

# Reflective practice in pastoral ministry education essay



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The focus of this paper is reflective practice, which is the ability of individuals to learn from critically analysing events and experiences that they encounter in their daily lives besides the values and theories that support those activities. This is employed in various professionals such as in teaching, nursing, environmentalists among other professionals as a supplement for formal professional learning.

In this study, reflective practice will be examined from a pastoral point of view. The term reflective practice will be examined with reference to its definition, the various types of reflective practice that exist and the models of reflective practice that are in use today. Additionally, reflective practice will be analysed from a pastoral point of view whereby the various ways in which it can be used in Christian ministry will be explored as well as the ways in which it has enabled the writer of this paper to develop or change their public relations as far as the ministry is concerned. Finally, the role of reflective practice in the learning experience of the writer will be examined.

## 2. Reflective practice

### 1) Definition

Reflective practice is one of the core characteristics in professions such as education, health, environmental management and theology among others and usually refers to the ability of an individual to reflect on actions or acts in a way that facilitates further learning for the individual. This usually involves paying special attention to the activities of everyday life with special reference to the values and theirs that are the basis for these actions.

Reflective learning encourages practice-based professional learning whereby  
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individuals are able to learn from their experiences as opposed to formal and structured teaching.

The term reflective practice is composed of two words; reflection and practice whereby the term reflection means to critically and accurately evaluate an item, an individual or a situation while experiencing them or after one has encountered them. Practice on the other hand refers to learning or mastery through repetition.

Reflective practice has been defined by Moon as “ a set of abilities and skills, to indicate the taking of a critical stance, an orientation to problem solving or state of mind” whereas Cowan has defined reflective thinking as the situation “ when they analyse or evaluate one or more personal experiences and attempt to generalise that from thinking”. Biggs on the other hand defined reflective thinking as “ a reflection in a mirror is an exact replica of what is in front of it. Reflection in professional practice, however, gives back not what it is, but what might be an improvement of the original” .

In conclusion therefore, the process of reflective learning may be thought of as a process through which individuals critically evaluate their actions, thoughts and experiences and through this critical appraisal, are able to experience autonomous learning. The connection between knowledge and practice is further facilitated by the availability of an experienced professional within the discipline, in this case theology and pastoral ministry. In layman’s terms, the practices and strategies for reflective practice includes questioning the manner in which one carries out various activities and comparing it to the manner in which others carry out the same

activities; the search for alternatives in the course of accomplishing the same activities; comparing and contrasting; keeping an open mind; looking for the framework, theoretical basis and underlying rationale for those activities; viewing from various perspectives by asking for the viewpoints of others; consideration of the consequences; hypothesising, testing, seeking, identifying and resolving problems .

## 2) Advantages of practice reflective

Reflective practice in pastoral ministry is associated with a higher understanding for the minister of his or her own style in the course of ministry besides validation of his or her own ideas, beneficial challenges to traditional approaches, recognition of the role of ministry in society and the respect for diversity in the course of applying theories in practice .

## 3. Types Of Reflective Practice

### 1) Content Reflection

This refers to the recounting of something that happened by the practitioner who in this case is the minister . This may be the outright description of a situation or of a problem such as “ Mr. Stan did not tell me anything that may have been troubling him in spite of the fact that I reassured him that I was ready to listen and despite his revelation that his family was unreceptive to him”

### 2) Process Reflection

This is where a practitioner the process that was involved in the happening of an event such as “ as I narrated in the encounter with Mr. Stan what my purpose was, then I began to carry out an intense physical assessment. I asked again about any concerns once in the middle of taking temperature, and did not mention it again. Mr. Stan failed to make eye contact when he said everything was ok.”

### 3)Premise Reflection

Premise reflection is where a problem, issue or situation is evaluated with the view of understanding why it happened or occurred. For example “ I wonder why he failed to respond to my questions. How come I didn’t notice and respond to his body language then? Why did I not feel comfortable “ digging” a little more? Did I ask about her problems too early in the interview and too often again when in the middle of the task? Was I comfortable? What should I do differently in a future situation? Do I feel comfortable acting differently in the future? What would assist me in the future?”

### 4)Action Reflection

This is also known as “ reflection on action” and is used to refer to the reflection of actions, activities and events that happened in the past and may involve documentation of those past events and experiences and may be referred to as Schon’s model of reflection.

### 5)Critical Reflection

Critical reflection is the process of “ analysing, reconsidering, and questioning experiences within a broad context of issues” and can be broken  
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down into various dimensions for the purposes of addressing various activities besides various levels of reflection. The first, second and third dimensions constitute the ordinary process of reflection whereas the fourth dimension constitutes the core of critical reflection.

The first dimension involves critical observation for the purposes of understanding the issues in a deep and accurate way through the use of frameworks such as past experiences. The second dimension involves an exhaustive description of what has been observed whereas the third dimension involves the making of the meaning of what has been described. Finally, the fourth dimension refers to the addition of breadth and depth to the issue through asking questions about and relating meanings to a variety of professional and personal issues.

#### 6) Reflection In Action

Reflection in action refers to the reflection of an individual on action while in the course of carrying out the action. This is manifested in constant thinking throughout the duration of the action and is referred to as “ knowing in action”, “ thinking on your feet” and “ keeping your wits about you” besides “ learning by doing” as described by Schon.

#### 4. Models Of Reflective Practice

The purpose of these models is to enable professionals to draw lessons out of experiences in the course of enabling professionals to develop independence and to create a continuous, life long, learning experience.

#### 1) Argyris and Schon 1978

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In 1978, Argyris and Schon proposed the “ single loop” and the “ double loop” models of reflective practice on the basis of the identification and correction of an error, fault or mistake. “ Single loop” learning is where the individual continues to rely on the old procedures in spite of the identification and resolution of a problem whereas “ double loop” learning is where upon the identification and resolution of a problem, new procedures are adopted and in case the same problem appears again, a new solution is found.

Later, Schon brought up the idea of “ reflection-in-action” and “ reflection-on-action” whereby the former may be defined as “ thinking on their feet” and the latter may be described as “ felt knowing”. The idea behind these two concepts is that in the course of any practice, a professional normally experiences feeling, emotions and thoughts that are derived from a similar past experience and which enables them to face the situation at hand directly.

## 2) Kolb 1984

This model was heavily influenced by the works of Dewey and Piaget in the 1970’s and besides focussing on experimental learning, is centred on the change of information into knowledge. This occurs when an event has already come to pass and involves the reflection of the individual on the experience in order to gain understanding and insight of the concepts, which are then transferred into a new situation. Thus, knowledge obtained from a specific situation is constantly and regularly utilised and builds on an individual’s experience and knowledge .

### 3)Gibbs 1988

This is an improvement of Kolb's experimental learning cycle whereby structured debriefing is used as a way of enabling reflection. The stages of a full structured debriefing in order are: the initial experience, the description of the experience, the description of the feelings that an individual encountered, the valuation of the experience, an analysis of the experience, the general conclusions that an individual makes from the experience and analysis, the specific conclusion and the personal action plans in case a similar situation is encountered in future. These steps are also known as the "Gibbs model of reflection" or the "Gibbs reflective cycle" and are summarised as: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, and conclusion and action plan.

### 4)Johns 1995

This is a structured model of reflection that consists of a guide for individuals to gain higher understanding and is designed to include the participation of a colleague or a mentor, who facilitates faster transformation of the experience to learnt knowledge. This model is based on the earlier works of Carper and puts emphasis on the ability of a professional to access, understand and put into practice information gathered empirically through looking in on one's thoughts and emotions and looking out at the events that took place. This model includes "Carper's four patterns of knowing" which are: empirical, personal, ethical and aesthetic and reflexive.

### 5)Rolfe 2001



The basis of this model is Borton's developmental model of 1970 and involves a simplistic cycle consisting of three questions that a professional asks. These are: what, so what and what next. This enables an individual to describe a situation accurately, which further enables scrutiny of the situation and construction of knowledge that was learnt through the experience. After this, the various ways and methods in which one may improve as well as the results of one's response to the situation are evaluated .

#### 6)Baud's model

Baud's model places emphasis on the feelings and emotions of an individual besides being cyclical. This model recommends a critical analysis of an experience or an event with reference to the emotions or feelings that were experienced in the course of the event or after the event and application of the lessons that were learnt from this experience.

#### 7)Greenaway 3-stage Model

This model is based on three activities that are performed in cyclical progression. These are " plan", followed by " do", which is followed by " review" and so on. It is suggested that this model is closely related to the Gibbs model of reflective practice.

### 5. Use Of Reflective Practice In Christian Ministry

The role of reflective practice in Christian ministry and Pastoral work cannot be overemphasised. This is especially so taking into consideration that

ministry involves the delivery of the word of a perfect God, through an <https://assignbuster.com/reflective-practice-in-pastoral-ministry-education-essay/>

imperfect individual to other imperfect individuals with the aim of bringing them close and closer and closer to the fold. Additionally, Christian ministry is much more than preaching and one of its other components is to set a good example to the congregation and thus the need for reflective practice among the Christian ministers.

### 1) Reflective Practice in Church Ministry Leadership

To begin with, reflective practice is important for a pastoral minister to accomplish his or her leadership role within a ministry. The leadership of any ministry is important in the achievement of the goals and objectives of that particular community in addition to influencing their congregations to view and value these in the same way. The role of leadership demands certain behaviours from the Christian minister and hence the minister needs to constantly reflect on his or her behaviour and adopt behaviour and actions that will serve as an example to the community. This would enable the attainment of goals and objectives besides steering the congregation to greater heights .

### 2) Reflective Practice in Prayer and Instruction

Reflective practice may be used by the ministers to encourage congregation to reflect on their thoughts, experiences and events with reference to Biblical teachings as well as prayer as a way of encouraging them to live lives that are more godly. This may also be used by the ministers themselves as well in striving to live lives that are more godly.

### 3) Reflective Practice in Improving the Running of the Church's Affairs.

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In the course of management of the affairs of the church, not everything that the minister comes across will have been taught in class and it is prudent for him or her to come up with ways of handling such situations. Additionally, the minister may find that some of the management that he or she may have learnt in the classroom are not so practical in some situations and it is in such times when reflective practice should be used to invent more solutions to management problems.

## 6. Role Of Reflective Practice In The Course Of Learning

### 1) Reflective Practice in Time Management

In the course of learning, reflective practice has come in handy especially in the course of time management. By looking at past events and experiences, I have learnt how to plan ahead for activities, how to prioritise activities and the importance of allocating time both for working and for relaxation purposes. Unlike in the past, I am now able to meet my obligations and the stress that comes with undone work has dramatically reduced in my life. Consequently, in spite of fulfilling my responsibilities, I am able to engage in activities that I like.

### 2 )Reflective Learning in Accommodating Others

Accommodation of others has been a challenge all along in my life and more so in the course of Christian ministry studies as a result of the diverse viewpoints that are held by my fellow students. However, by reflecting past instances of my intolerance towards the opinion of others, I was persuaded to try and accommodate the feelings of others. This turned out to be

worthwhile as I learnt that it is important to accept the views and opinions of others no matter how offensive they are to me, since I realised that people like being listened to and understood even if not necessarily agreed with. This, I have learnt is perfect for harmonious living and coexistence even with my classmates.

### 3) Reflective Practice and Challenges at Work and in personal life

Reflective practice has been instrumental in assisting me to deal with challenges at work and at home. In the past, difficulties and work would spill over when I got home and difficulties I experienced at home would affect my work. As a result of reflecting on these situations, I learnt that there is a time and place for everything and that what happens at home should not affect what happens at work and what happens at work should not impact my life away from work. This has enabled me to find fulfilment at home and at work in spite of whatever difficulties I may be experiencing. This has made me more effective in my work and responsibilities.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has been centred on reflective practice within the context of pastoral ministry. To begin with, the definition of the term reflective practice has been defined in layman's terms but the definitions of various experts such as Moon, Cowan and Biggs have also been included. The advantages of the practice of reflective practice especially among pastoral ministers have also been mentioned besides the types of reflective practice. The types of reflective practice that have been discussed in this study are: content

reflection, process reflection, premise reflection, action reflection, critical  
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reflection and reflection on action. This paper also contains brief discussions on the various models of reflective practice that have been proposed by experts over the years which are: Argyris and Schon model of 1978, Kolb model of 1984, Gibbs model of 1988, John's model of 1995, and Rolfe's model of 2001. Additionally, the importance of reflective practice in Christian ministry has been explored and in this case, its role in church leadership, prayer and instruction and in the running of the affairs of the church has all been discussed. The impact of reflective practice in my personal life has also been outlined with reference to its effects on the challenges that I encounter in my personal and professional life, in accommodating others, and in time management.