



Original Research - Qualitative

## Development of a Model of Holistic Reflection to facilitate transformative learning in student midwives

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## ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received 11 November 2016

Received in revised form 22 January 2017

Accepted 15 February 2017

*Keywords:*Midwifery  
Practice  
Education  
Reflection  
Reflexivity

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Reflective practice is considered an essential aspect of personal and professional development, and critical reflection is considered the cornerstone of being an accountable and autonomous practitioner. Tertiary education should lay the foundations of lifelong learning by ensuring students develop into critically reflective and reflexive practitioners, who demonstrate self-awareness and an ability to reflect on personal values and beliefs and their impact on the wider healthcare system. This level of reflective practice is essential to effect change at both an individual and societal level. Reflection should therefore be embedded into education programs as a learning, teaching and assessment strategy.

**Aim:** The aim of this paper is to describe a structured Model of Holistic Reflection embedded within an Australian Bachelor of Midwifery Program. The paper firstly outlines the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the newly developed model. Secondly describes the six integrated and inter-dependant phases of the model.

**Discussion and conclusion:** The aim of developing the Holistic Reflective Model was to produce a sound educational tool to assist midwifery students to progressively build reflexivity and reflective practice. Furthermore, provide midwifery academics with an educational resource to facilitate development of reflective and critical thinking skills in students. The specific intention was to promote deep personal and transformative learning across an entry to practice program. This paper highlights a number of ways the model can be embedded within the curriculum to support the scaffolded development of critical reflection and reflexivity required to facilitate transformative learning. While evaluation is required the model may have transferability to other disciplines.

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## Statement of significance

## Problem or issue

Reflection is recognised as a core professional competency however a model of reflection incorporating a structured guided process specifically designed for midwives does not exist.

## What is already known

Reflection supports development of critical thinking and integration of theory and practice. When students are introduced early to a structured model of reflection they continue to demonstrate continued use of reflection.

## What this paper adds

Development of a structured Model of Holistic Reflection embedded within a transformative learning framework, promoting deep personal learning and transformation at an individual and societal level. Provides learners and educators with a tool to develop critical reflection, reflexivity and reflective practice in midwifery students.

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## 1. Introduction

Reflective practice is considered an essential aspect of personal and professional development as a midwife,<sup>1</sup> and critical reflection is considered the cornerstone of being an accountable and autonomous practitioner.<sup>2</sup> Reflection is one of the main learning approaches endorsed by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies to promote the development of knowledgeable and competent practitioners.<sup>3,4</sup> In Australia the accreditation standards for entry to practice midwifery programs require a contemporary educational philosophy underpinning program design and delivery.<sup>2</sup> This includes scaffolded learning and teaching approaches that encourage the development and application of critical thinking and reflective practice to facilitate the integration of theory and practice.<sup>2</sup> From a learner perspective reflection provides an opportunity to explore practice experience, and integrate existing knowledge with new insights and understanding. Undertaking this process helps learners avoid ritualistic or routine approaches to care as a result of unexamined knowledge and experience.<sup>5</sup>

Historically midwifery academics have drawn from models of reflection predominantly designed for nursing and/or education to guide the development of reflective practice. These models have not reflected the woman centred and holistic philosophy that underpins midwifery practice and education. Currently there is no model designed exclusively for midwives that reflects the unique holistic nature of midwifery practice.

In this paper we describe the development, design and utility of a Model of Holistic Reflection. In undertaking this task we aimed to produce a sound educational tool that would assist midwifery academics support students progressively build reflective and critical thinking skills, with the specific intention of promoting deep personal and transformative learning across the student's entry to practice program. The overarching goal was to foster reflective practitioners who exercise critical reflection and reflexivity to create change at both an individual and social level.

## 2. Conceptualising reflection

The first task undertaken by the team was an extensive review of the literature and the development of an underpinning conceptual framework. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore all the underpinning concepts, therefore the theoretical and conceptual framework has been summarised in [Appendix A](#). However the principles that guided the development of the Model of Holistic Reflection are provided in [Table 1](#). What follows in the next section is a brief summary to orientate the reader to how the team conceptualised reflection and the role it plays in supporting transformational learning.

### 2.1. Reflection: a key concept in learning

Dewey a philosopher and education reformer was among the first to identify reflection as a specialised form of thinking and a key concept in transformative learning. A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience and in his account '*How we think*' Dewey<sup>6</sup> emphasised the importance of 'learning to think well' through reflection. Dewey identified four criteria that underpin his theory including reflection as a rigorous and systematic process, occurring through interaction within community, values personal and intellectual growth of self and others, and involves meaning making from experience. Collectively these combine so that reflection becomes a purposeful consideration of the basis and consequences of our beliefs, that once examined, can lead to seeing the world in a new and/or different way.<sup>6</sup> Learning through experience lies at the heart of Dewey's notion of transformative learning.

Mezirow<sup>7</sup> further developed Dewey's notions of transformative and reflective learning arguing that to achieve change at both the personal and societal level the process needs to involve a recognition and analysis of taken-for-granted assumptions.<sup>8</sup> Also of significance is the importance placed on communication with

**Table 1**

Guiding principles and theory underpinning development of the Holistic Reflection Model.

- 
- Transformative learning<sup>6–8</sup>
  - Transformational education learning as intuitive & emotional process<sup>6,47</sup>
  - Holistic midwife practitioners art & science of practice; Holistic practice<sup>44</sup>
  - Holism,<sup>27</sup> Holistic systems theory<sup>56,57</sup>
  - Holistic paradigm – Holistic ways knowing & being<sup>29</sup>
  - Philosophy phenomenology focus lived experience & personal consciousness
  - Multiple intelligences, IQ, EQi, SQi<sup>31,58,59</sup>
  - Patterns of knowing<sup>33</sup> socio-political<sup>40</sup> unknowing,<sup>41</sup> constructed knowing<sup>32</sup>
  - Critical theory fosters emancipation,<sup>8,23,60</sup> integrates cognitive, affective & emotional domains
  - Integrate swampy lowlands professional practice as professional artistry,<sup>10</sup> developmental levels of reflection from surface to deep, technical to critical<sup>45</sup>
  - Models of reflection iterative, structured & holistic, structured reflection (MSR)<sup>44</sup>
  - Reflection surface level vs. critical reflection deep personal learning
  - Critical reflection social & political analysis transformative social action & change
  - Reflexivity practice involving both personal reflection & social critique
  - Reflective practice synthesis reflection, self-awareness & critical thinking
  - Awareness, presence, mindfulness
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