

Introduction to Psychological Counselling

Completion of a Reflective Dairy/ Learning Journal Entry from
Counselling Class

Session Week 6

Abba Hailegebriel Girma, PhD

*The Ethiopian Orthodox Theological
College Houston, Texas, USA*

What is Required in Reflective Writing?

Why Reflect?

'It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively.' (Gibbs 1988)

Reflective writing provides an opportunity for you to gain further insights from your work through deeper reflection on your experiences, and through further consideration of other perspectives from people and theory. Through reflection we can we can deepen the learning from work.

The Nature and Content of Reflection

- So what do we mean by reflection? One tentative definition of reflection is offered by Moon (1999):

'... 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)

- Moon continues by outlining some of the purposes for reflection:
- *We reflect in order to:*
 - *Consider the process of our own learning – a process of metacognition*
 - *Critically review something - our own behaviour, that of others or the product of behaviour (e.g. an essay, book, painting etc.)*
 - *Build theory from observations: we draw theory from generalisations - sometimes in practical situations, sometimes in thoughts or a mixture of the two*
 - *Engage in personal or self development*
 - *Make decisions or resolve uncertainty ...*
 - *Empower or emancipate ourselves as individuals (and then it is close to self-development) or to empower/ emancipate ourselves within the context of our social groups.'* (Ibid pp23)
- In this instance, whilst your reflective writing must relate to your experience, the exact focus and emphasis is for you to determine.

Deepening Reflection – Three Models of reflection

- When assessing your reflective writing you will be expected more than a superficial review of your experience, they will be seeking evidence of deeper reflection. This means moving beyond the descriptive, and subjecting your experience to greater scrutiny.
- In *Learning by Doing*, Gibbs (1988) outlines the stages for a ‘Structured Debriefing’, which are based on Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle and which encourage deeper reflection:

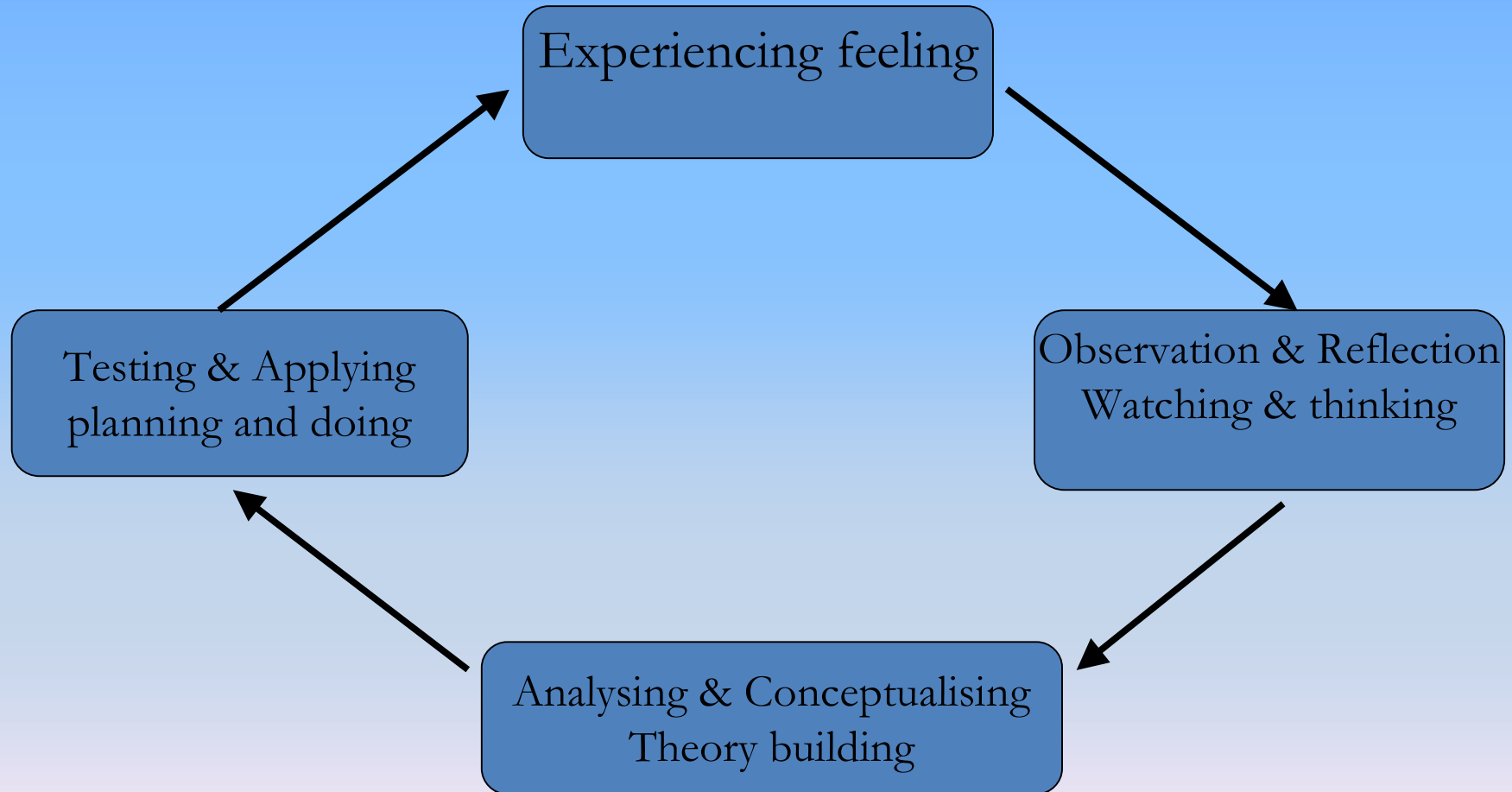
Deepening Reflection – Three Models of reflection

Description:	What is the stimulant for reflection? (incident, event, theoretical idea) What are you going to reflect on?
Feelings:	What were your reactions and feelings?
Evaluation:	What was good and bad about the experience? Make value judgements.
Analysis:	What sense can you make of the situation? Bring in ideas from outside the experience to help you. What was really going on?
Conclusions (general):	What can be concluded, in a general sense, from these experiences and the analyses you have undertaken?
Conclusions (specific):	What can be concluded about your own specific, unique, personal situation or ways of working?
Personal Action plans:	What are you going to do differently in this type of situation next time? What steps are you going to take on the basis of what you have learnt?

On being Reflective

- **Starting point**
 - We need to acknowledge our role as theory builders
 - Have a clear method for making sense of our experience
 - Develop a range of theoretical perspectives
 - Participate in learning opportunities to practice, theorise and evaluate their work.

The Method: Kolb's (1984) Experimental Learning Cycle



On being Reflective

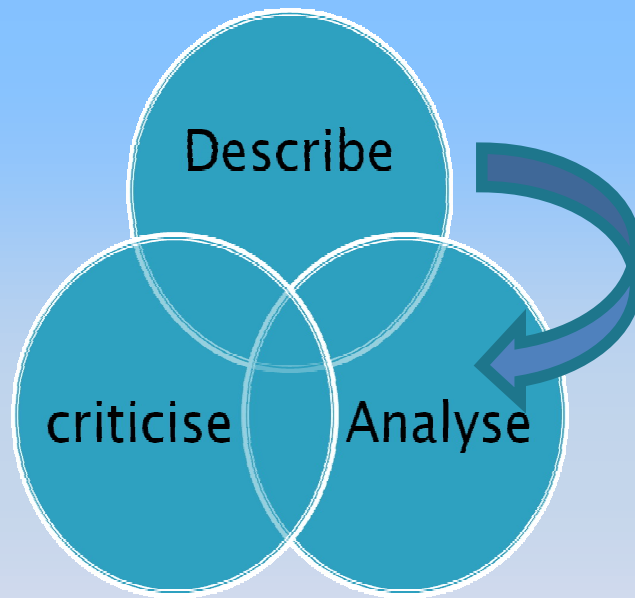
- **Reflection** is the ability to think about the things we have experienced in a systematic way
- **Evaluate** those experiences and learn from them
- **Reflective practice** is where you as the youth, social or health work practitioner take a step back in order to **review** and **analyse** how well the work is **progressing** and how **effective** you are working.
- **It has two components:**
 1. **Reflection -in- action;** you are reviewing as you are working with a group of young people.
 2. **Reflection-on-action;** you review after the event.
- A commitment to ongoing reflection is necessary if you want to improve and learn as practitioners.

Integrating Theory and Practice Key Stage

Reflection involves asking a series of questions about your work and the ways in which you are approaching it.

Key questions

- What were you aiming to achieve?
- What body of knowledge informed your work?
- What skills did you use to work?
- For example **group work skills**, my role as a **Student**, my **learning style**
- **Interpersonal skills**: listening and responding. The use of open and close questions.
- **The skills of providing information**
- **The skills of making suggestions or command (prescriptive intervention)**
- **Challenge and confronting skills**
- **Being a catalyst**
- **Exploring feelings**
- **Providing support**



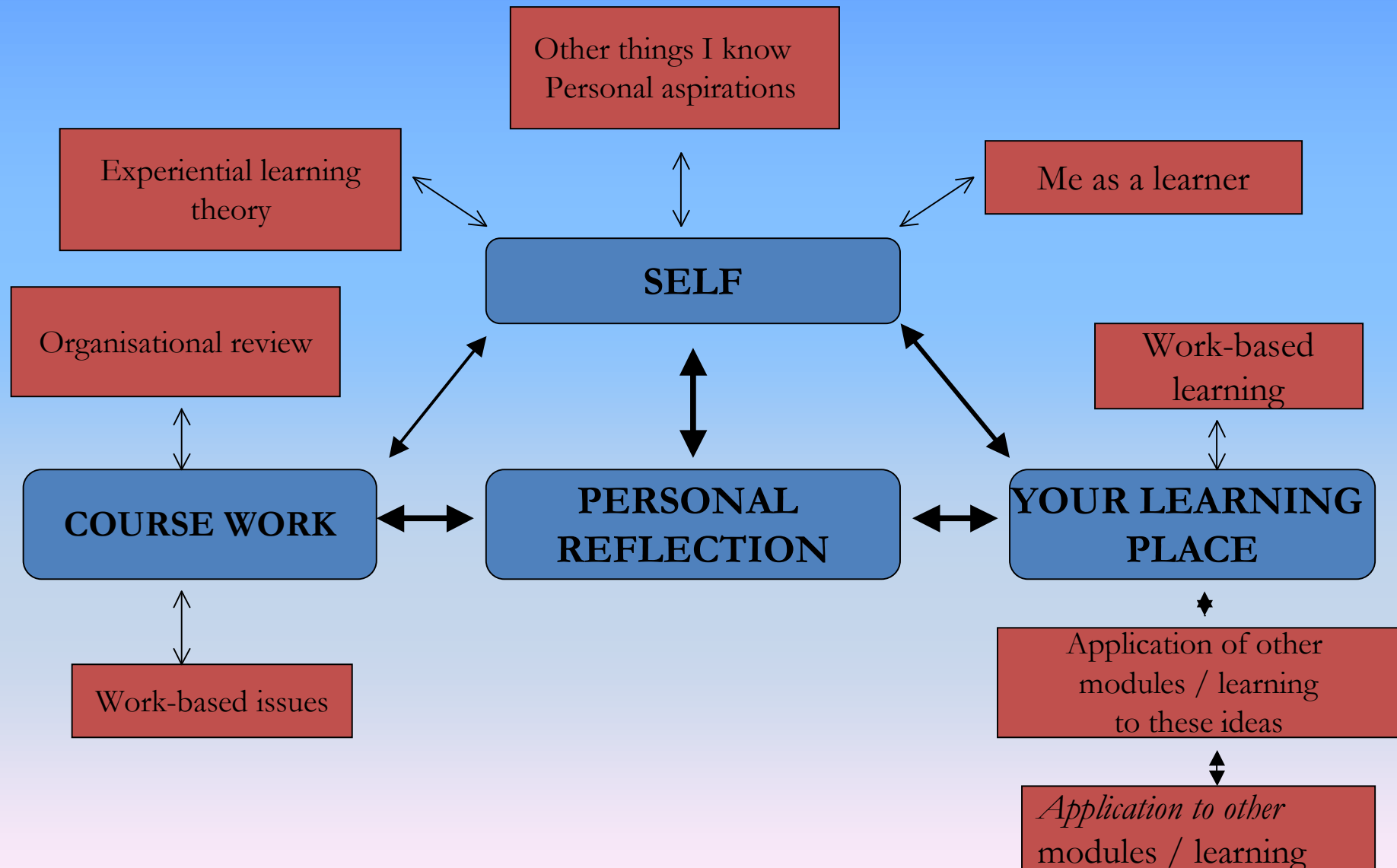
Models of reflection

- Hatton and Smith (1995) identified four levels in the development of teacher reflection from teaching practice. In your reflective writing your tutor will be looking for evidence of reflecting at the higher levels.
- **Descriptive writing:** This is a description of events or literature reports. There is no discussion beyond description. The writing is considered not to show evidence of reflection
- **Descriptive reflective:** There is basically description of events, but shows some evidence of deeper consideration in relatively descriptive language. There is no real evidence of the notion of alternative viewpoints in use.
- **Dialogic reflection:** This writing suggests there is a 'stepping back' from the events and actions which leads to different level of discourse. There is a sense of 'mulling about', discourse with self and an exploration of the role of self in events and actions. There is consideration of the qualities of judgements and possible alternatives for explaining and hypothesising. The reflection is analytical or integrative, linking factors and perspectives.
- **Critical reflection:** This form of reflection, in addition, shows evidence that the learner is aware that actions and events may be 'located within and explicable by multiple perspectives, but are located in and influenced by multiple and socio-political contexts'

Bloom (1964) identified different levels of thinking processes, which he presented in a hierarchy; these can also be used as a framework for more thorough reflection. They move from knowing, evidenced through recalling information, through to evaluating, evidenced through making systematic judgements of value. In your reflective writing your tutor will be looking for evidence of these higher level processes.

	Process	Process
Increasing Difficulty	Knowledge	Recognition and recall of information - describing events
↓	Comprehension	Interprets, translates or summarises given information - demonstrating understanding of events.
	Application	Uses information in a situation different from original learning context -
	Analysis	Separates wholes into parts until relationships are clear – breaks down experiences
	Synthesis	Combines elements to form new entity from the original one - draws on experience and other evidence to suggest new insights
	↓	Evaluation

Possible sources of evidence for reflective



Guidelines for completing the Reflective Journal/ Dairy

- Studies have shown that reflection upon one's learning is key to a full learning experience. For this reason, you will be required to keep reflective journals as part of your professional development. There are two different Reflective Journal templates.
- **Learning Reflection** – to be completed after attendance of each one day of workshop
- **Technology Reflection** – to be completed after using the technology in your work practises. Participants are required to integrate at least two new skills into their work practises after each one day of workshop attendance.
- **How long will it take?**
 - As a rough guide, each journal entry should take approximately 20-30 minutes. Feel free to add comments but the minimum requirements are included in the template.
- **What should I write?**
 - What you learn today
- **Confidentiality**
 - All information completed in journals is confidential.

Learning Journal

- Reflect for a few minutes on today lesson and write your sample reflection on Reflective Journal Template.
- Don't forget writing your learning journal each week after lesson.

Next – Week 7 Session

Introduction to Counselling Skills

References

- Gibbs, G. Rust, C. Jenkins, A. Jaques, D. 1994, *Developing Students' Transferable Skills*. Oxford Centre for Staff Development.
- Kolb, D. 1984, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey
- Moon, J, 1999, *Learning Journals: A Handbook for Academics, Students and Professional Development*. Kogan Page
- Wright, Jeannie and Bolton, Gillie (2012) *Reflective Writing in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (London: SAGE)