

Reflective Teaching and Learning in the Health Professions

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Reflective thinking along with critical thinking and decision making are concepts that are receiving increasingly more attention in the health sciences educational programs. There is considerable attention being given to how educators can better facilitate a student's development of reflection through classroom courses and clinical experiences. It is generally believed that reflection on practice is important to the continuing and deepening understanding of a healthcare professional and their developing practice.

This book would be of most interest to dental hygiene educators. Dental hygiene educators would find the book beneficial for not only developing their own reflective practice but also for fostering reflective practice of dental hygiene students during didactic and clinical courses. Additionally, dental hygiene researchers who are interested in the qualitative research methodology of action research would also find this a useful resource as an example of a multicentre action research project.

The action learning project on which the book is based was an interinstitutional initiative involving academics from eight different institutions. The academics were from the health disciplines of nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and optometry and radiography. Individual action research projects were simultaneously conducted that involved courses where one outcome for the course was to further develop the students' ability for reflective thinking. Another goal for each action research project was to enhance the academics' ability for reflective teaching. The overall evaluation component of the project evaluated the five courses using the questions listed below as the focus for the evaluation. The evaluation was conducted using qualitative research approaches, such as face-to-face interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observation.

The focus of the book is centred on five broad questions that guided the evaluation component of the action research

project. The questions were: (1) How can courses be designed to encourage reflective thinking? (2) How can obstacles to reflective thinking be overcome? (3) How can theory and practice best be integrated in professional courses? (4) How can students' reflective practice be assessed? and (5) Are existing models of reflection adequate? The authors' explored how to foster development of reflective teaching and learning through the completion of various action research projects. Therefore, the book becomes a great resource for understanding the action research process.

The book is organized into four parts that together contain a total of 12 chapters. Part I includes two chapters, one on the nature of reflection and the second on action research and its application to the project. These two chapters work well in situating the concept of reflection as a critical process for healthcare practitioners. Definitions of reflection are presented along with types of reflection, such as thoughtful action, introspection, premise reflection and reflection. There is a succinct description of two models for reflective thinking that are recommended for application in healthcare education and practice. The content is well referenced so the reader could find more detailed descriptions in these referenced works. The second chapter briefly explains the action research process and outlines the methodology for the total action research/learning project conducted by the team of researchers from the various institutions. Action research was the chosen methodology for the project to assess reflective practice in specific courses since action research is the only research process that has implementation of change as its purpose. All the academics in this project wanted to narrow the gap between student understanding of theory and application of theory to practice and supported the development of student reflection as a means to this end.

Part II of the book includes chapters on the action research process and follows with specific examples from courses that promoted reflection including, integrating theory into practice, using learning contracts, writing reflective journals and promoting discussion from reflective writing. The action research chapter discusses how action research was used to help the academics experience a new teaching approach and to be able to make changes in their teaching practice to maximize student learning. The chapter on integrating theory into practice

describes two initiatives with students that were focused on how to effectively encourage integration of theory into clinical practice. The third chapter in Part II describes a course where learning contracts were used with both students and clinical educators as a way to encourage reflection. The next chapter describes how and why writing reflective journals were used. The last chapter in Part II describes how students' reflective writing was used to promote and guide classroom discussion.

Part III of the book is divided into two chapters that describe the conclusions of the action research project. The two chapters are: (1) encouraging reflective writing and (2) facilitating critical discussion. Practical and descriptive examples are provided that academics could adapt to their own courses. Part IV and the last part of the book returns to the nature of reflection and discusses the affective dimension of reflection, triggers for reflection and reflections on reflection. Once again, there is an in-depth discussion of the many considerations for developing reflective teaching and learning in the healthcare professions. The authors identify conflicting elements and challenges when developing and delivering a reflective thinking curriculum. These conflicting elements are described and the authors offer suggestions for managing the conflict.

This is a very reader-friendly text that provides a wealth of information about the importance in and the process for the development and enhancement of reflection for healthcare practitioners. Many examples of journal writings and interview dialogues are provided that could assist the educator when

applying a similar model to their own teaching and practice. The book addresses the very real concerns with regards to the often personal nature of reflection and how this may cause the student to be unwilling to share in discussion based on their reflective writing. Suggestions for how to manage this concern are provided. The book ends with 20 key themes capturing the elements for consideration when developing reflective teaching and learning. The essence of one key theme emphasizes the importance of incorporating reflective judgement into theory courses so that theory may become integrated with practice and students may be better prepared to reflect upon practice during their professional practice.

I would highly recommend this book for dental hygiene educators who are interested in better understanding the reflection process and how the development of reflection can be supported through the classroom courses and clinical experiences. It is also a great example of a multicentre action research project that would be most valuable to dental hygiene researchers who are involved or interested in action research.

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