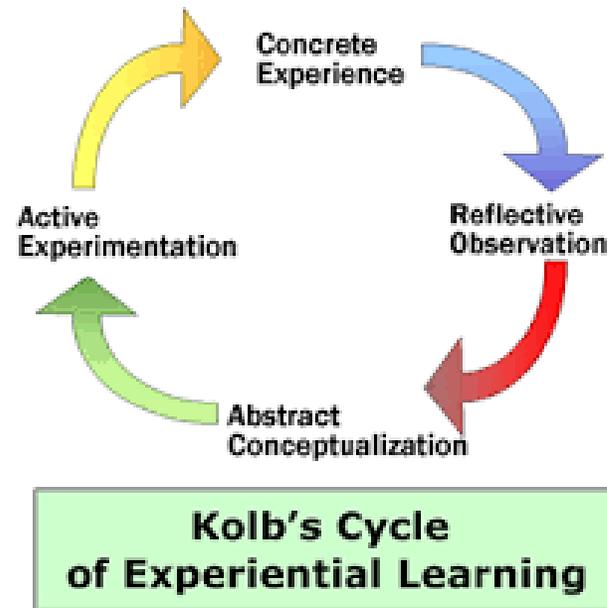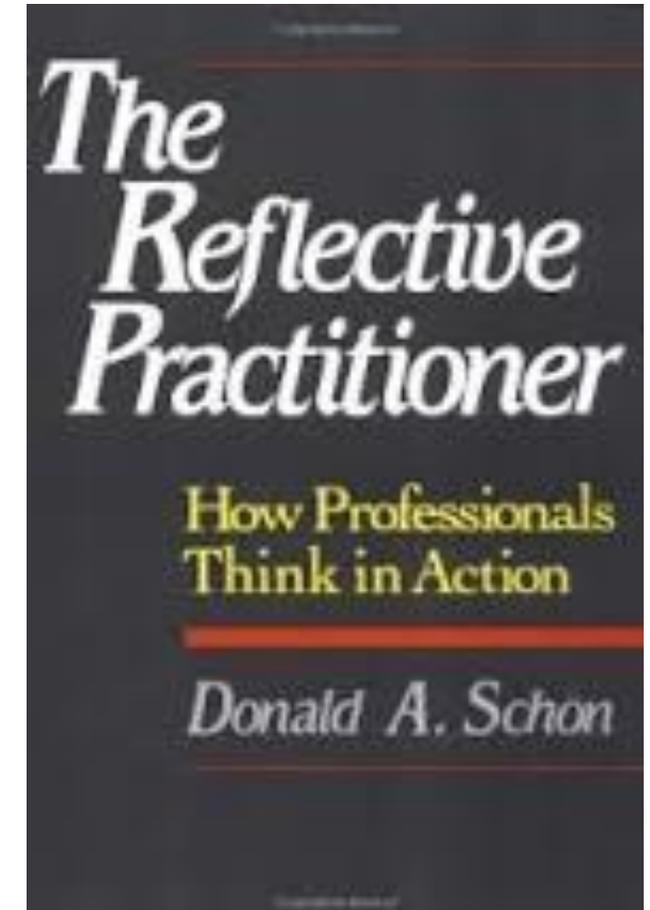A number of theoretical models have been developed, most prominently those of **Kolb** (2014) and **Schön** (2017).

Concrete Experience

Active Experimentation

Reflective Observation

Abstract Conceptualization

Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning

image by Karin Kirk

The Reflective Practitioner

How Professionals Think in Action

Donald A. Schon

Reflective Practice is often seen as essential to the professional role (Thompson and Pascal 2012 Marshall 2019) and particularly to education.

So it's often part of professional training and CPD

Also GTCS Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges (GTCS 2018) state:

"These Standards will be used for a range of purposes including: …. Developing critically reflective and evaluative practitioners;" (p3)

• One of UHI twelve *Learning and Teaching Enhancement Values* is "**Reflective practice and continuous improvement**":

• *"At individual, team, departmental and institutional level we will review the effectiveness of our teaching practices, reflect on the potential for improvement and actively plan for a better educational experience for current and future students."* (UHI 2020)
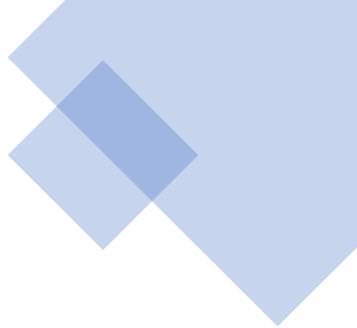
However, the awareness and usage of RP in Higher Education remains uneven and poorly understood

This project aimed to investigate RP awareness and use within our institution

Methodology

Stage 1

 A *questionnaire to all academic staff (N= 22 returned)*

Stage 2

Semi-structured interviews followed by qualitative thematic analysis (N =14)
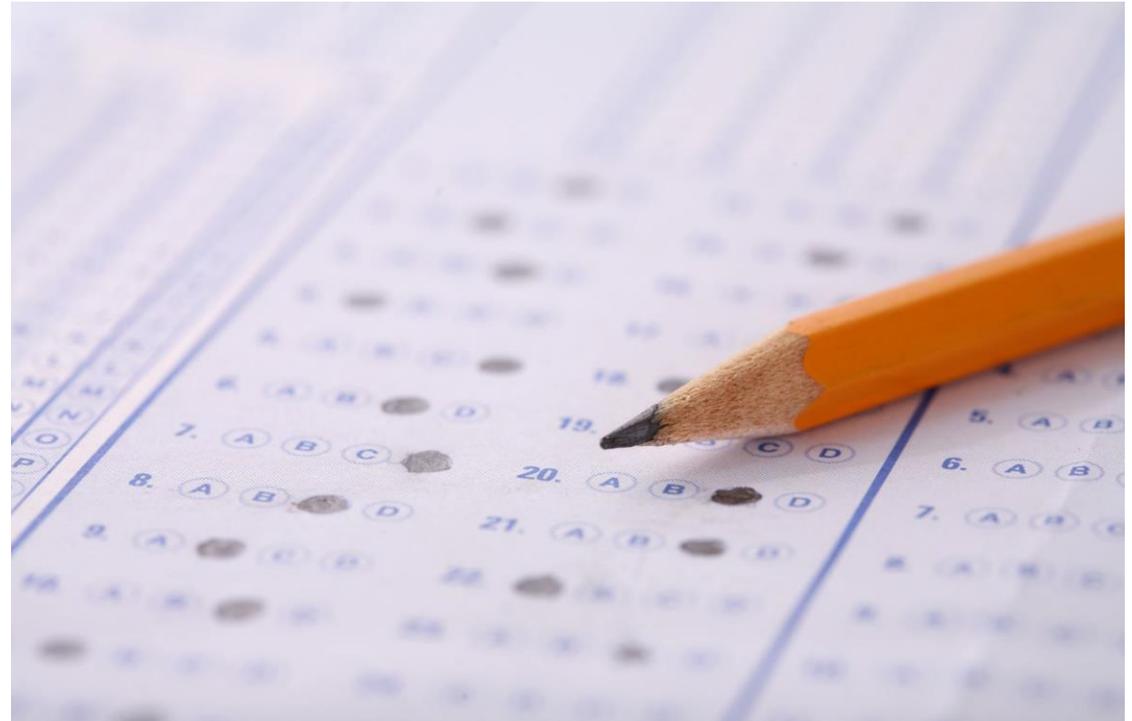
Table 1 How long have you worked at UHI? (Total N =22)

0-1 years	1
2-4 years	3
5-10 years	14
11+ years	4

Table 2 What areas do you teach (Total N =22)

FE and HN / Degree	**11**
HN/Degree and PG/ Professional	3
PG and Professional	4
All the above	4

Table 3 Teaching qualifications (May be multiple responses)

PGDE	2
PGCE	6
TQFE	9
B.Ed	1

Table 4 To what extent are you aware of the University's policy on Reflective Practice?

Not aware	7
Somewhat aware	9
Quite aware	3
Very aware	3

In this project we focused on staff using RP to reflect on **their own** practice

Table 5	Using RP to reflect on own practice	Using RP to assess students
I don't use	3	4
I seldom use	3	2
occasionally	4	5
I often use	12	10

Comments on Questionnaire results.

All levels of teaching (FE, HN, degree, postgraduate and professional) are well represented.

Respondents came from 9 of the 14 constituent elements of the University.

Only six respondents (27%) were 'quite' or 'very' aware of the University's policy on Reflective Practice.

As might be expected with a questionnaire of this nature, high proportions of respondents reported they often used RP on their own practice (55%) or to assess students (45%).

Stage 2 Semi-structured interviews - results of thematic analysis: themes and sub-themes

Reflective Practice

How?
- Processes
- Methods

Why?
- Organisational
- Personal

Why not?
- Concrete
- Training
- Attitudinal
- Development ideas

Reflective Practice: Theme 1 How - Processes

Type	Categories	Quotes
With others - formal	Mentoring Team meeting	**… we use that as a real kind of team exercise to ensure that we're doing [reflection].**
With others - informal	Peer support Supportive environment	**The team I'm working in right now - it's definitely founded in those values of trust and confidence ….**
Self (individual)	Personal and ongoing	**I think reflection is so very personal**
With students	Diverse processes	*Reflective accounts; learning logs; reflective question and answers; personal development planning and SWOT analysis …; giving and receiving feedback; reflective ……..*

Reflection – How? Methods

Method	Categories	Quotes
Traditional	Journals, diaries, notebook Might be re-read or not (record or process)	**I think using a journal's really, really effective …** **I journal daily, ….** **I do re-read them [my journals] and I find that really helpful …** **I think it is more about the process of doing it than, than actually having it there to refer to …**
Use of theories	Kolb, Schön, Gibbs, Brookfield, Piaget	**[it] helps me to finish the loop … rather than thinking about what I'm not happy with, may be focusing more on what you're doing better, rather than just being stuck.** **I was fascinated by the sort of Schön and the meta-cognition on reflection**
Other	Non-recorded Pictorial Technology based: none!	**… for me, art practice is a reflective space**

Reflective Practice – Theme 2 Why?
Organisational drivers

Type	Categories	Quotes
Institutional	Organisational culture (might be specific to some departments)	**… it just seems to be a really integral part of how we work, the ethos, the culture that we have**
Awarding and professional bodies	Usually subject specific. Examples includes Skills Development Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence, GTCS registration	**…. it's part of the professionalisation of the workforce, that reflective element has been really pushed**
Training, CPD, courses	Education and training, mandatory or not	**… then I did my TQFE , … it also encouraged reflection which was something I hadn't considered …**

Reflective Practice: Theme 2 Why?
Personal drivers

Type	Categories	Quotes
For better practice	Improve performance, correct mistakes	**I want to see ... how we could improve ourselves ...**
To combat inertia	To overcome complacency, routine	**on reflection, I can probably see, I was becoming complacent in my teaching practice ...**
Personal disposition	Reflection as an element of identity	**When I'm my best self, I'm engaged in reflective practice, so I feel that I'm a naturally reflective person ...**
Personal growth	Emotional and psychological well-being	**.. if I don't get the time to think about my work professionally and reflect on what I'm learning and thinking about things reflectively - I don't sleep**

Reflective Practice: Theme 3 Why not? Concrete barriers

Type	Categories	Quotes
Insufficient opportunities to share resources …	Resources such as materials, case studies, processes, research etc	**… we don't have mechanisms for sharing material enough** **There doesn't seem to be that place where we can go and see, look at those materials**
Insufficient opportunities to reflect with others	Either formal or informal mechanisms	**… we don't have enough team practice, time to sit and reflect**
Insufficient time	Especially sanctioned time	**There's no allocated time [for reflection].**

Reflective Practice – Theme 3 why not? Attitudinal barriers

Type	Categories	Quotes
Psychological, attitudinal and cultural factors at Institutional level	Reflection not embedded in the culture of college, RP not prominent enough	**Where's the reflection?** **it's doesn't seem to be embedded, that reflection**
Psychological reluctance to reflect at individual level	Some staff not reflective; fear; people take it too personally, find it daunting, are intimidated; lack the confidence and knowledge to reflect	**People are scared to reflect on themselves they're frightened what they're going to see.** **…. Quite often people feel … intimidated by it [RP] … it's the fear of learning something new …** **Reflection requires some confidence**

Reflective Practice – Theme 3 why not? Training and induction barriers

Type	Description	Quotes
Induction	New lecturers - Induction not adequately training new lecturers in RP	**… you're just thrown in the deep end, off you go** **… there's nothing from 0 to 3 years .. I mean, you need to be … sink or swim.** **I think first of all what people have to be aware of is what reflective skills are.** **I think many of them [new lecturers] struggle with the idea of reflection and reflective practice**

Reflective Practice – why not?
Development ideas to tackle barriers (a selection)

Ideas	Quotes
Enhanced peer support (Reflective peer mentoring)	Reflective pairs: if you were to pair people up and you could kind of just 20 minutes a week, you get 10 minutes each to talk through something that's happening
Formal mechanisms for sharing ideas, good practice and materials	we should be able to have - as a huge institution that we are - a place where we can come and have these dialogs to help improve and share with one another … we should call it something like the Teaching and Learning Hub … as part of the process of reflective practice, to bounce ideas off your peers of your colleagues [a resource bank] would be a really useful tool
Enhanced induction / CPD	a self reflection stand alone unit, a mandatory part of CPD, that all the lecturers need to complete, like, data protection [Teaching observation]

Conclusions

There is a significant depth of knowledge, passion and expertise with regards to Reflective Practice at UHI …

… that is largely grassroots based and uncoordinated

That's a strength, allowing diversity and spontaneity …

… but also results in uneven provision, isolation, duplication of resources

There are some exciting ideas on how to tackle the barriers

Most of all – there should be a greater recognition at all levels that **Reflective Practice** is **vital** and **central to our purpose**

Implications and recommendations 1

What can and should be done to implement the recommendations?

How to facilitate more and better reflective practice within UHI and how to involve more of us in these processes?

Implications and recommendations 2: Ideas include

reflective writing groups (see Webinar on November 11);

blogging groups;

resource and ideas sharing;

Informal mentoring and peer support; enhanced training, webinars, events;

how to change a culture – creating a reflective organisation?

are there others?

Ideas and plans for development

?

Thank you

Questions ….

To contact me … the full report or its summary is available
Rob.bray@uhi.ac.uk

My thanks to

Heather Fotheringham

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All those who participated

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