

- a. Reflection In Practice As A Learning Technique For Internships In A Masters Of Public Administration Program
- b. Other Areas of Education and Cross-Disciplinary Areas
- c. Reflection-in-Practice Internship
- d. Jeanne Cross, Ed.D.

Nancy K. Grant, Ph.D.
- e. Dr. Jeanne Cross
Assistant Professor Education Technology
Department of Teacher Education
401 College Avenue
Ashland, OH 44805

Dr. Nancy K. Grant
Professor Public Administration and Emergency Management
The University of Akron
Akron, OH 44325-7904
- f. Dr. Nancy Grant ngrant@uakron.edu

Dr. Jeanne Cross: jcross@ashland.edu
- g. Dr. Nancy Grant – 330-972-5417

Dr. Jeanne Cross – 419-289-5299 – cell 330-962-4874
- h. Dr. Grant – fax 330-972-6376

Dr. Cross – fax 419-207-6702

REFLECTION IN PRACTICE AS A LEARNING TECHNIQUE FOR INTERNSHIPS
IN A MASTERS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

Dr. Jeanne Cross, Ashland University
and
Dr. Nancy Grant, The University of Akron

Abstract

Reflection-in-practice is a technique long recognized as effective in education. Over the past three years, this technique has been used in tandem with an internship requirement in a Masters of Public Administration (MPA) program. The technique appears to be very effective not only during the internship course, but also during the completion of the degree program and in making decisions about entering or changing careers. This research paper discusses the use of the reflection-in-practice technique and presents the results of narrative, open-ended questionnaires delivered to students following their internship experience. Informal response suggests that students are utilizing this technique more extensively than initially anticipated. The systematic gathering of information will illuminate the reality of this feedback. These questionnaires will be distributed during November with the planned content analysis completed by January.*

Introduction

Reflection in practice is a useful method of enhancing the internship experience for both pre-service and in-service students. Obviously, internships are designed to offer students in professional degree programs experience prior to entering their careers. However, the classroom component that accompanies internships can have value for in-service students as well. The course can require a systematic and structured consideration of a career position and daily professional practice that does not usually take place on a regular basis once individuals become

* Due to changes in the University of Akron's Human Subjects Review procedures the questionnaires could not be reviewed until the end of October.

involved in their careers. Reflection in practice is recognized as a useful problem-solving tool, which it is. However its usefulness can go far beyond that and assist in enhancing performance when used appropriately. The internship experience offers the perfect learning environment in which current and future public administration professionals can learn a performing enhancement technique that can serve them well throughout their careers.

The Concept and Application of Reflection in Practice

Schon initially introduced the concept of Reflection-in-Practice in his book “Technology and Change” (1967). This initial presentation was subsequently refined to explain that professional practice of all types fundamentally deals with issues of design or imposing design on ambiguous situations by considering new actions and undertaking problem-solving through reflection upon one’s professional actions. This requires a background in theory – which students in public administration learn in their coursework, the ability to analyze a situation, which is generally acquired through the use of case studies, and the understanding of how to perform and act upon reflection. Education theorists argue that learning cannot take place without reflection and that experience provides the basis for learning (Giles and Eyer 1994; Dunlap 1998; Hatcher and Bringle 1997). Students are afforded this opportunity for reflection in standard courses where discussion requires reflection over readings and papers require reflection over theory and research. Reflection in internship or service activities, where students are actively working in the community

in a professional capacity, can also be the catalyst where true and effective learning occurs.

At the most direct level, this application of design is understood as applying theory to practice. Masters in Public Administration students learn public administration theories and given the ongoing debate or discussion of the theory and practice dichotomy and attention to the various approaches to bridging that gap, generally understand the importance of application of theory. Reflection-in-practice at the most fundamental stage facilitates the analysis and understanding of a situation and, more importantly, of one's own actions and reactions in the workplace. It encourages and provides a mechanism for adjusting the theories and trying different approaches. However, reflection-in-practice goes beyond the direct application of known theories and testing of theories in practice. Further investigation of the theory of reflection-in practice, however, demonstrates that this is much more than a simple application of existing theories in a discipline.

Argyris and Schon (1974) argue that it is through reflection that practitioners revise current theories-in-action (fundamental "truths" upon which their planned actions are based) and create "knowledge-in-action" which incorporates their learning from experience. Cross points out that in these discussions the word "theories" is not being used in its customary definition of an abstract presentation of a generalized idea. (Cross 1999) Instead, these are known as personal action theories which influence daily action and behavior and they exist in two forms, espoused theories and theories-in-action. "Espoused theories have two characteristics: First, they exist at the conscious level (and) secondly, they can

change in response to new information with relative ease. But while we believe that espoused theories guide our behavior, intentions, and beliefs, often our behavior is inconsistent with what we say” (1999, p. 20). In contrast, theories in action tend to be more deeply ingrained in ones consciousness yet are not easy to articulate and are not easily changed. Theories-in-action refer to understandings upon which daily activities are based, they are the “why’s, where fore’s, and how-to guides upon which we base our behavior.” (Cross 1999, pp 20-21)

Thus, students and professionals need to discover their theories-in-action in order to identify what works, what doesn’t, and how to change. This is the focus of reflection-in-practice. It is possible that these theories-in-action relate to existing organization or management theories. It is also possible that they do not. That is a consideration for the next steps in the process. What is initially important is an understanding of what personal action theories one uses and, if possible, to understand what theories-in-action are being used by colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates. While it is not generally possible to change another’s theories –in-action, it is possible to adjust one’s own on the basis of reflection in practice.

As Osterman and Kottlamp state, “reflective practice is viewed as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development.” (1993, p. 19) Kruse identifies reflective practice as the catalyst that allows teachers to incorporate experiences into new teaching practices (1997). Likewise, Schon states: “Reflection gives rise to on-the spot experiment. We think up and try out new actions intended to explore the newly

observed phenomena, test our tentative understandings of them or affirm the moves we have invented to change things for the better”. (1987, p. 28) Schon also characterizes reflection as a “dialogue of thinking and doing through which (professionals) become more skillful.” (1987, p. 31)

The holistic model of reflective practitioner is concerned not only with outcome practice, but also with the cognitive process which develops the outcomes and which includes experience as well as professional competence and knowledge base. (Yelloly and Henkel 1995) and Schon (1987) describe the reflective practice model as a cycle where practice is carried out, reflection occurs, and reflection and practice occur simultaneously when the thoughts/reflection are put into action in the real world. The reflection occurs on the basis of experience and leads to more abstract conceptualizations that result in new decisions and changes in actions. Without reflection, professional development is less likely to occur.

Although the application of reflection-in-practice was originally developed in education research, Gould and Taylor (1996) discuss the importance of reflective approaches to problem solving in management development. A shortcoming of this method is that management often simply reflects on the obvious. Research emphasizing the dialogue process that engages the practitioner in second order thought can mitigate this weakness. (Dimmock 1996, in Gould and Taylor, 1996) In a more generalized manner, Osterman (1991) identifies the model as a system in which “the practitioners act “as researchers who gather and analyze information within the context of their own practice as a means of constructing knowledge and improving practice.” (p. 216)

It is this approach that is utilized in the Masters of Public Administration internship program. Students are taught, via course lectures and exercises, as well as in depth one-on-one interviews with the instructor, how to utilize reflection in practice to better understand and respond to workplace situations. Students begin to reflect upon their actions and reactions as well as to analyze the situations in which they find themselves, whether they are unique or recurring. More importantly, attention is placed on recognizing the process of this analysis and reflection, enabling them to carry it forward into other areas of their lives and careers.

Presentation of Reflection in Action

Reflection in action is first presented as part of the job analysis process where students are asked to deconstruct their jobs, both current and past, to identify the various major and minor components. The initial lecture that outlines how to analyze a job position, with frequent examples, is presented in a large group setting. Students are then asked to identify what aspects of each job they like most and dislike most, with the instructor guiding them to identifying and defining the root aspect of what appealed to them. This discussion generally leads to an awareness of specific aspects of either procedure or, often, of personal interaction, which results in favorable or unfavorable reaction. .

The focus on past positions, even if they are not in the field, help the student understand how to deconstruct a job or profession in order to understand the different components. The main focus is then applied to the internship. After a

break, students are asked to share their thoughts about the best and worst aspects of their internship. These examples are broken down into specifics in order to identify whether it is the task, the personal interaction, the skill application, a characteristic of the work environment, etc. The student is then asked to identify what actions might enhance the experience, both in terms of supporting and building upon the positive and mitigating the negative aspects. At this point students are broken into groups of three in which they share the actions they have identified so that others can not only comment on them, but also learn from them. Students are then asked to practice these identified actions during the following two weeks.

This is the first presentation of reflection in action. It is not identified as a theory or a process or technique. Instead students are simply guided through the process in order to practice the application. It must be noted that sometimes the dislikes are the product of being in the wrong type of job for an individual. Students often discover that the aspect of a job that attracted them is, in fact, only a minor part of what is expected and that the majority of the position consists of things they do not like doing. In these instances, the student is guided not only in making the best of the situation, but also in identifying alternative career options.

With this exercise, students begin the process of analyzing the situations they encounter in the work environment. After a couple of weeks, students are asked to share their experiences in small groups again. Then, in the large group they are asked to volunteer experiences they had with applying the suggested behaviors to improve their situation. Not all of the reports are positive. However, students are again led, through a series of questions, to identifying what happened and why. The

focus is on analyzing the situation not judging the conduct or accuracy of the behavior applied. Generally, a few students ask to go through the process again, to try something new. They then share the experience with the class at the next session.

Students are given assigned readings on reflection in practice, but not tested on the material. The theory of reflection in practice is then presented, with special emphasis on the impact self-awareness can have on career enhancement.

Recognizing what you are doing, how it impacts job performance and workplace operation, and adapting behavior in order to maximize both, not only makes doing a job better, but often leads to career building opportunities. As opportunities are offered, students are also told to apply reflection in practice to ensure that the opportunity is one which will take them towards their career goal rather than on a detour away from it. The importance of thinking things through and seriously deconstructing careers as well as job positions is emphasized as a key component of career development.

In order to cement this information, students are required to construct a career map with three different alternative goals and a minimum of five alternative career paths to reach those goals in 10 – 15 years. They first identify the three alternative goal positions and analyze what is required in them. This analysis incorporates researching job descriptions and competencies and information interviews of individuals in these positions. (This second activity is generally an optional assignment. However, it has proven to be extremely helpful for students who are doing serious career planning.) This job analysis assists them in identifying

the degree to which their job likes and dislikes correspond to their career goals. Students are then required to reflect on the degree of compatibility to ascertain whether they really believe their behaviors will be conducive to career enhancement and development if they aspire to the position identified. Students often narrow their preferred career path or redirect their plans on the basis of reflection concerning career responsibilities. Thus, they are offered yet another example of how reflection in practice can be applied to career development. Looking critically at career options and reflecting upon their preferred practice and activities leads to changes in practice, either in adapting behavior toward that which is appropriate for their goals, or in changing their goals.

In creating the alternative career maps, students reflect on alternative jobs and career paths that can provide career enhancement opportunities as well as ones that might make the path more difficult. On the basis of the analysis of the goal position, the students identify jobs that amplify the primary characteristics required so that they can better select intermediary positions that enable them to refine and perfect performance behaviors and skills required in their goal position. In doing this exercise, students also have to identify what aspects of their current position lead to the development of the required capabilities identified in the analysis of their career goal position. This provides an example of the ongoing reflection in practice that they need to utilize as they build their careers. Although they attempt the same analysis in their career mapping, much of this is hypothetical and based on job descriptions and career descriptions. The need for ongoing analysis and reflection is stressed in order to continue positive career development.

The final component of the internship class requirement is a one on one session with the instructor in which they analyze the career paths as well as the job market. In addition, the student is asked to discuss why they want the career identified and what they feel they have to offer as their strongest characteristic required in that position. The student must provide examples of skills and behavior preference that support his/her contention. During the discussion the instructor offers two or three scenarios for the student to reflect upon and decide how he/she would respond. The emphasis is on the process of working situations out, of modifying or adapting behavior in order to improve the work being performed and the atmosphere of the workplace. These examples of reflection in practice are presented in order to reinforce the usefulness as well as the application of the theory to practice throughout one's career.

The Process of Evaluating Success

The true test of success will be demonstrated in enhanced self-awareness and associated enhanced career development of students who participate in the reflection in practice enhanced internship experience. This process has been in place for three years and in some ways it is too early for true outcome evaluation. However, in terms of process evaluation to determine whether students use the technique, the time is right for student feed back.

The instructor has already received informal feedback as several students have returned to visit and to discuss what is happening and how they have applied

the techniques, especially the reflection in practice, in their career development. In fact, a number of in-service students who took the course have made career adjustments based on the job analyses and reflection in practice.

Given that the purpose of basing the class component of the internship on reflection in practice is to instill this theory in action into the students to use on an ongoing basis, the evaluation is designed to ascertain the degree to which students who have completed the course use it. This evaluation will serve not only as a testing of the effectiveness of the reflection in practice techniques presented in class, but also as a reminder and encouragement to the students to apply the technique in their careers. As such it resembles the action research discussed by a number of theorists that identifies the research as both a process and a goal. For example, Greenwood, Whyte, and Harkavy view participatory action research as a means to identifying outcome evaluations as well as a process that enhances the student development. (1983) Likewise Grzelkowsky (1986) and Harkavy, Puckett and Romer (2000) discuss the special challenges of bridging research with infield experiences such as internships or service learning. Given that public sector internships often share characteristics with service-learning experiences, much of the discussion concerning the type and impact of action research is applicable here.

A questionnaire has been designed to identify whether students utilize reflection in practice in their career. The questionnaire allows for narrative detail and invites students to send additional information if they wish. It is being sent to all students who completed the internship course in the past three years. The questionnaire is attached. Hopefully the responses will add to the informal feedback

that supports the use of reflection in practice as a base for the classroom component of the internship experience.

References

- Argyris, C. and Schon, D.A. 1974. Theory in Practice. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cross, Jeanne A. 1999. Instructor's Roles and Expectations for Course Development in an Urban Distance Learning Setting. Dissertation. Akron, OH: The University of Akron.
- Dunlap, M.R. 1998. Methods of supporting students' critical reflection in courses incorporating service learning. Teaching of Psychology. 25(3), pp. 208-210.
- Giles, D. E. Jr. and Eyler, J. 1998. A Service Learning Research Agenda for the Next Five Years. New Directions for Teaching and Learning.
- Gould, N. and Taylor, I. (eds.) 1996. Reflective Learning for Social Work: Research, Theory, and Practice. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing.
- Greenwood, D.J., Whyte, W.F., and Harkavy, I. (1993). Participatory Action Research as a Process and as a Goal. Human Relations. 46(2), pp. 175-102.
- Grzelkowski, K. (1986). Merging the Theoretical and the Practical: Community Action Research as a Process and as a Goal. Teaching Sociology, 14, pp. 110-118.
- Harkavy, I. Puckett, J. and Romer, D. (2000) Action Research: Bridging Service and Research. Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning. Fall, 2000.
- Hatcher, J.A. and Bringle, R.G. 1997. Reflection: Bridging the Gap Between Service and Learning. College Teaching. 45(4), pp. 153-158.
- Kruse, Sharon. 1997. Reflective Activity in Practice: Vignettes of Teachers' Deliberative Work. Journal of Research and Development in Education. X (10) pp. 23-30.
- Osterman, K.F. 1991. Reflective Practice: Linking Professional Development and School Reform. Planning and Changing, 22(3-4), 208-17.
- Osterman, K. F. and Kottkamp, R. 1993. Reflective Practice for Educators: Improving Schooling Through Professional Development. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.
- Schon, D.A. 1967 Technology and Change. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
- Schon, D.A. 1983 The Reflective Practitioner. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Schon, D.A. 1987 Educating the Reflective Practitioner. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Yelloly, M and Henkel, M. (eds.) 1995. Learning and Teaching in Social Work Towards Reflective Practice. Bristol, PA: Jessica Kingsley.

INTERNSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to ascertain the degree to which you use the information and techniques presented in the internship class. Please answer each question to the best of your ability and return it in the envelope provided. ***If you would like to add additional information, please call or e-mail Dr. Grant.***

1. How often in the past six months have you encountered challenges in your job?

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than 10 times | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-4 times |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9-10 times | <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 times |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7-8 times | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5-6 times | |

2. When you encounter challenges, do you reflect on what caused the situation, where your role is, and how to react?

- Yes No

a. If yes, do you then act upon this reflection?

- Yes No

b. If yes, have you ever changed your behavior?

- Yes No

3. How frequently did you place your reflection in practice?

- in 100% of the incidents
 in 90%-99% of the incidents
 in 80%-89% of the incidents
 in 70%-79% of the incidents
 in 60%-69% of the incidents
 in 50%-59% of the incidents
 in 40%-49% of the incidents
 in 30%-39% of the incidents
 in 20%-29% of the incidents
 in 10%-19% of the incidents
 in less than 10% of the incidents

a. Please describe an example.

Select three of the most memorable occasions in which you applied reflection in practice. Answer the following questions for each.

4. What degree of difference did the change in practice make?

a. Situation A

Negative Change					No Change					Positive Change
-10	-8	-6	-4	-2	0	+2	+4	+6	+8	+10

b. Situation B

Negative Change					No Change					Positive Change
-10	-8	-6	-4	-2	0	+2	+4	+6	+8	+10

c. Situation C

Negative Change					No Change					Positive Change
-10	-8	-6	-4	-2	0	+2	+4	+6	+8	+10

5. Did you revisit or reflect upon the changes that occurred because of your changed behavior?

Situation A	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Situation B	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Situation C	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No

6. Do you use reflection in practice on an ongoing basis or only in challenging situations?

Ongoing Only in challenging situations

7. Do you intend to use reflection in practice in the future?

Yes NO

a. Why or why not?

8. How would you describe the usefulness of reflection in practice?