

Bowers Reflective Model

Sue Bowers

School of Nursing & Midwifery, Faculty of Health Sciences, Staffordshire University

Introduction

Having taught in nurse education for a number of years, reflection is something that has developed as a key requirement of health care curricula, both in pre-registration nursing and in life long learning, as well as in other professional courses. Reflective writing is a skill that many nursing students appear to struggle with, especially when the concept is first introduced. Reflective models can be useful in providing structure on which to “hang” thoughts and ideas; however in my professional experience, some models are sometimes not easy for the novice reflector to understand what to include within each heading, and some struggle to use the model properly, in order to gain the most from reflecting on an incident or event.

One of the key points that I consider is important, is *why* the specific incident or event was initially chosen as the focus for the reflection. It is important to recognise and identify why this has such a significant impact on the individual to require a more in-depth analysis and evaluation. Recognising the significance of the situation or event can lead to a thorough exploration, translating to further insight, professional development and personal professional improvement. It was with this in mind, that I developed the Bowers Reflective Model.

Keywords: Reflection; Reflective model; Professional development.

Background literature

Both student and qualified nurses within nurse education and other professional courses have used reflection for a number of years. There is a wealth of literature around the concept of reflection, and reflective practice, with Dewey (1933) perhaps being recognised as the instigator for bringing reflective thinking into the nursing arena. Reflection generally aims to bring together personal, aesthetic and ethical perspectives, along with empirical knowledge (Johns 1995) and it also aims to help to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Horton-Deutsch & Sherwood 2008).

The reflective process encourages the individual reflector to develop a greater understanding on which to build upon their strengths and improve practice and future action (Somerville 2004). Reflection should be an active process, where purposeful thought is applied to an experience, which consequently develops an understanding of the situation (Ashby 2006; Bolton 2010). Reflection is not merely thinking about an event, but systematically appraising the situation, and learning from the analysis of the event from different perspectives (Dolphin 2013).

There are a number of published reflective frameworks or models (Johns 1999; Gibbs 1988; Kolb 1984), which support the reflector by following a guideline to explore a situation or event in detail, focusing on what is important in a structured manner (Johns 2004; Price and Harrington 2013). The use of a reflective model can also prevent the reflector from merely focusing on their own reaction to an event, and without the reflective model, the scope of reflection may be limited and hence reduce the positive benefits and outcomes (Ashby 2006). However, not all reflective models will suit the individual reflector, and not all situations will comfortably or

easily fit into a specific reflective model. It is therefore important to have a range of reflective models for choice to suit the individual reflector.

Situations that nurses and health care professionals constantly revisit in their memory, and those that conjure up strong feelings and emotions, are often the events that would benefit from a more in-depth exploration. It is not always easy to break down a significant event into manageable and useful "chunks", with perhaps a tendency to "go around in circles" trying to make sense out of events. This is where reflective models come into their own by guiding the reflector in a structured and logical manner, to assist with clarity and focus, thereby enabling a deeper exploration of the situation or event.

This paper outlines a new reflective model, which aims to add to the range available for use within the nursing and health care professions. The primary focus of the Bowers Reflective Model asks the reflector to consider *why* their chosen situation or event is important. Recognising the significance of this to the reflector, is the first step towards exploring the event in detail, and gaining a greater understanding on which to develop and enhance practice.

Bowers Reflective Model

There are many issues that occur in day to day nursing and health care practice, which are often reflected on superficially, usually by means of reflection-in-action (Schon 1983). Although this can be useful in itself to some extent, those events which cause the individual to think more deeply about a situation and explore the relevant literature (reflection-on-action) (Schon 1983), are those which can influence a positive change in practice and consequent action.

I developed the Bowers Reflective Model (Table 1) following years of personal experience using the published reflective models, and also guiding new and experienced students through the reflective process. Although the published reflective models have their use and can be effective in the right situation, guiding student nurses through the reflective process often raised the question by the student nurse, 'why should I reflect on this?' Some student nurses commencing their course also expressed difficulty knowing what to include in reflective writing, even though the models available included headings, they were unsure what to include within each.

The development of this model happened at a time when I began to write reflectively about an event that happened to me, but none of the reflective models available appeared to fit what or how I wanted to write. The event was also very significant to me personally, and I could not get past why I kept revisiting this in my mind. Hence my initial question on why the event was important to reflectively explore in more detail was developed. By exploring this first, it then encourages the reflector to consider the personal and professional aspects of a particular event, and their accompanying feelings surrounding it.

Informal verbal feedback of using the Bowers Reflective Model, was gained mainly from year 2 and year 3 student nurses. Introducing reflection and reflective writing to year 1 students (both student nurses and those on other health care awards), also indicated that many novice reflectors struggle to understand what information to include under the reflective model headings.

For this reason, the Bowers Reflective Model includes questions that are 'user friendly' and appropriate for either novice or experienced reflector. The 'Guidelines for Completion' were added to encourage reflectors to consider the content that could be included in each part of the model, guiding in a constructive and logical manner.

This Bowers Reflective Model intends the reflector to explore the situation or event in detail and from different perspectives. Without using a model to reflect, there is a possibility that the reflector will focus on just one aspect, often a particularly negative aspect, which may consequently limit the scope of the benefits of detailed and wider exploration (Ashby 2006).

As previously mentioned, the Bowers Reflective Model initially asks the reflector to identify why writing about the situation or event is important. This may include a variety of reasons, for example: An event which prompted the reflector to recognise a lack of knowledge or skills: Where an episode of poor practice was observed: A situation that made the reflector feel uncomfortable or anxious: or experiencing an internal conflict between theory and practice.

The consequent headings encourage the reflector to describe the event or situation, identify why it is important to analyse this event or situation, and to apply appropriate literature/research to this analysis. In order for the reflection to have further meaning, the Bowers Reflective Model asks the reflector to identify what they have learned that could improve events in the future, which could involve for example, personal identification of a change to practice, discussion with other staff, dissemination of knowledge, or recognising a change that needs to be implemented. The Action Plan asks the reflector to identify and implement goals to achieve following completion of the reflective writing.

It is important to recognise that not all reflective events should focus on negative incidents or events. Indeed, positive events and those that made an individual feel valued and respected are just as useful to reflect on, celebrating good practice and supporting actions taken with an appropriate evidence base. This Bowers Reflective Model therefore also lends itself towards this type of reflective writing, and celebrates positive practice.

Table 1. The Bowers Reflective Model.

Bowers Reflective Model
• Why is this reflection important to me?
• What happened?
• Why is it important to analyse this event?
• Analysis of the event with supporting literature / research.
• What have I learned that could improve events in the future?
• Action Plan – what do I need to do now?

In my experience in teaching and facilitating reflection, it was apparent that particularly at the start of their reflective writing experience, some students struggle to identify the content to include in the reflective model headings. Novice reflectors often struggle to identify how to use the reflective models to gain the most from their use, and It is with this in mind, that I have devised the 'Guidelines for Completion' to accompany the Bowers Reflective Model. These guidelines are intended to be used as *prompt questions* and *not* a list of sub-headings to be followed. Not all of the prompt questions will apply to each reflector and their relevance will depend upon the event or situation being reflected on. However informal feedback from year 2 and year 3 students who have used the Bowers Reflective Model has been very positive. Comments indicate that they found the 'Guidelines for Completion' (Table 2) particularly beneficial, in encouraging thoughts and ideas, and how to develop the different aspects of an event or situation, by

providing additional guidance for those less experienced in reflective writing using reflective models. Verbal comments from student nurses also indicate that they have found the model to be logical and guide them in an easy to follow format, and that the model helps them to focus on what is relevant in that situation or event. The initial question of why the event or situation is important, also helped the reflector to focus on what it means to the individual and others, in terms of both personal and professional implications, including the impact on patient care. Reflection should assist in developing good nursing practice as well as individual development, and this also came through in the feedback from some student nurses.

Table 2. The 'Guidelines for Completion'.

Bowers Reflective Model : Guidelines for Completion
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why is this reflection important to me?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What prompted me to want to write about this event?○ Does it relate to any of my Portfolio / Profile content? eg. SWOT Analysis, Reflective Diary /Journal?○ Did my feelings prompt me to want to write about this event?<ul style="list-style-type: none">- feelings of anger or frustration- feeling that something should have been done that wasn't- feeling of helplessness- feeling that the patient was not being treated holistically- observation of poor / good nursing practice- feeling that I could have done better- feeling of achievement- feeling of 'a job well done'- feeling that you had made a difference to your patient / colleague / other person○ What do I hope to gain from writing about this event?• What happened? (Description of events)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Recall of events as they happened○ Be accurate and concise○ Be aware of and acknowledge confidentiality and keep individuals, places of work etc anonymous and unidentifiable• Why is it important to analyse this event? (What does it show about good / positive behavior or nursing practice and what does it show about poor / negative behavior or nursing practice?)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What good or positive aspects does this event show?○ Positive aspects could be for you, for your peers /colleagues, for patients and / or for the institution.○ Negative aspects could be for you, for your peers /colleagues, for patients and / or for the institution.○ The event may show some positive and some negative aspects○ How could analysis of this event be of benefit?<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Beneficial for me?- Beneficial for my patients?- Beneficial for my peers / colleagues?- Beneficial for others?- Beneficial for the working environment or institution?- Beneficial for the profession?• Analysis of the event with supporting literature / research<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Undertake a detailed examination of the component parts of your identified event<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Question the actions taken- Consider how the parts of the event relate to and influence each other- Consider if and how your feelings influenced the event- Identify and challenge assumptions

- Use literature / research to analyse the event
- Include a variety of sources and use current / most recent sources where possible
- Apply the literature / research to the event that you have highlighted in your 'What Happened' section
- Include references to support your analysis with a full list of references at the end of your reflection
- **What have I learnt that could improve future events or practice?**
 - From exploring the literature related to the event, what have I learned?
 - What improvements could be made to this event for the future?
 - Would anything need to be done by others?
 - Other staff / managers?
 - Employers?
 - Policy makers?
 - Summarise the event and what you have learned
- **Action Plan – what do I need to do now?**
 - Identify if you need to do anything further
 - Further reading or knowledge
 - Further training
 - If the same / similar situation happened again, what would you do differently that would improve the outcome?
 - Consider the event from different perspective if applicable
 - Student perspective
 - Qualified professional perspective
 - How would you disseminate your learning from reflection on this event to others (eg. colleagues / staff), so that practice could be improved?

The first heading 'Why is this reflection important to me?', offers prompts to explore why the reflector chose to develop a specific event or situation further. This may also link to content already in the reflectors' Profile / Portfolio of evidence, a requirement for NMC updating (NMC 2011) and one that many modules or courses often require. Content from this may be a trigger factor in wishing to explore an experience in further detail. The event or situation may also have resulted in strong feelings for the individual, which may be revisited many times before it's explored in detail in a written format, and where learning can then result through in-depth analytical reflection.

The 'Description of events' reminds the reflector to be aware of the need for confidentiality and anonymity, especially if the reflection is to be used as part of a course or module, and / or will be read by others.

In the section titled 'Why is it important to analyse this event', reflectors are asked to consider positive aspects as well as negative ones. The Guidelines encourage the reflector to consider a wider scope than merely themselves, including their colleagues, the institution and their profession. Not all of these will be applicable to the individual reflector and be dependent on the focus of their reflection, however as these are meant as Guidelines only, those that apply to the event or situation should encourage the reflector to consider a wider overall picture.

'Analysis of the event with supporting literature / research', clearly guides the novice reflector where to include the majority of the supporting literature applied to the situation. Prompts are suggested to guide and develop this section, with suggestions of areas to consider. One of the main parts of the reflective model is the next section, 'What I have learnt that could improve future events or practice'. The exploration of an event or situation should result in learning for the reflector in some form or other, in order to develop the reflector themselves or future practice. The prompts here encourage the reflector to again consider the wider implications too, that may have an impact on health care.

The 'Action plan' is also a very important component of the Bowers Reflective Model. Without the Action Plan, learning from reflecting on an event or situation is incomplete. Although for many students, this will involve focusing on future actions during their training programme (where often support and guidance is with a mentor or tutor), this is an ideal opportunity for senior students to explore their future actions from a qualified practitioner perspective. This may help the senior student in the transition from student to qualified nurse, encouraging the development and consideration of concepts of accountability and responsibility. The Action plan may also highlight where the reflector needs to develop their skills or knowledge, to consequently have a positive impact of patient care and continuing professional development (CPD).

Reflection is part of lifelong learning and personal professional development, with the NMC highlighting CPD for mandatory renewal of registration (NMC 2008). It is therefore important that novice reflectors are encouraged to begin developing their reflective skills early, and supported to analyse events or situations that occur. Actions can be explored, alternatives considered and action plans developed and implemented to further enhance both knowledge and skills, and consequently confidence and competence in practice.

Summary

Reflection and reflective writing are likely to be a part of nursing and health care curricula and personal professional development for many years to come. This model is appropriate for any health care student at any level, not just student nurses. It is therefore important to support novice reflectors in developing this skill. Utilising structured reflective models can help to develop the reflectors' logical and detailed exploration of a situation or event, and encourage focus on the principal issues involved. The reflector is encouraged to explore their practice and that of others, challenge assumptions and explore the evidence / literature base that impacts on the situation or event. The outcome is not only to develop the individual both personally and professionally, but also to have a positive impact of patient care.

The Bowers Reflective Model has only been evaluated informally and verbally, through comments received from student nurses, who have used the model during their course. A more formal written evaluation would be appropriate, and a comparison of the model with those readily available within the literature.

The Bowers Reflective Model supports those reflectors who prefer to follow a structure, encourages focus on the important aspects of the recognised event, and encompasses aspects of both personal and professional development, whilst acknowledging the necessity to support thoughts and actions with the appropriate evidence base. The Guidelines for Completion add suggested prompts, particularly useful for those novice reflectors, who are perhaps less experienced in utilising reflective models, or those who prefer more guided structure. The Bowers Reflective Model is not intended to replace any of those currently being used by reflectors, but to offer an alternative. Not all reflective models will suit the individual reflector and not all reflective writings will fit into the same reflective model.

References

- Ashby C (2006) Models for reflective practice, *Practice Nurse*, vol.32 no.10, pp.28-30.
- Bolton G (2010) *Reflective Practice, 3rd edition*, London, Sage.
- Dewey J (1933) *How we think (Revised edition)*, Boston, D.C. Heath.
- Dolphin S (2013) How nursing students can be empowered by reflective practice, *Mental Health Practice*, vol.16, no.9, pp.20-23.
- Gibbs G (1988) *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*, Oxford, Oxford Further Education Unit.
- Kolb D (1984) *Experiential learning: Experience in the Source of learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs NJ, Prentice-Hall.
- Horton-Deutsch S & Sherwood G (2008) Reflection: an educational strategy to develop emotionally-competent nurse leaders, *Journal of Nursing Management*, vol.16, pp.946-954.
- Johns C (2004) *Becoming a Reflective Practitioner: A reflective and holistic approach to clinical nursing, practice development and clinical supervision*, Oxford, Blackwell Science Publishing Ltd.
- Johns C (1999) Unravelling the Dilemmas with Everyday Nursing Practice, *Nursing Ethics*, vol.6, pp.287-298.
- Johns C (1995) Framing learning through reflection within Carper's fundamental ways of knowing in nursing, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, vol.22, pp.226-234.
- Nursing and Midwifery Council (2011) *The Prep handbook*, London, NMC.
- Nursing and Midwifery Council (2008) *Standards to support learning and assessment in practice*, London, NMC.
- Price B & Harrington A (2013) *Critical Thinking and Writing for Nursing Students, 2nd edition*, London, Sage.
- Schon D (1983) *The reflective practitioner*, New York, Basic Books.
- Somerville D (2004) A practical approach to promote reflective practice within nursing, *Nursing Times*, vol.100, no.12, pp.42.