

HEALTH SCIENCE LIBRARIANS' ENGAGEMENT IN WORK-RELATED REFLECTION

**A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF WHY THEY INVEST IN
REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND
APPLICATION TO ACADEMIC LIBRARIES**

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October 2020



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Medical Library Association Research Training Institute
 - Susan Lessick, AHIP, FMLA, Research Training Institute project director
 - Emily Vardell, Research Training Institute faculty and my project mentor
- Academic Library Association of Ohio

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify ways in which intentional reflection can be applied to your current position in order to improve performance
- Apply a simple reflective technique to better understand the process of reflective practice
- Identify barriers that keep you from using intentional reflective at work and identify strategies to overcome them

WHAT IS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE?

There are many definitions of reflective practice. They tend to have two things in common:

- They include reflection (of course)
- They identify a purpose for the reflection
 - Engaging in continuous learning
 - Improving performance
 - Increasing understanding
 - Uncovering assumptions and theories-in-use

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

- Much of the literature of reflective practice comes from teacher education, nursing, social work
- In librarianship: many articles reporting on results of reflective practice, describing the author's reflective process and recommending it for particular kinds of work. Not much research on whether and how library employees use reflection.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

- Greenall and Sen (2014): cross-sectional study of librarians in the UK on their use of reflective practice and perceived benefits and barriers to use
- Miller (2020): replication of the Greenall and Sen study in U.S. health science librarians

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- As librarians engage in reflection to improve work performance, what are they actually doing?
- Given the many barriers that work against intentional reflection, why do they invest time and energy in reflection?

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews with qualitative analysis of transcripts (UT IRB reviewed/designated as exempt)

- Most recent time using reflection for a work situation
- Most important time using reflection for a work situation
- Why start to use reflection at work and how its use has changed over time
- Barriers to using reflection at work and how they are overcome
- Advice to someone who is interested in starting to use reflection at work

PARTICIPANTS

Potential participants were recruited through a number of email distribution lists targeting medical and health science librarians, regardless of whether they worked in an academic library, a hospital or VA library, etc.

Currently have interviewed 11 participants. Data saturation has not yet been reached, so interviews are continuing.

REFLECTIVE WRITING EXPERIENCE

- Rule #1: date it
- Rule #2: reflect in a way that works for you
 - pen and paper or a word processor
 - write out a narrative, jot down bullet points, draw out a concept map, etc.

REFLECTIVE WRITING (15 MINUTES)

- Pick a work situation that you would like to better understand
- Write about the situation
 - What?
 - So what?
 - Now what?
- What's your next action? (if anything)

META-REFLECTION (2 MINUTES)

- Reflection on your reflection
 - What was easiest for you?
 - What was most challenging?
 - What parts do you need to explore in more depth?
 - Is there anything about the situation that you missed or ignored?
 - What did you learn in the reflection? What are you learning as you reflect on your reflection?

INITIAL THEMES FROM THE RESEARCH

- Benefits of using reflection at work
- Importance of intentionality in reflection
- Diversity of practices

BENEFITS

- Information literacy instruction
- Interpersonal relations
- Reporting and goal-setting
- Emotion regulation
- Facilitating processing of events



If I know I'm going to have that same class the next semester, I go through those [written reflections] and see what did I do and how am I going to change it for this next semester based on what I had written there.

Barbara



I can be in that mindset of 100 million different things that I think I want to do. Bringing it back to the goals and values that I set for myself is what reflection gives me.

Erica



[We talk about] managing people and expectations...looking at a situation politically: what are the best ways to achieve what we want to achieve? Who's the best person to talk to? What's the most diplomatic approach?

Angela



I can be an anxious person, and I tend to ruminate. [Reflection] really helps me focus. I can get it out because if I'm writing it down, it's not like a constant loop in my head of what I'm doing when I'm doing when I'm doing.

Virginia



I always strive for equanimity and balance, and I think the process lets me smooth the rough edges to my thoughts or to my experience....It's a processing thing.

Corey

IMPORTANCE OF INTENTIONALITY

- Being intentional in the reflective process
- Cultivating an environment for reflection
 - Working with supervisor
 - Scheduling time



When I first started, I was so new to the career that I was just doing things, not really stopping to think about them. At some point...I started becoming more reflective....I am a bit more intentional when I go talk to someone if I want to talk about an experience.

Barbara



When your supervisor gives you the green light [to take time for reflection], it's a recognition that you matter, and that your reflection and all the things that you want to do matter....it just makes everything so much easier.

Tolkein

DIVERSITY OF PRACTICES

- Pondering, writing (longhand, electronically), writing (narrative, form/lists, drawing; freeform or using a model as a guide), having conversations, incorporating movement
- Regular practice or initiated by a situation



I essentially use reflection on a daily basis for different formats. The one that I most typically use is writing....I do like to write and I find that I often will write as a preferred reflective practice. I will do that most evenings at the end of the day at work.

Corey



[My office is in] a basement room that has just artificial light....If I need to reflect on something, I will actually get up and go out. I do my reflection a lot while walking....As I walk and I'm outside in the fresh air, I mull it over in my mind, and what I find often is that in doing so I have...that a-ha moment.

Callie

BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES

- Lack of time
 - Using small pockets of time for reflection
 - Responding to a set of standard questions (using a model)
 - Working with supervisor to create time
- Cognitive and emotional blocks
 - Defending the important from the urgent
 - Making space to diffuse high emotions



I send thanks to the instructor, record my stats - it's like almost like a ritual of 'this is what I do next' - and I do like the handwritten [reflection]. It's a little ritual that helps me feel like, 'OK...I can move on to the next thing.'

Barbara



You need to allow yourself to have this time and justify it if you need to -- to your bosses and yourself....My boss knows I do it. She's noted it in my performance evaluations and how much she appreciates it take the time to do it.

Virginia



That internal voice says ‘Is this a good use of your time? You know, you could be working on XYZ.’ It is a challenge to push back: ‘Nope, this is an important part of what I do and how I get better.’ And so making space for it in my own head, I think this is pretty important.

Angela

LIMITS OF THE RESEARCH

- Data saturation not yet reached
- Novice interviewer
- Archiving de-identified transcripts discouraging participants?

ADVICE TO SOMEONE WANTING TO START USING REFLECTION

- Just do it but start small
- Do it for yourself (no need to share it with anyone else)
- Consider what techniques might work best: pondering, writing, talking with others; free form or working with a model as a guide
- Don't let perfectionism get in the way

IN THE CONTEXT OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

- Reflection as a tool to improve performance can be used in academic libraries by any library employee
 - Focus of the reflection will vary, but general reflective practices and processes transfer among types of libraries and positions
 - Barriers to reflective practice are universal (especially lack of time); strategies might need to be modified a bit given one's work environment



If you're interested in understanding your own work and if you're interested in becoming better, building best practices for yourself, and understanding yourself in general, then having a purposeful reflection system is going to help you a lot.

Tolkein

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON STARTING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Miller, J. M., Ford, S. F., & Yang, A. (2020). Elevation through reflection: Closing the circle to improve librarianship with reflective practice. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 108(3), 353-63. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2020.938>.



THANK YOU!

If you have questions, comments, or would like to talk about your reflective writing experience, join me on Thursday, October 29, from 2:20-3:20 pm.

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October 2020





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