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Reflection revisited: can it really enhance practice?

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Like the title of this conference, this is a presentation/paper that sets out to ask questions - but not necessarily to provide answers! It starts by challenging the assumption in the conference title. In asking '*How* do we improve?' it assumes that reflective practice does lead to improvement. I want to take a step back and explore the relationship between 'reflection' and the enhancement of practice. Indeed I want to ask a series of quite challenging questions as we seek to unravel the relationship between a process - *reflection* - and our performance - our *practice*.

- What is 'reflective practice'?

- Can everyone be a reflective practitioner?

- Does reflection enhance practice? If so how?

- How do we know when practice has improved?

- How can we know it was reflection that led to, or contributed to, improvement?

- How does reflection link to 'continuing' professional development?

- How can you 'evidence' reflective practice, improvement or development?

In this presentation I'm not going to provide definitive answers to any of these questions although I will, directly or indirectly, address most of them and will return to this list at the end.

I am going to structure the presentation in three sections - or rather three strands - that 'braid' together in an exploration of the question in the Conference title - 'How do we improve?' From a fairly critical - certainly questioning - exploration of 'reflective practice' I will extend the debate to locate notions of reflection and improvement in the wider context of what is often called 'continuing professional development' (CPD). Again I question both the terminology and the implications. Finally I move to an example - a case study - located in the open and distance learning (ODL) context of the UK Open University (OU). Here I examine a process that involves reflection and improvement yet also claims to be a form of continuing professional development. The 'process' involved the carrying out of individual and collective action research enquiries by the part-time, widely distributed, tutors within the UK OU.

So my presentation can be summarised in a diagram where a large oval representing 'professional development' encompasses a smaller circle representing 'reflective practice' that overlaps with another small circle representing 'action research'. In this presentation I want to explore how these three 'strands' inter-weave or braid together.

Strand One: Reflective practice

The questions above, the title of the conference and the title of my presentation are based on the assumption that a practitioner does want to 'improve' their practice overall or at least some part of it. There are many descriptions and definitions of 'reflective practice'. I base this discussion on the work of Boud and Walker (1990) who described a three phase reflective process involving (i) recall, ie re-living an aspect of practice; (ii) re-visiting the affective or emotional aspects of the incident, event or process and then (iii) finding a way forward to change or improve that practice. Thus this approach is close linked to 'learning from experience' (Boud et al 1993) and 'turning experience into learning. (Boud et al 1985)

The key components of reflective practice assume that we are able to be 'critical' about our performance. This may involve the ability to identify what worked well, as in an appreciative approach (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987; Ludema et al 2001), as well as what was less successful and might be improved. Not everyone can positively self-critique in this way, either because they find it hard to contemplate a potential weakness or - alternatively - their low self esteem leads them to anticipate and therefore identify failure. I find ideas from Dweck's (1999) work on 'entity theory' and Bandura's (1995) exploration of self-efficacy relevant to this issue.

> *The extent to which performance attainments alter perceived efficacy will depend on people's preconceptions of their abilities, the perceived difficulty of the tasks, the amount of effort they expended, their physical or emotional state at the time, the amount of external help they received, and the situational circumstances under which they performed. (Bandura 1995 p5)*

Self-assessment is obviously a considerable challenge! Learning from experience resulting in changed practice requires a reflective approach that recalls, re-evaluates and revises performance; it also requires both honesty and a certain amount of confidence. (Boyd and Failes 1983; Mc Alpine et al 1999; Cranton and Carusette 2002). Reflection that leads to improvement involves a willingness to learn and to change. Hargreaves (1990) reminds us that teaching, and particularly reflecting on that teaching, is an emotional process.

In any analysis of reflective practice it has been suggested that there are four ways in which people link perception to performance -

> - Those who think they can - and can!
> - Those who think they can't - but can!
> - Those who think they can't - and can't!
> - Those who think they can - but can't!

While the first group might well improve their performance through reflection; the second group may improve given encouragement and support; the third group probably need more than reflection to help them improve; the final group includes those who write very convincing reflective accounts that bear little relation to their practice!

Within the UK the assumption that we all are - or should be - reflective practitioners is pervasive throughout education at all levels, including higher education and ODL, and within many of the 'people professions' such as health and social work. Developing reflective practice forms a major part of initial training as well as continuing professional development. Despite well articulated criticisms and

challenges, particularly by Michael Eraut (1985; 1995; 2000), the work of Argyris and Schon (1974); Schon (1983; 1987) and Kolb and Fry (1975; 1984) still features prominently in any discussion of reflection and underpins complete books that explore reflective practice. (Cowan 1998; Moon 1999).

All practice occurs in a social and political context, within an institutional and often national agenda. (Bengtsson 1995).

> *Most far-reaching is the idea of a completely autonomous teacher who, with the help of reflection, is able to see through all political, social, historical and other ideological factors embedded in every educational situation and from this elevated position choose freely and consciously in order to take full responsibility for his or her actions. (p25)*

Both Russell (1993) and Bleakley (1999) explore the need for the practitioner to be 'critically reflective' and to relate that reflection to the context and to the other people and agencies involved. Isolated, individual reflection may not recognise the constraints or may find that restrictions subsequently inhibit action or change.

> *Practitioner education for teaching and learning in higher education is likely to adopt wholesale what has become the dominant model across the rest of the post-compulsory sector, including medical and health education - that of 'reflective practice', following Schon's formative account of the anatomy of reflective practice. Yet the core notion of this model - reflection itself - has not been interrogated with the kind of rigour that practitioners in higher education would normally apply to their own disciplines' theoretical frameworks.* (Bleakley 1999 p315)

Confusion between 'quality assurance' (ie showing what you can do) and 'quality enhancement' (showing how you will do it better) has made some practitioners critical of 'reflection' when it has to be evidenced for recognition or accreditation. I question how writing a 'reflective account' on which judgements of performance will be made necessarily demonstrates even a competent performance let alone enhances it.

The claim that reflection improves performance raises three fundamental questions -

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- How can you evidence reflective practice that leads to improvement?

- How do you judge, describe or measure that improvement?

- Is the reflective commentary of the practitioner claiming improvement sufficient?

Probably one of the most pervasive and contentious issues around the notion of 'reflective practice' relates to questions about evidence and assessment. Although much of the literature addressing this refers to the initial training of teachers and other professionals, the principle of collecting vast amounts of reflective 'evidence' for assessment and accreditation is pervasive. (Jarvinen and Kohonen 1995; Jeff and Smart 1998). This debate extends into areas of continuing professional development and I will revisit it again when I move into the second strand of this paper.

In avoiding the reductionism of tick boxes that purport to demonstrate competence, how can we encourage a reflective approach that is effective and does enhance practice? I would suggest that a qualitative exchange between colleagues or a dialogue with our learners might be more productive. There is evidence to suggest that reflection that leads to change and to improvement is enhanced by constructive collaboration. (Aldred et al 1998; Blackwell et al 2001). This encourages and enables the practitioner to seek and receive feedback or be supportingly challenged by a colleague. Peer observation may not be appropriate in an ODL context but a shared discussion or dialogue, based on 'evidence' where possible, may enhance performance. This can be face-to-face, by phone, or electronic. The monitoring of correspondence tuition in the UK OU is one example where feedback on the performance of the tutor may help them to reflect on the way they give feedback to their students. Another approach using 'professional dialogue', developed and described by Anne Stevenson (2005) will be explored in her workshop at this conference.

Research by Jo Tait (2002) involving UK OU tutors in various individual and group situations demonstrates how a 'refractive' approach within a group that comes from sharing with - or 'bouncing off' - ideas with colleagues can enhance the quality of reflection. Again, the context of ODL may make this difficult but the issue is not just one of distance. As I explore further in the next strand, within the wider context of continuing professional development considerations of role and status in a dispersed community have to be addressed.

One final question about reflection - if you are not able to reflect does it mean you are not able to improve? The predominance of a reflective approach has obscured other ways of enhancing practice.

> The dominant model of reflective practice assumes that development is largely deliberative and linear, and that the relationship between reflection and action is transparent, with reflection-on-action leading to improvement and change. Analysis of our data led us to problematise the relationship between reflecting and acting. (Clegg et al 2002 p132)

Just as we urge each other to recognise the diversity of our students, so too we need to recognise the diversity of our colleagues. As I move on to consider issues relating to continuing professional development we need to remind ourselves that reflection - even if it is effective for some if not for all of us - may not be the only way, or indeed the best way, to develop practice. (Hatten and Smith1995; Korthagen and Wubbels 1995; Ecclestone 1996; Ferry and Ross-Gordon 1998; Ferman 2002; King 2004).

Strand Two: Professional development

There are at least two links - and even more questions - between the first strand of this paper on reflective practice and the wider context of continuing professional development. In many professions reflection is seen as a major component of CPD, either formally recorded or informally encouraged. Reflection on other components of CPD - for example taking courses or attending conferences - is sometimes required. Within the context of higher education, both Day(1993) and Clegg et al (2002) make the connection explicit.

Professional development, then, has been, is and will be more or less effective depending on a number of factors:

- *Teachers' psychological, social and career life histories which fashion their attitudes, expectations and behaviours;*
- *The levels of reflection and confrontation taken;*
- *The power and degree of external intervention upon the individual or social system;*
- *The levels and quality of provision of opportunities for professional development of appropriate kind;*
- *In-house management support and recognition through, for example, provision of time for reflection and learning support;*
- *Intrinsic (professional) social (peer and management) and academic reward (accreditation)*
- *The perceived relevance and practicality of the professional development opportunities. (Day 1993 p 92)*

Our own data suggests that when academics are exhorted to become reflective practitioners as measured by their capacity to produce a reflective practice assignment, not all choose to do so. Rather there are a range of responses: some simply fail to complete the task, others put off keeping a journal or engaging in reflection but report nonetheless that they tried out new things in action, others became enthusiastic reflective practitioners, either through an internal monologue or as journal keepers. Moreover, our data suggested that for many there were time lags between action and reflection. Our case study, therefore, explores the plurality of responses among a group of academics who were asked to become engaged in reflection. (Clegg et al 2002 p133)

Indeed so great is the assumed connection between reflective practice and other aspects of professional development that it is important to remind ourselves that there are many other kinds of 'development' addressing many different aspects of practice from many varying perspectives. However, throughout there is an assumption, not always supported by evidence, that CPD activities should always result in some form of 'development' if not improved practice.

Professional development opportunities can address a range of practice needs and, as with reflection, individuals will vary in what is effective for them, be it increased knowledge, demonstrable skills or the enhancement of practice through reflection. Indeed, it may be the merging of all three in some form of enhanced 'capability'. In their book on developing the capable practitioner, O'Reilly et al (1999) say that throughout their work they found -

- *An explicit awareness of the need to move beyond competence to a more dynamic concept of capability, embracing learning, culture and values;*
- *A concern with the education of the whole person for professional and social responsibility;*
- *A commitment to fostering critical, reflective professional practice through critical, reflective learning experience;*
- *A willingness to grapple with the intellectual challenges of conceptualizing these new models of professional education for lifelong learning;*
- *An engagement in constructive dialogue between academia, professional bodies, employers and other interest groups about the purposes and methods of professional formation, assessment and accreditation. (page 3)*

In this strand I want to consider the current debate within the UK about the requirements for continuing professional development. The term 'continuing' implies that the development occurs after some form initial 'training' and this encourages me to turn briefly to a discussion about 'competence'. Are we considering some

'threshold' skill level or 'licence to practice' followed by continuing improvement towards some notion of 'excellence' through a range of developmental activities? (Burchell 1995; Van Manen 1995; Cheetham and Chivers 1998). If so, do we also need, initially, to learn how to be reflective and then continue to improve that capacity as we improve our practice?

I do not intend to re-visit the somewhat heated exchanges around the notion of competence (Barnett 1994; Edwards and Usher 1994; Andrews et al 1996) or an earlier debate about competence in ODL (Lewis 1992). To summarise - there seems to be a strong argument that suggests that continuing professional development - or improvement - involves more than demonstrable skills or competence (Carr 1993; Becher 1996; Bathmaker 1999) Development may also be more complex than a gradual progression through a series of staged proficiencies as described in Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986, 2005), Kugel (1993) or Dunkin (1995).

However, if we accept that there should be a minimum level of competence, how do we then recognise improvement and what part does continuing professional development play in this? I take development to have two components - improvement of performance in regular or routine aspects of whatever role in ODL you play - plus the ability to cope 'professionally' with change and unfamiliar demands. So what is the role of reflection in these two arenas? Reflective practice as improvement within an established role has already been examined - but what of reflection in response to new challenges? I would argue that we may need to be more 'reflective' as an organization or institution before we focus on the relationship between reflection and improvement. Forgive me if my examples come from changes within higher education in the UK but that is the scenario I know best. I hope you can relate my exploration - and my questions - to your own circumstances.

These are some of the current debatable - and sometimes debated - questions within HE in the UK relating to both full and part time academic staff:

- Do we need to recognise and revisit the relationship between theory and practice?

- How can we raise the profile of the 'scholarship of teaching' - through research and through reflection?

- What is 'good teaching' and how do we recognise it - and is a reflective practitioner always a good teacher?

- Should professional development be required, recorded and rewarded or encouraged, individually selected and experienced?

The final question is particularly charged when over 8000 of the academic staff of the UK OU are part-time tutors offered the equivalent of just two days a year for staff development.

> *In the OU, as in other institutions, there is a tension between the economic necessity to maintain course tutors as a peripheral, flexible (and disposable) work force and the pedagogic agenda which places these same teachers at the centre of the student learning relationship.* (Tait 2002)

Encouraging individual reflection is indeed an inexpensive option!

Recognising and rewarding reflection rather than practice seems to have become the norm both when 'accrediting' new teachers and 'recognising' experienced ones. Until the 1997 Dearing Report on higher education the professional development of academic staff was a minority interest; in Australia they appear to have been at least 10 years ahead of us (Brew and Boud 1996). More recently we have seen a considerable expansion in provision and increased debate about professional development in which the role of reflection is usually accepted but rarely examined. Becher 1996; Webb 1996; Bourner and Flowers 1997 among others recognise this is a contested area.

So where does that leave us in our consideration of reflective practice? It is claimed and often assumed that reflection can improve practice but the evidence is not robust. Reflection is certainly encouraged and endorsed. So here are three statements to consider .....

- We need to find a way to focus reflection on practice that incorporates change and provides evidence of improvement.

- We need an approach that does this in a form that can be collaborative.

- We need to identify and possibly record that appropriate professional development has taken place.

Strand Three: Action Research - practitioner enquiry as professional development

Action research is an approach that has been used extensively in many educational settings, although the precise definition and description of the process is often contested.   In essence it is a process whereby a 'practitioner' (eg a teacher, in any context and at any level) and their 'learners' (eg students in any institution or setting) carry out 'research' into some aspect of their teaching or learning with a view to improving it. In terms of a research method it remains a minority approach, although those using qualitative approaches or 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss 1968, Altricter and Posch 1989) are more likely to appreciate its value. In terms of professional development, however, it retains a major role especially in teacher training. There is no agreed definition of exactly what constitutes action research; advocates of some positions use a narrow definition while others are happy to include many different approaches providing certain common principles are adhered to. Carr and Kemmis (1986) simplify the process -

> *Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out. (p162)*

Reason (2001) suggests that action research can be an individual enquiry into our own practice, an enquiry with others as part of a 'community of enquiry' or an enquiry involving larger groups in a wider community where participants may not be personally known. Collaboration in action research can be with colleagues or with participants - or both. In fact our action research activities within the UK OU took place at three levels involving the students, the tutors and our regional and central academic colleagues. As the project developed we made changes in the light of our

experience and the feedback we received. In a sense we, as the project organisers, were also participating in action research. In some cases, our regional colleagues took over the responsibility for enabling tutors and students to engage in enquiries and extend this process. Questions of power and emancipation, considerations of collaboration and of change, are crucial to any understanding of action research as part of professional development, especially with part-time staff.

There are several ways of linking action research with professional development particularly in an educational context. (Norton 2001) Action research by teachers into the learning of their students may provide information that leads to more targeted teaching and thus to enhanced performance. Action research enquiries in which both teachers and learners participate can reinforce and develop relationships both within and between the groups involved.

> *The process strengthens and deepens the learning relationship between tutor and student, with the result that the dynamics of responsibility shift and students genuinely begin to play a more active part in the learning-teaching interaction. The tutor learns to be a better facilitator, but the students too become facilitators of their own learning consciously and effectively. (George 2001, p59)*

However, an action research approach is not confined to a direct 'teaching' role and many aspects of ODL practice might find it a developmental experience. (Donche et al 2004)

Engaging in action research can contribute to a practitioner's professional knowledge and their understanding of learning theory although the links between theory and practice are complex. (Eraut 1994, 2000; Winkler 2001) Increasingly, however, links are being made between action research and the 'scholarship of teaching'. (Badley 2003)

A further component of action research is that the enquiry and the outcomes can provide a direct link to the notion of 'reflective practice', although McMahon (1999) argues that action research and reflective practice are not the same. I have already suggested that the assumption that reflection inevitably leads to enhanced practice is seriously under-theorised; it is often taken for granted that all practitioners can engage in reflection on their performance and thus improve it (Leicht and Day 2000)

Two particular issues need exploring -

(i) how can a practitioner evaluate their own performance without feedback?

(ii) how effective is reflection without 'evidence' from practice, whether provided by colleagues or students?

Collaborative action research can provide feedback and evidence, as well as the opportunity to engage in shared reflection leading to enhanced practice.

One reason for exploring an action research approach within the UK OU was our growing concern at the overuse - if not abuse - of the term 'reflective practitioner'. I had been concerned that our endless exhortation to our part-time tutors to become 'reflective practitioners' was a cheap option when it comes to their professional

development. Materials that contain pro-formas for reflection, portfolios that collate reflective materials, reflective accounts that contribute to external recognition or 'accreditation' are relatively inexpensive ways to 'evidence' performance if not to enhance it. Interestingly our full-time academic staff are not actively encouraged to do this - though some choose to do so. A second reason was that it enabled our part-time staff to take control of one aspect of their own professional development rather than being recipients of provision devised and delivered by other people The third reason that emerged strongly as the project progressed was that is gave a 'voice' to our part-time colleagues.

In 1994 Helen Lentell wrote in a paper entitled 'Why is it so hard to hear the tutor in distance education' -

> How do we begin to hear tutors' voices? I would argue that we have to start by giving tutors the right - authority and resource - to undertake action research. Clearly the majority may not be interested or have the time to become action researchers as such. But the practical theory and ideas for action derived from such research can be the basis of professional democratic dialogue at staff development meetings and disseminated in the professional journals.

> The simple answer to 'Why is it so hard to hear the tutors' is that we just do not listen. I have argued in this paper that there are a number of structural reasons why distance educators cannot hear the tutors. This institutional deafness is a major obstacle to understanding student learning and the development for quality support for learning. (p51-52)

To some extent it was actually curriculum change that led us within the OU to encourage action research as a component of continuing professional development. We were keen to explore, within an outcomes-based curriculum, how action research might lead to enhanced practice through encouraging practitioner enquiry and collective reflection. What we had not anticipated was the degree to which tutors felt that their enquiries had enhanced not just their own practice but also the learning of their students, reflected in qualitative feedback from tutors and students.

The fifty six action research reports submitted by the seventy two part-time tutors involved in the original project provide a rich picture of personal and professional development though enquiries based on -

- teaching and learning at tutorials,
- feedback on assignments,
- additional learning development opportunities for students,
- other forms of learner support.

In May 2004, the majority of the tutors who had completed action research projects came together for a two day symposium. On day one, they worked in groups determined loosely by the areas that they had chosen to explore, e.g. feedback on assignments. Each group's task was to produce a presentation to be delivered to an audience of regional academic staff, many of whom were their line managers.

During the group work, tutors discovered that what started as small scale individual and collaborative practitioner enquiries designed to develop the individual tutor's practice, also delivered unexpected insights into student learning and ways of

enhancing this. This underlined the benefits of participation in the various enquiries as common experiences were identified.

On day two of the symposium, the groups' presentations were made to the audience of fellow tutors and regional academic staff. Four presentations each celebrated this opportunity for personal and professional development. Experiences were shared collaboratively with fellow tutors as well as publicly. Presenters and audience then formed groups to discuss the issues highlighted by the action research work. The symposium provided tutors with the opportunity to make their 'voices' heard and, while regional staff came mainly to listen, an ongoing dialogue was established. Tutors were provided with the opportunity to make a major contribution to both the central production of learning materials and the learning support provided in the regions. The results of their enquiries and their reflection on the experience of action research have also contributed to ongoing debates about academic professional development within the university.

Since the initial stage of the project action research events for part-time tutors have been held in all the regions of the OU and well over 100 have now completed or are completing enquiries. A publication for OU tutors on action research has been produced and an internal web site carries copies of reports and further advice. Some of the original cohort have gone on to 'cascade' the approach in their regions and it is hoped that this approach will become a recognised part of professional development provision for those tutors who wish to participate.

All the original participants were asked to include a brief section in their report reflecting on how their enquiry and findings might affect their future practice. There was evidence of many benefits to both tutors and students including -

o a greater understanding of students' learning processes
o enhancing relationships with students and encouraging more dialogue
o the involvement of students - listening to them and encouraging better relationships
o the insights gained from interviewing students individually and directly
o becoming aware of levels of personal anxiety around assignments
o hearing students' explicit expectations helped tutors to address them
o discovering aspects of learning that tutors had not expected
o finding ways to enhance learning to take forward in the future
o realising the importance but challenge of encouraging meta-cognition
o seeing that feedback was used by their students made them feel that time spent on it was worthwhile
o positive intervention - inviting and initiating contact
o changing from a reactive to a pro-active approach
o valuing the experience as staff/professional development
o recognising professional expertise and confirming good practice
o exploring teaching was satisfying both within discipline and/or generic situations
o collaboration with colleagues worked well and added value, resulting in more students being involved
o giving an opportunity to provide feedback to regional and central staff.

But the tutors' own words were perhaps the most powerful evidence of the significance of their experience. Here are a few quotes from their reports -

> *This project had a positive impact on my correspondence tuition in a number of important ways. For a start, it made me focus more directly on the nature of the advice I was giving to students and to think about how this tied in with*

the specific learning outcomes of that particular assignment. (Level 2 Sociology tutor)

This project has made us aware that reflection doesn't 'just happen'. It involves some effort and we need to create occasions and mechanisms to gather and reflect on feedback if we are to maximise its effectiveness. It was important to hear students talk about how they use feedback in correspondence tuition. Maybe we could make more use of opportunities in tutorials and on the phone to do this.
(Level 1 Social Science tutors)

I feel that my professional development was enhanced through the opportunity to interview students directly, something that I did for the first time. The experience has, hopefully, made me less anxious about seeking out and acting upon comments of whatever nature.
(Level 2 Languages tutor)

One of the most positive outcomes this year, I felt, was that of involving students and making them aware of the issues I was interested in researching and why I thought they were important had the effect of making them more aware of, and interested in, these aspects themselves. This in turn led, in many cases, to an impression that students themselves were 'taking charge' more positively in this area of competence, and felt able to reflect on it thoughtfully at defined points in the year. (Levels 2 and 3 Arts tutor)

Perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to reflect on my teaching has allowed me to think about and develop more effective ways of teaching critical evaluation skills, from which, I hope, future groups of students will also benefit. (Level 3 Psychology tutor)

It may sound obvious but I think taking part in the project made me realise that professional development is not just about courses led by others with a more academic knowledge of teaching. It can be more personal than this, relating directly to aspects of my tutoring that I wish to explore or improve. This makes the whole issue of development more approachable. (Level 2 Maths tutor)

I make no apology for including the voices of the tutors concerned because they demonstrate clearly how their experiences led to enhanced reflection and improved practice. The wider benefits also indicate how this approach can be seen as a viable form of professional development. I want to argue that our experience of action research also helps us answer at least some of my original questions.

- What is 'reflective practice'?
- Can everyone be a reflective practitioner?
- Does reflection enhance practice? If so how?
- How do we know when practice has improved?
- How can we know it was reflection that led to, or contributed to, improvement?
- How does reflection link to 'continuing professional development'?
- How can you 'evidence' reflective practice, improvement or development?

Conclusion: through 'braiding' the strands?

Throughout this presentation I have raised a number of questions - about reflective practice, professional development and action research. I am conscious that I have not even begun to answer many of them - indeed that is your task! I hope that they provide you with ideas and challenges that relate to the theme of the conference and the sessions that follow.

I have suggested that it important to re-examine the notion of reflective practice and that this should not be done in isolation but in the context of other professional development opportunities. I have argued that some of the dangers of isolated self-reflection without evidence or feedback might be reduced through the action research process - the linking of practitioner enquiries to reflective practice - and that this might be encouraged and recognised as part of professional development provision.

I have not had time in this presentation to explore one fundamental assumption that underlies reflective practice, professional development and action research - and that is the capacity for change. In fact I will summarise this with just a final question - if we accept that reflection can indeed improve practice, then how do we best encourage ourselves and our colleagues, whether centrally located or widely dispersed, whether employed full-time or part time, to engage in this collaborative and sometimes challenging change process.

> Reflection, improvement, development, action - all imply some kind of change - and change, in itself, can prove to be yet another challenge.

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