



University  
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# An introduction to reflection

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# What is reflection?

*to go back in thought, meditate or consult with oneself* (Concise Oxford Dictionary)

*consideration, thinking, contemplation, deliberation, musing, rumination*  
(Microsoft Word thesaurus)

# Why be reflective?

- in order to learn
- to support lifelong learning
- to develop the ability to self-assess
- to solve problems

# Reflection and learning

We reflect in order to **learn**:

*...in the context of learning, (reflection) is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations*

Boud et al, 1985:19

# Non-academic reflection

*Many of us could do with more reflection ...  
When we ponder, it is not a matter of  
seeking some practical solution to anything.  
It is simply a matter of thinking,  
meditating... - but without any particular  
goal. When we look for a goal, we are  
already focusing on something in particular.  
Pondering is just thinking and letting kinds  
of thoughts about a particular subject  
wander through our head ....*

Abbot Philip, Monastery of Christ in the Desert, New Mexico.

# Academic reflection

*(reflection) is not idle meanderings or day-dreaming, but purposive activity directed towards a goal*

Boud *et al* 1985:11.

# Self-assessment

*Continuously review your knowledge, skills and professional performance. Reflect on them, and identify and understand your limits as well as your strengths.*

*Standards for Dental Professionals, GDC, June 2005*

# Problem-solving

*...reflection may be seen as an active and deliberative cognitive process, involving sequences of interconnected ideas which take account of underlying beliefs and knowledge. Reflective thinking generally addresses practical problems, allowing for doubt and perplexity before possible solutions are reached.*

Hatton and Smith, 1995:34

## More problem solving ...

*(Reflection is) a form of mental processing with a purpose and/or anticipated outcome that is applied to relatively complex or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution.*

Moon (1999:23)

# Summary: why be reflective?

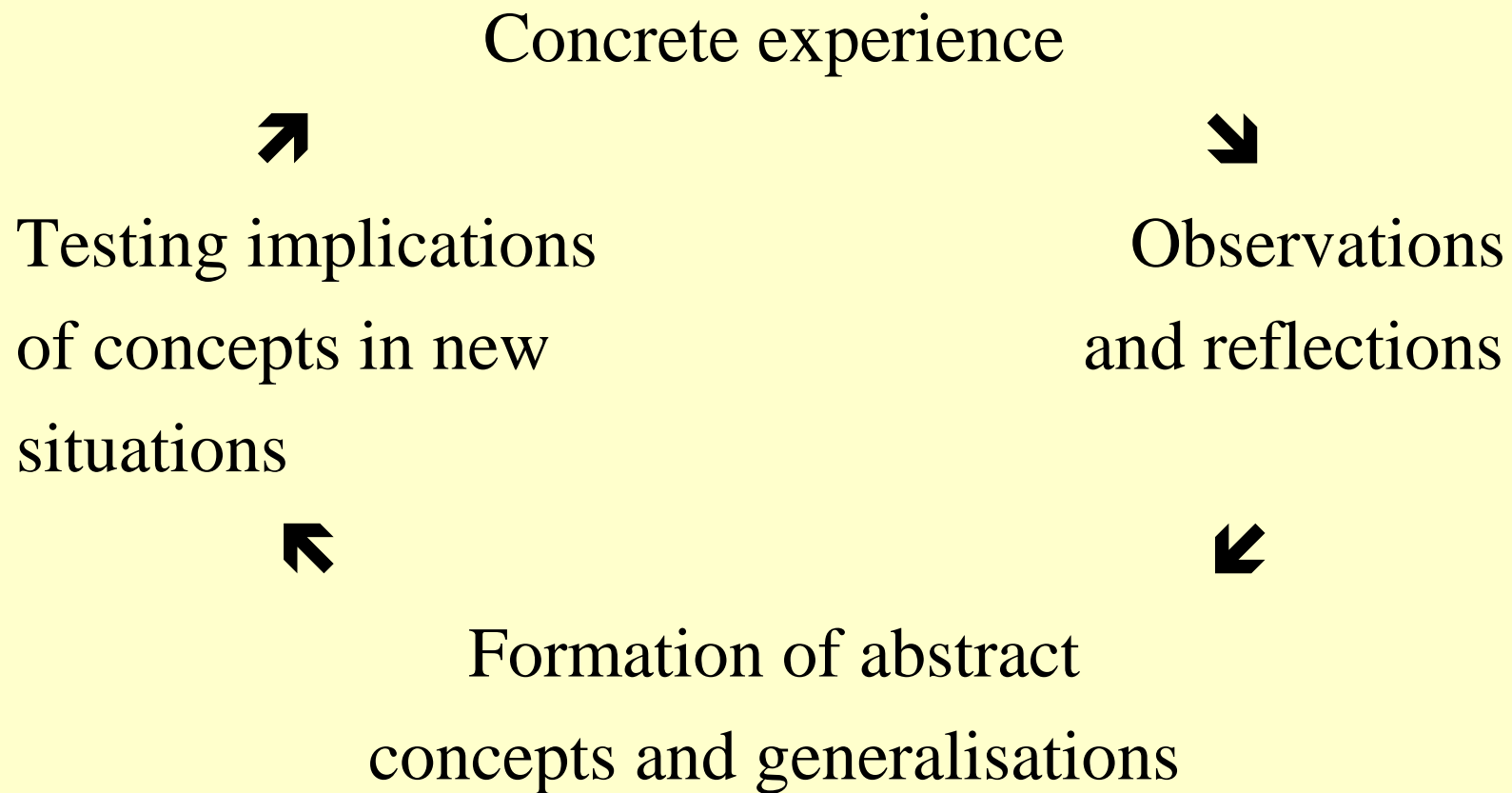
- in order to learn
- to continue to learn throughout one's career
- to develop the ability to self-assess
- to solve problems

# Terminology

- reflection
- reflective learning
- reflective writing
- reflective practice

Moon, 2004:80

# Kolb's cycle of experiential learning



# Schon: the reflective practitioner

*Rather than attempting to apply scientific theories and concepts to practical situations (Schon) holds that professionals should learn to frame and reframe the often complex and ambiguous problems they are facing, test out various interpretations, then modify their actions as a result.*

*Hatton and Smith, 1994:33*

# The reflective practitioner

Thus professionals

a) *reflect in action* to cope with situations that are novel, complex and/or unpredictable

b) *reflect on action* to convert the information gained into learning

*It is at least arguable, however, that much of the suffering in the world ... could have been avoided had practitioners stopped to think about what they intended to do and how they intended to do it before they actually did it.*

Greenwood, 1993:1186

# Boud's model of reflection (1)

Step 1: Experiences - behaviour, ideas or feelings

Step 2: Reflective processes

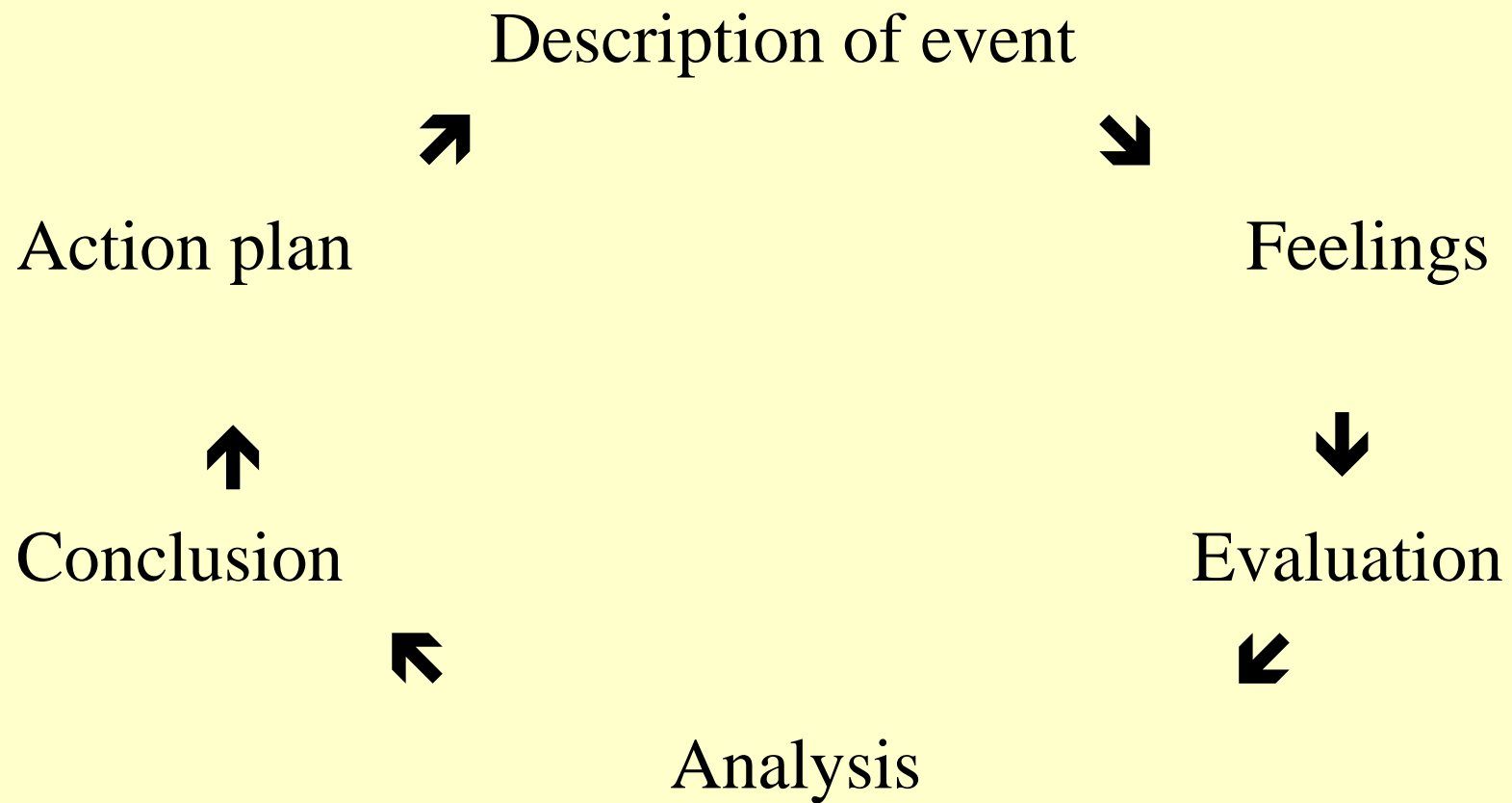
- returning to the experience
- attending to feelings
- re-evaluating the experience

# Boud's model of reflection (2)

## Step 3: Outcomes of reflection

- clarification of an issue
- a new way of behaving or of doing something
- the development of a skill
- the resolution of a problem
- greater confidence or modified priorities

# Gibbs' reflective cycle



# Race's interrogative approach

- a questioning approach to help the reflector focus
- clusters of questions

# Questions to promote reflection (1)

- What did I actually achieve with this piece of work?
- Which were the most difficult parts, and why were they difficult for me?
- Which were the most straightforward parts, and why did I find these easy?

Race (<http://escalate.ac.uk/resources/reflection>)

# Questions to promote reflection (2)

- What did I find the greatest challenge in doing this work?
- Why was this a challenge for me?
- To what extent do I feel I have met this challenge?
- What can I do to improve my performance when next meeting this particular sort of challenge?

# Reflecting on a case report

- loosening of bridge in lower left quadrant
- longstanding patient at Dental Hospital
- bridgework dismantled
- extensive treatment, including placing of implant and two crowns
- no complications following initial procedures; subsequent work problem-free

# Reflective writing (1)

## Writing

- provides evidence of reflection
- can reveal and develop ideas
- helps to organise and clarify thoughts
  
- a written reflection can be returned to for further reflection
- mental reflection is ephemeral

## Reflective writing(2)

- Is not just description
- Involves exploration and questioning
- Can be influenced by a range of factors

# Influences on writing

- whether others will see it
- how safe you feel about this
- your emotional state
- your attitude to reflective writing

# Possible obstacles to reflection (1)

- influences on writing
- concern about consequences of admitting to errors or anxieties

# Possible obstacles to reflection (2)

use of a less formal, more personal style of writing:

*The traditional academic genre is characterised by features that are in many ways the antithesis of the personal, tentative, exploratory and, at times, indecisive style of writing which would be identified as reflective.*

*Hatton and Smith, 1994:42*

# Possible obstacles to reflection (3)

- concerns about the value of reflecting
- not being naturally reflective