

“Reflection is the element that turns experience into learning.” -Schon, 1983

The process of self-reflection is an integral part of true learning. Our PTA students are required to self-reflect on a weekly basis when completing the Weekly Summary form. They are also required to self-reflect when completing the Self Performance Evaluation Instrument in preparation for both the midterm and final assessments.

In addition to the formal self-assessment processes just described, students need to self-reflect daily in order to maximize their learning in the clinical environment.

Reflection-On-Action

In his 1983 book, “The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in Action”, Donald Schon defined reflection-on-action as reflecting on how practice can be developed, changed or improved *after* the event has occurred. When a student completes a treatment intervention or session and then reflects back upon it later, that is “reflection-on-action.”

Reference:

Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London: Temple Smith



How to Reflect-On-Action

Step 1: The student identifies a situation to reflect upon.

Step 2: The student thinks about what the situation was like before the intervention and what it was like afterwards. If this was a positive experience, write down what made the situation effective. If the student was not happy with the experience, note what action was taken and then what action s/he would have preferred to have done.

Step 3: The student should consider the thinking process that was used to bridge the gap between the ‘before and after’. For example, what was the student thinking about during the treatment and why it wasn’t working well in that situation? What should the student have actually been thinking? At this point, the student should draw on literature or mentorship from the Clinical Instructor to help make sense of the situation.

Step 4: Lastly, the student summarizes the whole situation. What are the key points from the reflection-on-action? What would s/he do different?



Reflection-In-Action

Schon describes reflection-in-action as reflecting on the situation while changes can still be made to affect the outcome, rather than waiting until a later time to reflect on how things could be differently in the future. As most practicing clinicians know, this is a useful tool for PTs and PTAs because clinicians have to react to an event at the time it occurs. We don't always have the luxury of being able to think about what happened at a later time to make changes for the future.

Additional Questions:

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Case Load and Reflection

When students are immediately given a full case load, there is little time for reflection, questions and learning. For example, a student who treats 12 patients in an 8 hour day during the first week of the first clinical, may look on the exterior as if s/he is doing very well. However, a student who treats 4 patients in an 8 hour day during the first week of the first clinical, and has time to engage in discussions with the Clinical Instructor about treatment choices, outcomes, progressions, indications, and more, will ultimately learn more than the first student.

Encouraging Reflection

1. Ensure that the student's case load is appropriate to enable to discussions between the student and Clinical Instructor throughout the day.
2. Ask the student to share what s/he believes went well that day and what could be improved. Ask follow-up questions about how the student plans on making those improvements.
3. Set time aside each week to review the Weekly Summary form.
4. Share your self-reflection thoughts aloud so that the student begins to understand how reflection is used to help guide treatment decisions.
5. If feasible, allow the student to take notes regarding his/her self-reflection and your feedback, so that it can be reviewed throughout the clinical affiliation.