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A blue rounded rectangular graphic with a background of abstract, overlapping circular patterns. The text 'Theme 1' is written in a white, elegant script font.

Theme 1

Beginnings

This section will:

- Help you begin to understand the process of transition and what often happens when you start something new
 - Introduce you to the concept of the ‘metaphorical mirror’
 - Discuss issues of motivation, including the importance of having a personal vision
 - Emphasise the importance of investing time in reflection
 - Help you begin to examine how you learn best
-



Theme 1.1

Starting something new

When we start anything new, such as a new course or job, there are almost always challenges along the way. Change can be both exciting and daunting at the same time, even when the change is something you have been looking forward to. You are probably starting something new at the moment and so have begun a process of transition.

Various words come to mind to describe a transition and some of them are as follows:

- Exciting
- Scary
- New
- Taxing
- Different
- Emotional

You may be able to think of others. During this process of transition you may feel or experience some, or even all, of these.

A useful model of transition is put forward by Bridges (2004), who argues that all transitions start with endings and finish with new beginnings. It has three stages. Stage one, 'endings', shows that we all experience loss at the beginning of the transition process as we let go of what is behind us. Even when we dislike our current situation we experience loss at the beginning of the process, as most of us prefer what we know (even when we dislike it) to the unknown. This is followed by stage two, 'the neutral zone'; this can be an uncomfortable place where we often feel anxious and uncertain about what lies ahead. It could be described as a state of 'limbo'. But Bridges argues that we need to spend time here so that we can discover what we should do next. The final stage is 'new beginnings', as we move forward into the next phase of our lives. It is particularly interesting to note that all three stages overlap; so, towards the end of the process we can still be experiencing elements of loss, whilst feeling uncertain about the future after we have begun something new.



Try this

Describe your recent experiences of transition. Have you experienced any of Bridges' (2004) stages? If so, which ones stand out in your memory? Are there any that do not seem appropriate to your situation? There is a space below for you to use for your reflections.

The ‘metaphorical mirror’

When looking in a concise dictionary for the word ‘reflection’, you will find at least two different definitions – a mirror image and thinking. Over time you will develop through a process of thinking and looking at your practice in a ‘metaphorical mirror’. This will heighten your levels of critical evaluation and self-awareness, as you examine your knowledge, skills and attitudes. Many of us look into different types of mirror each day – here are some examples that give us insights into what reflective practice entails:

- **The bathroom mirror** – most of us get up in the morning and look in the bathroom mirror. We then make a choice: we can decide to leave things as they are or take some action to make ourselves more presentable to the outside world! Examining our practice means that we are not always happy with what we find. However, whether we take action or not always involves choice.
- **The rearview mirror** – this is a vital tool that people use every time they get into the driver’s seat. By using it we can see what is behind us and assess whether or not it is safe to move ahead. Reflective practice means looking back on experiences we have had, so that we know how to move forward.
- **Wing mirrors** – these also help us to see what is behind us when driving. Most wing mirrors are convex, which helps us to see what is just over our shoulder, or in a blind spot. Feedback from others plays a vital part in helping us to identify what might be a blind spot in our practice.
- **The magnifying mirror** – this is indispensable in situations where we need to look at our faces closely, for example when shaving or applying make-up. The close examination of an incident can mean that we can learn from it for the future.
- **The funfair mirrors** – clearly, we do not look in these regularly, and these mirrors distort what we see. Some students and practitioners always feel that what they did was fine because they did their best, whilst others tend to be very hard on themselves and always find fault with what they did. In

both cases it is likely that there is some kind of distortion. This points to the vital role of feedback from, and discussion with, others; this helps to get a more accurate picture of our practice (see Theme 4.5).

- **Shop windows** – whilst these are not mirrors per se, we can see our reflection as we walk past. This reminds us of the capacity that we all have as human beings to think about things as we are doing something else. Schön (1983) calls this ‘reflection-in-action’.

Mirrors can quickly get ‘steamed up’ and need to be wiped down regularly to make sure that we can see our reflection clearly. This reminds us that we need to be conscientious in reflecting regularly to make sure that our perspective isn’t clouded in some way.



*‘all types of mirrors ... need to be
wiped down so they continue to
fulfil their purpose.’*

(Bassot, 2016a: 17)



Theme 1.3

Motivation

When starting something new, particularly if it involves a large commitment of time, it is important to think about what motivates us and what we want to achieve. In his work *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey (2004: 95) urges us to ‘begin with the end in mind’ (Habit 2). He argues that everything is created twice – first in our minds and then in the practice of our everyday lives. He emphasises the importance of having a personal vision for the future and that focusing on the end result or outcome is one way of helping us to begin to see this more clearly. Interestingly, he also argues that if we do not have our own vision, we could live lives where the vision and priorities of others become more important than our own.

It is worth spending some time thinking about what you hope to achieve in the coming months. If you have recently embarked on a course of study, what are you hoping to gain from it? Think about the following questions:

- What are your long-term goals? Whether you have a specific career goal or not, imagine you are talking to a friend five years from now: how would you like to describe what you are doing?
- What made you choose what you are doing at the moment? What do you hope to gain from it?
- Where does your sense of achievement lie? What are you looking forward to most?
- What are the key areas where you feel you need to develop? What could hinder your development?
- How could you overcome the barriers to your development?

Whatever your responses to these questions, having a clear vision can play a vital part in maintaining your motivation and commitment to your personal and professional development.



Try this

Write some notes for each of the questions on the previous page. Which areas in particular do you need to work on to ensure your success?

Most of us live life at a fast pace and, as a result, it is easy to slip into thinking that we don't have enough time to reflect as we try to keep up with everything going on around us. Many aspects of life, study and work can lead us to think that there simply aren't enough hours in the day. Some of them are as follows and you might be able to think of more:

- Things that seem to constantly demand our instant attention – whether it's social media, emails or text messages, often we feel the need to respond immediately because people expect an instant reply.
- People who demand our attention – these could include family, partners, friends and colleagues who we don't want to let down in some way.
- Circumstances that are not always within our control – for example, our journeys in heavy traffic, on slow buses or crowded trains, or personal and family issues that arise, that we don't expect.

All of these things can leave us feeling that life is just too full, leaving no time for reflection. However, the dangers in this are that over time our stress levels rise, and we can begin to feel that life is somewhat relentless. In extreme cases, this can ultimately lead to 'burnout'.

In our busy lives, one phrase that is worth bearing in mind is 'the only time I have is the time I make' (Bassot, 2016:130). In other words, even when I feel I have no time, if something is important, I will make time for it. There are many benefits in making time to reflect, some of which are:

- We begin to regain a greater sense of control – many of us get 'bogged down' in day-to-day life. Often, we simply try to do too much, and spending some time reflecting and planning ahead can be very valuable.
- Our levels of anxiety start to fall – as we slow down, we relax more, recognise what is important to us and focus more of our attention on this.
- We are kinder to ourselves – we begin to understand more about what we can and can't achieve and are more realistic with ourselves.

- We make fewer mistakes – doing everything in a rush often means that we become forgetful, make more errors and have to do things again. Spending some time reflecting and slowing down can even save us time in the longer term.
- We have space to grow and learn – instead of rushing from one thing to the next, we can build on our strengths and work on our areas for development.

Making time to reflect can be a key factor in changing how we view ourselves, our lives and our work.



Try this

Think about how you might be able to make some time for reflection.

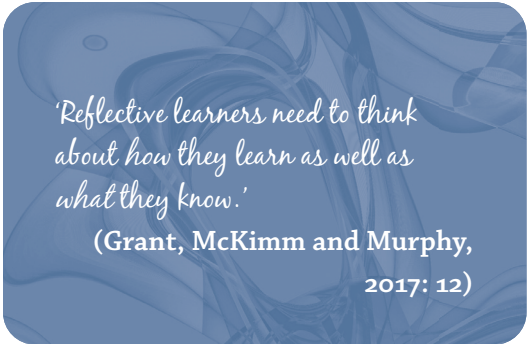
In order to be able to use the ‘metaphorical mirror’ effectively and to grow and develop to your full potential, you need a high level of self-awareness. An important part of this is to understand more about how you learn best, or your learning styles. This will help you to gain more from your course and to understand both your strengths and potential areas for development.

Much has been written on the concept of learning styles and there are numerous tests available that can help people to identify their styles. Some of these have been heavily criticised (Coffield et al., 2004), but one that remains helpful in the realm of professional development and learning is that of Honey and Mumford (2000). They carried out some extensive work with managers, and their four learning styles can help us to understand more about how we learn best. These are as follows:

- **Activists** learn best by doing and by being involved in new experiences. They are open-minded and enthusiastic about new ideas. They enjoy getting on with things and can achieve a lot in a short space of time.
- **Reflectors** are thinkers who like to stand back and look at a situation from different perspectives. They enjoy collecting data and thinking about things carefully before coming to any conclusions. They often observe others and listen to their views before offering their own.
- **Theorists** are analytical people who integrate their observations into sound theories. They think problems through in a step-by-step way. They can be perfectionists who like to fit things into a rational scheme or model. They have an ability to see things in a detached and objective way.
- **Pragmatists** are practical people who are keen to try out new ideas. They prefer concepts that can be applied easily in practice. They enjoy problem solving and decision making.

Honey and Mumford describe their learning styles as learning habits that have developed over time. It is important to understand that they are not in any way predictors of performance and that a balance of styles is often preferable to make the most of opportunities for professional development.

Most of us have a preference for more than one style and each style has its own strengths and weaknesses. Honey and Mumford describe these weaknesses as allowable and become evident when we 'overdo' our strengths. For example, an Activist might rush into a situation without much forethought, a Reflector may spend too much time thinking about it and procrastinate, a Theorist might want to do too much research before acting and a Pragmatist might not be interested if they feel they've tried it before, and it didn't work.



'Reflective learners need to think about how they learn as well as what they know.'

(Grant, McKimm and Murphy,
2017: 12)



Try this

Think about your learning styles (Honey and Mumford, 2000). Which are your preferred styles? Which ones do you feel you need to develop?

Jo's Journal

So, I've just started the course – the one I've been wanting to do for so long now and I can't quite believe I'm finally here. I remember how I felt when I got the place – euphoric! But now I'm not so sure. There's so much to learn and it all feels quite daunting. Will I be up to it? I guess time will tell. At least most other people seem to be in the same boat as me, which is reassuring. Maybe those who aren't are better at hiding it than I am!

Tutors keep talking about the need to reflect. There's so much to do that I know I need to organise myself better – never really my strong point! If my previous course is anything to go by, this year is just going to fly by. So, here goes. Time to face things head on and get a grip or all my time will just vanish in front of me.

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