



Reflective Practice

Reflection and reflective practice are learning processes that can develop greater competence and effectiveness as an instructor, teacher, educator or leader in Outdoor Learning.

They are seen as an essential element of professional development in many occupations, including teaching, sports coaching, and nursing for example.

They can be powerful processes and UKCC research has shown that the majority of coaches who use reflection believe it makes a significant impact on their coaching (62%) while a further 27% believe it makes a short-term impact.

The IOL accreditation process is designed to both introduce and apply reflection **and** reflective practice to help candidates in their professional development.



Reflection

Reflection typically involves asking questions such as what, where, when, how and why about an experience in order to learn more that may be possible through action alone (see the work of Dewey, Kolb, etc.)

Donald Schon has described two ways professionals may do this:

Reflection ON action

Stopping and thinking through a session, programme or event in order to discover how and why things turned out as they did.

Reflection IN action

Thinking through what is happening in the moment without stopping the action and using that insight to shape what happens next.

Both are valuable when used at the right time and in the most useful way.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice usually goes beyond reflection to develop critical understanding about underlying motivations, assumptions, skills and knowledge. The aim is to extend your knowledge of yourself and continuously improve your professional practice.

Reflective practice has a focus on:

- Motivations, intentions, values
- Links to theories, models, research
- Assumptions, beliefs or expectations
- Exploring reactions of self and others to experiences
- Developing and extending knowledge, understanding, experience
- Taking action to improve practice

Coaching conversations and self-reflection are critical elements of reflective practice within IOL accreditations.

Barriers to Reflection

In one study of reflective practice for sports coaches researchers identified 99 problems associated with reflection. The ratio of external barriers to personal barriers was around 2:1 with three key themes being:

- **Organisational:** both in terms of a lack of planning by the coach as well as a lack of encouragement and enforcement
- **Personal:** lacking motivation to reflect, citing laziness, the repetitive nature of sessions and player behaviour as reasons
- **Time:** a lack of time either as a result of other demands (work and family) or too much / too little coaching

The report concluded that the governing body and clubs must work harder to educate coaches to the value of reflection and the role of proper session planning in this.

Effective Reflective Practice

A 2012 report commissioned by the UKCC on Reflective Practice within Sports Coaching also recognised some of the barriers to effective reflection as:

- Finding time to reflect
- Motivation to reflect
- There appeared to be no immediate benefit from the reflection
- A lack of knowledge or understanding about what to do
- Reluctance to reflect on emotions as part of the process
- The journal approach to reflection

The report concluded with two key recommendations for promoting effective reflective practice:

1. Educating and Implementing

“Coaches must be given the opportunity to develop their understanding of reflective practice. This includes: definitions of reflection, the purposes of reflection, and the process of reflective practice. Helping coaches to develop this knowledge is likely to reduce the chances that coaches engage in other processes (e.g., simple evaluation) that will not allow them to learn from their experiences as effectively as reflective practice (Platzer, Snelling, & Blake, 1997)”.

2. Refining and Maximising

“Once coaches have gained an understanding of reflective practice and how it might be applied it is important for them to be supported in developing their own approaches to reflection. At the same time, it is important for coaches to continue to engage in reflective practices. Sometimes there is a tendency, once formal training has finished, to stop reflecting in a formal way (cf. Knowles et al., 2006) and this has to be protected against. “

Reflective Practice for Outdoor Learning Professionals

IOL Coaches play a vital role in working with candidates to adopt and apply effective reflective practice. Once IOL accreditation is achieved the dangers to candidates of stopping systematic reflective practice are as real as those for IOL Coaches.

In line with the recommendations above, IOL encourage all Outdoor Learning Professionals to:

1. Understand the purpose and benefits of reflective practice
2. Have a process for effective reflective practice
3. Implement reflective practice as a regular routine
4. Be supported in refining their reflective practice
5. Be encouraged to further develop their reflective practice

Horizons Articles

- [H69 – Putting theory into practice - An introduction to 'through-the-mirror' writing, Morgan Lax](#)
- [H68 – Reflecting on Reflection, Morgan Lax](#)
- [H66 - Reflective Practice: ...for meaningful and real-world understanding, David Jewitt](#)
- [H51 - Outdoor Learning and Learning Cycles: Moving Forward, Jonathan Lynch](#)



Further Information:

<http://www.sportscoachuk.org/blog/99-problems-reflection>

http://www.sportscoachuk.org/sites/default/files/Reflective-Practice-Report_0.pdf

Smith, M. K. (2001, 2011). 'Donald Schön: learning, reflection and change', *The encyclopedia of pedagogy and informal education*. [www.infed.org/thinkers/et-schon.htm]. Retrieved: 22 September 2020].

IOL Professional Development

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