

## **Schön's (1983) Reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action**

Reflection-in-action is 'action present'; which Schön (1983) describes as reflecting on the incident whilst it can still benefit that situation rather than reflecting on how you would do things differently in the future. This is a useful tool to use in disciplines where the professional has to react to an event at the time it occurs – rather than having the luxury of being able to think about what happened and make changes at a later time. This process is described by Schön (1983, p.68) as 'When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories or established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case'.

Basically, surprising incidents occur because in a new situation people use knowing-in-action (knowledge that you have gained in other/similar situations) that are inappropriate for the current (unique) situation (Schön, 1983). Thus to overcome this, rather than using preconceived ideas about what should be done in a particular situation; the person reflecting decides what works best at that time, for that unique event/incident.

Alternatively, reflection-on-action involves reflecting on how practice can be developed (changed) after the event 'We reflect *on* action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome' (Schön, 1983, p. 26).

Essentially, we reflect after the event on how our knowledge of previous similar events may have led to the unexpected incident and what we need to change for the future. Below is a guide for how to reflect-on-action:

Step 1: choose an incident. This could be something that you experienced in a placement or a component of your academic skills, which you feel has not been resolved or that you were not happy with the outcome.

Step 2: think about what the situation was like before your intervention and what it was like afterwards. If this was a positive experience that went well – write down what made the situation effective. If you are not happy with the experience, note what action you took and then what action you would have preferred to have done.

Step 3: consider the thinking process that you used to bridge the gap between the 'before and after'. For example, what were you thinking about in relation to your knowing-in-action and why it wasn't working well in the new situation? What should you have actually been thinking? At this point draw on academic literature to help you make sense of the situation.

Step 4: summarise the whole situation. What are the key points from your reflection-on-action? What have you learnt that developed your knowing-in-action? What would you do different?

### **Reference**

Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London: Temple Smith