

their creations. Thus, successful UK artists are needed to work with them to make pieces that while retaining Peruvian sensibilities and traditional ideas, are more saleable than they have been.

This was a great idea; the artisans are often bursting with creativity and a little honing would enable them to make more money, employ more workers and generally reduce the health-affecting poverty gap. I also think that the UK artists will get a lot out of the trip; Peru and its people are an inspiring combination. Plus, there is nothing like visiting a developing country to put your own problems into perspective. My

challenge was to find some willing artists, but we like a challenge in environmental health. Luckily, I found a supportive trade e-magazine called *Benchpeg*, which published a little article about the plan. Interested artists then contacted me and off we went – six EHOs, two water engineers and four jewellers, including one with the alter ego Sparklebunny.

So, I would argue, we can all do our bit to help this fragile world; we just need enthusiasm and a little bit of direction. Perhaps we should all go from encouraging people in the UK who ought

to know better (yes I know, we are all just victims of circumstance; I was being

There is nothing like visiting a developing country to put your own problems into perspective

ironic) and put our energies into helping people who not only really need it but are prepared to help themselves as well. There, I feel a bit better now, thank you.

Reflective practice and self-awareness

Gareth Morgan, Project Manager of the National Service Framework for Older People for the Welsh Assembly, suggests that self-reflection may be key to developing the public health workforce

Workforce development is a matter of considerable importance to ensure the effective and sustainable delivery of local and national public health policy. Given the diversity and challenges of public health roles, workforce development requires a multiplicity of approaches, and reflective practice could be considered, perhaps with increasing prominence, as part of this.

It has been suggested that the benefits of reflective practice are threefold.¹ The first is to re-define the understanding of professional knowledge; the second to develop personal knowledge or self-awareness; and the third is to evaluate the appropriateness of actions. This piece presents a summary of some of the underpinning theories of reflective practice along with examples of how these may be applied.

The literature on reflective practice is extensive and includes contributions from Boud, Schon and others. A critical review of this literature has identified three key stages that appear to underpin the process of reflective practice.² Stage 1 is triggered by an awareness of uncomfortable feelings or thoughts; stage 2 involves a constructive analysis of the situation, examining feelings and knowledge; while stage 3 involves the development of a new perspective on the situation. Prerequisites to reflection appear to include having an open mind and being self-aware.²

One limitation to this three-stage model might be that it does not recognize the potential for positive feelings or thoughts to be a trigger for reflection. Despite this limitation, the suggested prerequisites to reflection are interesting and have been explored in

other contexts. For example, in clinical medicine, lifelong learning and improving performance may not occur if mistakes are reviewed alone.³ Furthermore, it has been suggested that the achievement of expert levels of practice requires guided feedback.³ Perhaps the journey towards expert practice therefore requires an open-minded approach to learning from experience supported by guided feedback from a professional mentor.⁴

Meditation can be helpful in developing self-awareness, and theoretical models may also provide useful frameworks with practical application. The Johari Window model, for example, presents domains that relate to the level of self-awareness; this includes reference to “a blind spot”.⁵ In nursing practice, it has been suggested that portfolios provide the opportunity to document personal and professional growth, which in turn may help to minimize the “blind spots” that compromise self-awareness.

The “Hawthorne effect” is a management principle that suggests that individuals tend to improve their

performance when they are under observation. So perhaps another potential route to reflection is to ask colleagues to observe and provide feedback on performance. Some have questioned the “Hawthorne effect”,⁶ yet being under observation from colleagues could trigger reflection and lead to some of the benefits described previously. The potential exploitation of the “Hawthorne effect” might be best undertaken as a complement to line manager feedback and continuing professional development opportunities.

Another approach to reflection might be through the keeping of a personal journal. Moon has suggested a number of possible questions for prompting reflective writing and critical thinking.⁷ Starting with a pure description of an event that sets the scene, questions to facilitate reflection might include: How do you feel about the situation? How do your feelings relate to any action? If you “step back” from this, does it look different? Are there ethical, moral or social issues that might be explored?

The 360-degree feedback of professional skills offers a structured method to facilitate reflection and self-awareness, and can provide valuable information to promote reflection on a range of matters including interpersonal skills and thinking styles.⁸ Relevant to the former is personality preference and the Myers-Briggs type indicator is a further mechanism that might helpfully identify

traits such as extroversion or introversion.⁹ Not only does this promote increased self-awareness but it may also lead to a greater understanding of other personality preferences and the potential difficulties that might occur during interpersonal relationships in both personal and professional settings. On the related issue of thinking styles, the work of de Bono is pertinent and his colour-coded six hats model provides an interesting theoretical framework.¹⁰

Leadership styles are diverse and it has been suggested that self-awareness is a prerequisite to being an authentic leader who can inspire and empower others.¹¹ In addition to this, however, authentic leaders are willing to devote themselves to their own personal growth and development. Authentic leadership might also be considered to be strongly related to the concept of “emotional intelligence”, first put forward by Goleman. This concept has subsequently been expanded to “social intelligence”, which includes qualities such as having empathy, listening skills and influence.¹²

Not all of these qualities, however, may be derived from or developed in the workplace and some may be more related to personal experience. Eraut and Hirsh have integrated these multiple influences by proposing the concept of “learning trajectories”.¹³ This concept

brings together the broad experience and learning from personal and professional contexts. Wide-ranging personal interests and varying the

Authentic leaders are willing to devote themselves to their own personal growth and development

professional context, for example through a secondment, might therefore be helpful to provide diverse experience in order to facilitate reflective practice.

Of course, reflection might also be undertaken through collaborative working or in a project setting. For example, the “Plan, Do, Study, Act” model highlighted by Berwick¹⁴ allows reflective practice at all stages of a collaboration or project. Such reflective practice might also be extended to consider optimum interpersonal working by the project team or collaborators.

Reflective practice and increased self-awareness might be achieved in a variety of different ways. Personal preferences and individual circumstances may determine the most effective way to achieve reflective practice and the benefits of doing so should be considerable at any stage of a professional journey.

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