The ability to reflect on practice has become a competency demanded of every healthcare professional in recent years. It can be a daunting prospect, but this practical and accessible text guides the way, using the latest research and evidence to support the development of skills in reflection. It also provides help and advice on how to get started, how to write reflectively and how to continue to be reflective in order to develop as an effective and sensitive practitioner.

This fifth edition of *Reflective Practice in Nursing* is an indispensable guide for students and practitioners who wish to learn more about reflective practice, and also contains essential information for teachers and lecturers.

This edition features a variety of new material, including:

- Inspiring and uplifting guidance on writing reflectively
- New chapters on the issues for supervisors around clinical supervision in nursing and an experienced practitioner’s continuing journey with reflection
- An extensively updated first chapter introducing reflection in relation to the current issues that affect nursing
- Updated chapters on skills for reflection and group reflection, exploring attributes of the reflective practitioner as well as advice and tips for practitioners and educationalists
- An updated chapter on the student’s and mentor’s journey into reflection, deliberating issues that affect nurses’ and mentors’ capacities to develop and use reflection today
- Useful reflective frameworks, including an updated, adapted version of Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle, plus new exemplars to inspire you to begin your own journey with reflection

**Chris Bulman and Sue Schutz** are both Senior Lecturers within the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK.

From reviews of previous editions:

‘This excellent book provides useful guidance on the use of reflection in practice... a helpful addition to any nursing library.’

*Primary Health Care*

‘...an excellent investment in any nurses’ library portfolio.’

*Journal of Advanced Nursing*

‘An extremely welcome addition to nursing’s literature on thoughtful, knowledgeable practice.’

*Nursing Times*

‘This is an excellent practical guide to reflective practice... I would highly recommend this book to all practice teachers and students.’

*Journal of Practice Nursing*

‘This is a cracking book for anyone wanting to gain an insight into reflective practice.’

*Nursing Standard*
Reflective Practice in Nursing
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Dedication

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Welcome to the fifth edition of *Reflective Practice in Nursing*. This new edition responds to the interest in reflective practice amongst nurses and offers a motivating and accessible text about reflection. Fundamentally, this book does not assume any previous knowledge about reflection and aims to be useful to those wanting to learn about what it has to offer them. Past editions of *Reflective Practice in Nursing* have appealed to a wide variety of readers – undergraduate and postgraduate students, practitioners from a range of backgrounds and experience, plus teachers, managers, mentors and professionals from other disciplines. This past success has motivated us to produce this latest publication.

The fifth edition has much new to offer. The extensively updated first chapter introduces you to reflection in relation to the current issues that affect nursing. The chapter considers some philosophical underpinnings, plus some of the ‘dangers’ of reflection and the role reflection can play in the evidence-based practice movement. It looks at other key issues including communicating practice knowledge, empowerment and change, knowledge tensions and the relevance of reflection to nurse education and practice. The chapter on skills for reflection has also been updated and includes a valuable exploration of the attributes of the reflective practitioner.

A new chapter on writing reflectively offers some inspiring and uplifting guidance and introduces the idea of reflective writing as a method of deep, self-directed learning. An extensively updated chapter on group reflection offers plenty of advice and tips for practitioners and educationalists, as well as a lively critique of the current literature. The chapter on the student’s and mentor’s journey into reflection focuses on pre-registration students and the preparation and support of mentors. The chapter deliberates some of the contemporary issues that affect nurses’ and mentors’ capacities to develop and use reflection. The chapter illustrates how the development and use of reflection is valuable to nurses’ and mentors’ personal development and the ongoing achievement of thoughtful and excellent professional practice.
The chapter focusing on clinical supervision in nursing is another exciting new addition to this book. It draws on the experiences and knowledge of two highly experienced supervisors and considers the issues around supervision for supervisors. A new chapter on a personal exploration of reflection and clinical expertise adds to those contributed by Sue Duke to past editions of this book and offers some controversial and essential ‘food for thought’ concerning being a reflective practitioner in nursing today. The chapter on assessing and evaluating reflection remains and has been added to and updated. This is a challenging area for debate but remains one that we feel needs to be raised, if practice knowledge is to be valued in the same way as theoretical knowledge. Finally, the last chapter gives an extensively revised guide to getting started with reflection, drawing on other areas of the book and giving more tips, cautions, helpful frameworks and new examples to help you to begin your journey with reflection.

In essence, our aim is to make you curious about reflection, in a spirit that gets you thinking about the issues involved and challenges you to look at your view of the world. Essentially, we hope it will be useful to all those involved and interested in developing, using and exploring reflective practice.

Chris Bulman and Sue Schutz
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Chapter 1

An introduction to reflection

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Introduction

Every contributor to this book is motivated by an interest in reflection. Within this fifth edition, we have presented experience, research and theory in order to help you get a better grasp of reflection, especially if you are considering it for the first time. This probably means that you are a student but you could equally be a supervisor, mentor or senior nurse furthering your understanding of reflection, or a nurse teacher interested in reflective education. Whilst this is a book that clearly advocates reflection, we are also aware of the difficulties and criticisms associated with it. Thus we offer a book that will give you some help with whatever journey you are taking with reflection, but will also get you thinking critically about the issues involved.

Contemporary challenges for reflective nursing practice and education

There is no doubt that reflection continues to be of interest to nurses and to influence nursing practice and education around the world. It remains a concept that I and fellow authors are committed to. We believe that being reflective is essential for effective and person-centred professional practice. Significantly, current financial concerns and pressures are affecting health services across many countries. This has had an impact on nursing education and frontline clinical services. It has unquestionably influenced the amount of time, energy and support that nurses have to constructively consider and learn from their practice. All this has affected learning opportunities, such as provision of clinical supervision for
practitioners, time for informally reflecting with colleagues, and defending the relevance of reflective education for the development of clinical judgement, alongside the juggernaut which is evidence-based practice education. (I’ll return to this later in the chapter.) With these current challenges in mind, we believe it is even more vital to continue to write about reflection as a positive way to learn from experience – warts and all!

Explaining the concept of reflection

Starting with Aristotle

Getting to grips with an explanation of reflection is a sensible place to start. The concept of reflection is not as new as you might imagine. At the outset, I will underline the influence of the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle and his notion of practical wisdom/judgement or phronesis. Aristotle emphasised the importance of reflecting in the ‘real world’ and developing experience of it. He emphasised the requirement to pay attention to emotions and imagination in order to develop our perception of the world, so that emotion and imagination are not relegated to unwanted self-indulgent urges or corrupting influences that get in the way of ‘good’ rational thinking, but rather are a responsive and elective part of our thinking. In this way, Aristotle believed it was possible to develop real practical insight, responsiveness and understanding (Nussbaum 1990). So you can begin to see how this might be related to the development of practical knowledge, considering how we feel, as well as think, about practice, and finding a way of communicating this sort of knowledge to others.

Dewey

The educationalist and philosopher John Dewey has been extremely influential in contemporary discussion about the concept of reflection. Dewey developed his ideas on thinking and learning and focused on the concept of thinking reflectively. He defined reflection as:

‘Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.’ (Dewey 1933, p.9)

Dewey saw reflective thinking as thinking with a purpose and focused strongly on the need to test out and challenge true beliefs by applying the scientific method through deductive reasoning and experimentation. He implied that emotions and feelings are part of reflective thinking but, in contrast to Aristotle, this is not something that he expanded on. He made some important assumptions about people, emphasising our
tendencies towards quick solutions, custom and ‘mental ruts’ and the pervading influence of culture and the environment upon our thinking:

‘External monotony and internal routine are the worst enemies of wonder.’ (Dewey 1933, p.52)

Dewey also emphasised the need for thinking to be directly linked with action, demonstrating the pragmatic nature of his philosophy, and suggested that any thinking can be intellectual, thus emphasising the importance of the practical as well as the theoretical. He has influenced the work of many others, for example, Clarke and Graham (1996), who have also helpfully described the complexity of experiences, and reflection as a reasoning out process.

‘By engaging in reflection people are usually engaging in a period of thinking in order to examine often complex experiences or situations. The period of thinking (reflection) allows the individual to make sense of an experience, perhaps to liken the experience to other similar experiences and to place it in context. Faced with complex decisions, thinking it through (reflecting) allows the individual to separate out the various influencing factors and come to a reasoned decision or course of action.’ (Clarke and Graham 1996, p.26)

Schön

The philosopher Donald Schön has been a huge influence on the development of reflection in professional education. Importantly, Schön (1983, 1987) believed that practice should be central to professional curricula; consequently he saw learning by ‘doing’ becoming the core of programmes rather than an add-on, with students investing in practice and time, in order to learn from it. This implies that students need to develop a commitment to practice and the motivation to learn from it (Bulman 2004).

Schön defined reflection-on-action as:

‘… thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing in action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome. We may do so after the fact, in tranquillity, or we may pause in the midst of action (stop and think).’ (Schön 1987, p.26)

This focuses on retrospective critical thinking, to construct and reconstruct events in order to develop oneself as a practitioner and person. Significantly, his concept of reflection involves more than ‘intellectual’ thinking, since practitioners’ feelings and an acknowledgement of an interrelationship with action are also important. (Can you see a link back