

Exploring (co)meta-reflection as a professional development method of academic middle managers in higher education.

Anthony Thorpe and Diane Garside

University of Roehampton

d.garside@roehampton.ac.uk

a.thorpe@roehampton.ac.uk

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Background

- Explores (co)meta-reflection as a method for the professional development of academic middle managers in HE particularly those with responsibilities for courses and programmes.
- Two course leaders from different disciplines within a UK university.
- Reflective practice is generally recognised as valuable within the context of teacher development.
- We propose the idea of (co)meta-reflection as an extension of this practice, providing opportunities to jointly reflect on projects and combine perspectives in order to provide new insights.

(co)meta-reflection

We define (co)meta-reflection as

‘a joint activity involving a deeper and more meaningful form of reflection involving two or more people seeking to develop the thought and practice of all participants by moving from descriptive to analytical levels of reflection’.

Limits of generic technical solutions

General leadership theory and generic technical solutions delivered in formal development formats may not be appropriate for the specifics of a University context especially if those activities fail to acknowledge the limits of control and agency of middle leaders.

(Bryman 2007a)

The need for something more

The narrowness of leadership development in many contexts with the dominance of training through skills-building has led to calls for alternative discourses drawing on life experiences and promoting critical reflection in dialogical or 'shared' spaces.

(Griffiths 2009; Inman 2009; Mabey 2012; Wood and Su 2014).

Reflection as professional development

- Reflective practice in teacher and nurse education well established
- Inter-professional education
(Clark 2009)
- Supporting self-directed professional growth
(Korthagen 1999)
- Postgraduate and professional research projects
(Black & Plowright 2010; Bevins et al. 2011)
- Management skills development
(Boucher 2007)

'Deeper' and 'staged' reflection

- A call to move from reflective practice to something deeper - 'core reflection' or 'meta-reflection' (Korthagen & Vasalos 2005; de Freitas & Neumann 2009)
- Breaking reflection into stages to support the progress from descriptive to analytical levels of reflection (Bengtsson 1995; Samuels & Betts 2007)

(co)meta reflection

Original project reflection

Self-reflection on paper

**Purposeful conversation as
meta-reflection**

Reflection as thinking

**Reflection on conversation as
meta-reflection**

Reflection as self-understanding

**Reflection overall as meta-
reflection**

*Reflecting with its distancing
function*

Taking this forward

- Developing the (co)meta-reflection approach into something that others could practise, without being overly prescriptive.
- What might this practice look like?
- Could more than two people be involved in an exercise valuably and, if so, what might be the limits?
- Deeper levels of reflection enhance one's ability to examine issues, does that necessarily imply that developmental changes occur?
- Would it make a difference how the need for the (co)meta-reflection had developed and the intended outcomes were?
- Is (co)meta-reflection simply an outlet for professionals to share their frustrations with the constraints of the role?

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Please see paper for 0880 references