



Developing the Personal Reflective Journal: a co-production approach

The Fostering Communities programme

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	03
1.1 About this guide	03
1.2 Who is this guide for?	03
1.3 About The Fostering Network	03
1.4 The Fostering Communities programme	03
1.5 About the author	04
2. The Personal Reflective Journal: a revised approach	04
2.1 An introduction to the Personal Reflective Journal	04
3. An outline of co-production methodology	05
3.1 Foster carers: disseminating and gathering feedback	06
3.2 Foster carers: response to the concept of a reflective resource	07
Figure 1 – Expectations	07
Figure 2 – Thematic analysis	07
3.3 Themes identified in foster carer responses	08
4. The Personal Reflective Journal - Draft 1	09
5. The turning point for the Personal Reflective Journal	11
6. The revised Personal Reflective Journal: the underlying principles and design	12
Figure 3 – Single and double loop learning	14
Figure 4 – Table developing in PRJ	15
6.1 Elements omitted from the PRJ	15
7. The implementation	16
8. Resources and further reading	16
9. How The Fostering Network can help	17

1. Introduction

1.1 About this guide

This paper provides the background and changes made in the design of a resource which supports foster carers to develop their skills in reflective practice. This paper provides details of the consultation process in which foster carers and fostering service providers contributed to the design, along with details of the rationale behind the key features in the final resource. Theory and research are considered and discussed, in relation to the design.

For more information, please email the programme team:

- [Maria Boffey](#) – Head of Operations for Wales
- [Charlotte Wooders](#) – Project Manager

1.2 Who is this guide for?

This paper is written for fostering service providers, including managers, supervising social workers and foster carers. It provides supporting information to accompany the [Personal Reflective Journal](#) that has been produced by The Fostering Network. Reading this paper in conjunction with the Personal Reflective Journal Guide will provide fostering services with additional information to support foster carers in their reflective practice.

1.3 About The Fostering Network

[The Fostering Network](#) is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice. We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change, so that foster care is the very best it can be.

We have been leading the fostering agenda for more than 40 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level. As a membership organisation we bring together individuals and services involved in providing foster care across the UK. We have approximately 60,000 individual members and nearly 400 organisational members, both local authorities and independent fostering providers, which cover 75 per cent of foster carers in the UK. Our views are informed by our members, as well as through research; in this way we aim to be the voice of foster care.

1.4 The Fostering Communities programme

[Fostering Communities](#) is a national programme of improvement and support led by The Fostering Network in Wales and funded by the Welsh Government from 2020-

2023. The programme supports looked after children and their foster families throughout Wales, by improving wellbeing outcomes for children and increasing the competence, confidence and motivation of the fostering workforce.

As part of this programme, we will be producing a series of briefing papers for the fostering community in Wales, which will cover a range of relevant and useful topics. Click [here](#) for a list of these resources.

1.5 About the author

Laura Hanks is a Senior Lecturer at the University of South Wales, teaching on the MSc Play Therapy (BAPT). Laura has an interest in lifelong learning and has been an Associate of The Fostering Network in Wales for the past seven years, which has involved developing numerous courses for foster carers and social workers.

As a Play and Filial Therapist (Filial therapy provides caregivers with training in basic [play therapy techniques](#) that they can use with their children). Laura's background is primarily in working therapeutically with children and families, often developing caregiver's reflective skills in relation to the therapeutic care of children. Laura is currently providing consultancy and training for Barnardo's Cymru and is a board member for Association of Child and Adolescent Mental Health ([ACAMH](#)).

Laura's qualifications include MSc Play Therapy (BAPT), MSc Play and Therapeutic Play, BSc Psychology and Education (BPS).

This project pulls together Laura's different areas of interest, bridging a gap between the training of therapeutic skills with improving outcomes for children who are care experienced. Laura's insight through extensive work with foster carers has placed their voice at the heart of this project. Laura has worked closely with The Fostering Network Wales' team to discuss the project direction at various stages to produce a sustainable resource which can be effective.

2. The Personal Reflective Journal: a revised approach

2.1 An Introduction to the Personal Reflective Journal

As part of the Fostering Communities programme, The Fostering Network in Wales is developing learning tools and resources which are co-produced with foster carers. The co-production methodology is described in more detail below (see more information about co-production in the programme [here](#)). This report describes the process involved in engaging foster carers in the evaluation and design of the Personal Reflective Journal.

This paper acknowledges the fundamental role that the reflective process plays in developing skills into practice (such as Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998; Argyris, & Schön, 1978; Driscoll, 2007 in Bassot, 2020), in increasing cognitive flexibility and autonomous learning (Orakci, 2021) and in parenting traumatised children (North, 2014).

The National Fostering Framework's (NFF) Post Approval Learning and Development Framework and the Personal Learning Record and Development Plan (PLRDP) now provide structure to the provision of training, recording and identification of training needs for foster carers in Wales. There is a move towards foster carers as autonomous learners and ensuring that they are fully involved in shaping and documenting their training journey. The introduction of the PLRDP had a significant impact on the development of the Personal Reflective Journey, the reasons for which are explained within this paper.

The Personal Reflective Journal was developed in year one of the Fostering Communities programme and was originally intended as a blended learning resource to support foster carers who had attended a training event. Now in its second year of development, it is a standalone document which appreciates its potentially diverse application for foster carers. The journal may be used by foster carers to guide their reflective process between attending training and completing their PLRDP and, most importantly, affect change in their practice. However, the journal may also be of use in a range of situational issues which foster carers face and assist them with critical analysis and planning.

In line with the [Social Services and Wellbeing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#), this paper describes the journey of co-production, creating a resource for foster carers which truly reflects the value of a 'strong voice and equal control' (Care Council For Wales, 2017 further details on The Fostering Network's response to this act, please see [Boffey and Thomas' \(2021\) Report: Co-production: Reflecting on professional learning and development for foster carers](#)).

Throughout this document, the views of foster carers are shared, along with feedback obtained at both The Fostering Network's All Wales Local Authority (LA) and Independent Fostering Provider Managers' (IFP) Forums, and The Fostering Network Training Officers' Forum. Throughout the development of the journal, key themes have emerged which are discussed below, particularly as they contributed to redesign and important features.

In this project, the views gathered from stakeholders shaped the resource and the process of the design. The final product celebrates foster carers' diversity, professionalism, skill, motivation, and empowers foster carers as autonomous learners.

3. An outline of co-production methodology

The Fostering Network recognises co-production as one of the main principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Co-production involves working with, and involving, individuals, their families, friends and carers, to make sure their care and support is the best it can be. Co-production tests the norms in the culture of organisations and their ways of working, in a manner not typically nurtured in a professionally led social care culture where foster carers often feel marginalised (Boffey & Thomas: TFN, 2021).

‘Co-production is not just a word, it’s not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find shared solutions.’ (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2015).

It is important for many reasons that this mindset is embedded in the design of a resource, such as the Personal Reflective Journal. Foster carers’ skills, depth of learning, professionalism and motivation for development can be considered the main purpose of the journal, as well as challenging the experience that these attributes are not always appreciated. Involving foster carers has reshaped the resource and, as a result, it is more likely to be utilised, more effective for use in practice and, therefore, more sustainable.

Co-production can shape a project at various stages. For the first iteration of the journal (PRJ Draft 1), the start of the co-production process was at the evaluation stage. A journal that had already been designed by The Fostering Network was provided, first to foster carers and, later, to fostering team managers. The views shared at this point took the project back through the cycle of design. Therefore, the PRJ Draft 1 and the final resource, the Personal Reflective Journal (PRJ) are drastically different.

An overview of the initial PRJ Draft 1 has been outlined below, as this is central to understanding the initial responses given by stakeholders. The subsequent sections then provide details about the opinions stakeholders shared, and the contributions to the final resource.

The further considerations given in the resource design, including exploration of reflective processes, are also outlined, including the intended purpose and use for both foster carers as individuals and within their network.

3.1 Foster carers: disseminating and gathering feedback

The PRJ Draft 1 was first introduced to foster carers in a series of three webinars in September 2021 (Supporting Sibling Relationships). These webinars were facilitated by the author on The Fostering Network in Wales’ open course programme. At the end of each webinar, the key points in the PRJ Draft 1 were shared. Foster carers present were told that their feedback was welcomed as part of the development and evaluation of the resource. Two questions about the PRJ Draft 1 were included in the webinar evaluation form provided by a link into the Zoom ‘chat’ box:

- Q: Do you think you will use the personal reflective journal?
A: Yes / No.
- Q: Why?

The PRJ Draft 1 and the guidance were provided following this, by email, with the course materials and a course evaluation link in case they did not access the link in the webinar.

This methodology is fundamental in how we interpret the feedback from foster carers. Foster carers who were happy to be contacted about the journal were invited to leave an email address for this purpose. When foster carers were asked, they

were answering questions based on their assumptions about the journal, about the concept, and their intention to use a reflective journal.

The Fostering Communities All Wales Foster Carers' Advisory Forum members who attended the webinars received more detailed questions about the format, content and general thoughts about the resource. Following a thematic analysis on all qualitative responses, all respondents who had provided their email addresses received follow-up questions sent by email.

3.2 Foster carers: response to the concept of a reflective resource

Prior to receiving the PRJ Draft 1, 40 foster carers completed the webinar evaluation form. Thirty-seven said 'Yes', they did think they were likely to use the journal, three of whom said they were already doing something like this, self-directed. Only three respondents said 'No'.

Thirty-seven respondents were foster carers from local authority fostering services, while three were carers from independent fostering providers (IFP). Of the three carers from an IFP, one confirmed they would use the journal and was party to extensive further discussions about the design of the journal.

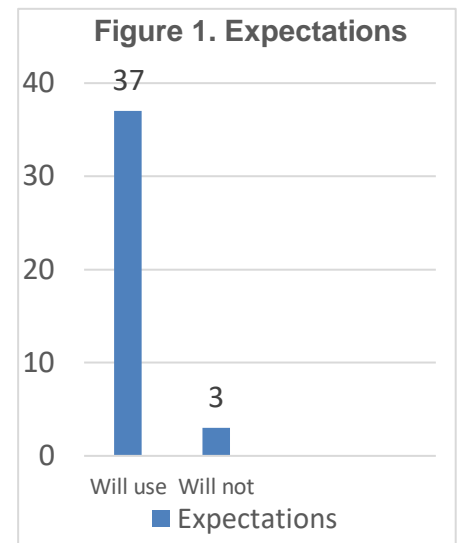


Figure 2. Thematic analysis



A thematic analysis on the responses to 'Why?' revealed three key benefits of the journal that foster carers perceived for their role (see figure 2). These benefits are interlinked to improve foster carers' skills, which result in improved experiences and outcomes for children looked after.

Additionally, important views were expressed, and are discussed below, regarding the insight they give into foster carers' experiences and perceptions of working relationships and their role within professional teams around the children they look after.

3.3 Themes identified in foster carer responses

Theme 1: Improving learning into practice

Foster carers highlighted the benefits of having time to reflect on learning opportunities in order to consider which aspects they would take on board in their care for children. One foster carer said, *'I think it is beneficial to reflect and to look at the journal regularly as you can see where you have improved, remind yourself of strategies etc'*. Another said, *'...as a carer I have attended a lot of training courses and the reflective journal will come in handy to work alongside your daily logs, to reflect on what has previously worked with your care skills and what hasn't, to either re-visit a previous approach or to try an alternative, even if it didn't work previously'*.

A primary objective of the PRJ Draft 1 was to help foster carers in reflecting on a learning opportunity in respect of their practice and for identifying additional learning needs.

Theme 2: Annual review and supervision

Foster carers acknowledged the benefits of having evidence of their reflections for their fostering service processes, such as in their annual review, or when completing their PLRDP.

One foster carer said, *'...useful to support supervision sessions and annual review. Demonstrates that you have not just attended a training session, but that you may have gained knowledge that you can put into practice OR that you feel you need more in-depth training on the subject'*. Another said, *'...it will be some physical proof of the vast amount of thought we put into our everyday actions regarding the children in our care'*.

Theme 3: Self-directed reflecting for personal gain

Foster carers were insightful about their own personal gains from reflecting. Three respondents talked about methods they already had in place, including, *'I have always used my own reflection documents and it will be good to have one that is produced for us'*.

Foster carers talked about their self-directed and self-motivated learning, such as, *'...self-learning is as important as being taught. Knowing yourself will help me give of my best and recognising when I need support or training'* and *'...it would be good to be provided with a book with lots of reflective journals in so you can keep all your reflections together and see how they impact as you learn more'*.

In terms of personal benefit one respondent said, *'I ... find it cathartic to say it out loud or write it down sometimes when no one is available to support me emotionally... it's a way of counselling myself after an issue at home so I think clearer next time or try a different approach and have a way of tracking my confidence and knowledge and assessing my own skills or learning. It might not be daily reflections as we are a busy household but at least weekly I think'*.

One foster carer talked about being a single carer, and the value that a guided tool would bring, suggesting that a guided discourse in writing would be useful when she

is otherwise unable to share her feelings, reflections on events or planning. Through this initial process, a clear need for the journal was established.

4. The Personal Reflective Journal - Draft 1

Phase 1: Initial development of the Personal Reflective Journal

The first draft of the Personal Reflective Journal (PRJ Draft 1) was written as part of year one of The Fostering Communities programme. This was an electronic document which consisted of a brief introduction, reminding foster carers that the document supplements the National Fostering Framework's Post Approval Training Framework Record of Ongoing Learning and Development and the Personal Learning Record and Development Plan (PLRDP). And that *'it is intended to be used as a private space for personal reflection, consolidation and goal setting, to support the application of learning'*. Guidance for completing the PRJ Draft 1 was also provided.

At the time of writing the PRJ Draft 1, the National Fostering Framework's Post Approval Training Framework was under development, and it was intentional that the questions were mapped to the framework. However, as the Personal Learning Record and Development Plan (PLRDP) was devised later, there are some aspects which are duplicated. This is acknowledged by The Fostering Network in Wales.

The questions to answer within the PRJ Draft 1 included:

- What were the key learning points for me?
- How will I apply this learning to my fostering practice and direct work with children?
e.g. What I will do differently, start doing or stop doing?
Individuals or groups to make contact with.
- What additional professional development activities do I need to undertake to build this learning?
e.g. Practice-based learning, professional/peer support, formal learning/education, self-directed learning.
- What have I learnt about myself as a foster carer/fostering practitioner?
- Which of the outcomes of the [All-Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care](#) has this learning helped me to achieve?
- Which of the outcomes of the Post Approval Training Framework for Foster Carers in Wales has this learning helped me to achieve?
- What information will I share with my supervising social worker and include in my Personal Learning Record and Development Plan?

The guidance included: *'Our aim is to help foster carers feel empowered and motivated, enabling them to use their own strengths and abilities to benefit themselves, their community and other people, whilst improving their own competence, confidence and motivation'*, (TFN, 2020). The guidance explained that, *'the Personal Reflective Journal is an account of your own professional development but, more essentially, it is an opportunity to reflect on your learning experience'*.

The guidance explained the benefits of reflection in terms of consolidating learning by 'making sense of' and 'thinking critically' about what was learned, and 'considering how knowledge can be applied'. The journal was identified as a tool to enable foster carers to evidence and plan their continuing professional development.

Guidance was given about the completion, storage, appropriate level of detail and the sharing or privacy of the contents. It was advised that the PRJ Draft 1 would be completed each time the foster carer has a 'learning experience', with a separate document being completed by each foster carer.

Phase 2: Feedback from foster carers after receiving PRJ Draft 1

After the resource had been shared, foster carers who were in the Fostering Communities All Wales Foster Carers' Advisory Forum gave further feedback. There was a notable difference in responses as some had had access to the PLRDP already, and some who were registered with IFP providers were not familiar with the National Fostering Framework. Two foster carers in the advisory group felt little or no change needed to occur; however, their responses were not detailed.

A key feature of this feedback was foster carers emphasising their nature as reflective and caring people. One carer said, *"I enjoy reflecting, a friend of mine calls me a 'thinking woman'. Particularly as a foster carer, don't keep on doing the same when clearly, it's not working"*.

Another foster carer commented on the need for a designated time to reflect with reference to the move to online learning and reduced travel times, resulting in the loss of time to reflect. A reflective journal would help address this issue. Interestingly, despite practice experience and knowledge of the challenges of time for foster carers, time to complete the journal was only considered a minor issue in terms of the format.

Issues with duplication and format were raised. While some felt that the format worked, one foster carer talked about the accessibility of the format and different learning styles. He explained that some foster carers within his agency would be resistant to filling in the form, but would benefit from guidance through some questions, which may even be shared at coffee mornings or in support group settings, for example. Some foster carers were already being provided with post-training questions or were familiar with the PLRDP framework questions and saw this journal as a duplication.

Foster carers' diverse experiences of supervision were commented on, including the experiences of foster carers feeling under-valued as skilled professionals. Here we were reminded to be reflexive as well as reflective, which means not only focusing on the part we play in the process, but the wider context within which this resource sits. It is fundamental that resources such as these consider the role and implication of power and power imbalances in our professional relationships (Bassot, 2015). This is considered further in the revision, below.

To extend the feedback beyond the foster carer advisory group, foster carers who had provided their email address received follow-up emails about their experiences of completing the journal. Response to these emails was poor, as engaging in this way often can be. However, the responses provided did match those views of the advisory group.

Phase 3: Gathering feedback from fostering services

In December 2021, both the Local Authority (LA) Fostering Managers' Forum and the Independent Fostering Provider (IFP) Managers' Forum were attended. The PRJ Draft 1 and the guidance were shared, along with the views expressed by foster carers.

Managers in the Local Authority (LA) Fostering Managers' Forum shared concerns about duplication with the PLRDP, which is currently being embedded in local authority services. Benefits were acknowledged for the potential of a resource to support supervising social workers in their discussions with foster carers around their training experiences. Concerns around providing an additional mandatory document for foster carers to be routinely used was also shared due to the heavy paperwork demands that foster carers already have. Managers identified 'reflective skills' as a potential training need.

At the time of sharing the journal in the Independent Fostering Provider (IFP) Managers' Forum, the PLRDP was not yet in active use owing to a phased introduction. Therefore, the issue of duplication was not a focal point. However, feedback was given around the potential benefits for improving and supporting reflective discussions around supervision and for enhancing foster carers' reflective skills. Managers discussed the use for evidencing ongoing reflections throughout a review period and the flexible format was discussed.

5. The turning point for the Personal Reflective Journal

In January 2022, in a meeting with programme staff from The Fostering Network in Wales, the views of the stakeholders on the PRJ Draft 1, in light of the PLRDP, were discussed. The decision was made to rewrite a reflective resource making stakeholders' views more central to the design. This resource would be created by Laura Hanks, the author of this paper. The revised resource will be termed the Personal Reflective Journal (PRJ) hereon.

It was agreed that the resource would need to be a standalone document which does not duplicate other resources but provides a tool to support and develop reflective skills, both in relation to learning experiences but also situational challenges. The autonomy and motivation of foster carers to engage in reflective processes needed to be acknowledged, and additional pressures reduced by ensuring the final resource was self-directed rather than mandatory. Later in January 2022, a consultation was held with The Fostering Network's Training Officers' Forum. The journey to creating the revised PRJ was shared. Training officers valued the role that a revised PRJ played in 'filling the gap',

documenting the reflective process that takes place between training and completing the PLRDP. Questions were raised about how foster carers and supervising social workers would navigate a comprehensive resource when, for some foster carers, reflective skills are in their infancy. Training officers expressed an interest in developing the skills of supervising social workers in their communications with foster carers around training and situational challenges.

Foster carers were consulted again at this stage. Acknowledging the redesign, two foster carers shared ideas for the extended application and the features which are described in more detail in the following sections.

6. The revised Personal Reflective Journal: the underlying principles and design

The use of reflective practice in social care is not a new construct, being introduced into the Diploma in Social Work in 1983 (CCETSW, in Ixer 2016). Wilson's (2013) research found that social workers engaging in reflective journaling had better degree classification at qualifying, which was attributed to this process. Reflection in social care can be held in high regard, however, it is often unsupported in practice owing to the challenging and competing work pressures.

It is unsurprising that a resource to support and develop foster carers' reflective practice was received positively *in principle* by all stakeholders, providing it is fit for purpose. Resources of this kind are relatively new in therapeutic care (North, 2014) and have not been widely promoted in mainstream foster care until very recently. The National Fostering Framework's Post Approval Framework is now being adopted across both local authority and IFP fostering services, which is a positive step towards the recognition for foster carers' ongoing training and motivation to develop new skills. To be fit for purpose, the PRJ must be user friendly, facilitate reflection and fit within the current systems and processes involved in foster care provision.

In designing this resource, time had to be taken to be both reflective and reflexive. Reflecting on the process so far, considering the views shared by stakeholders and evaluating the PRJ Draft 1, has led to substantial change. Being reflexive includes being mindful of our context and how this can impact practice (Bassot, 2015), including how within professional relationships there are often experiences of power imbalances. While not categorised in a key theme, some foster carers commented on their working relationships with their supervising social workers within the context of discussions around training. Our practice wisdom tells us that foster carers do not feel regarded as professionals and their skill and insight into the care of children is undervalued (Boffey & Thomas: TFN, 2021). Some foster carers acknowledged this in their feedback. It is essential that this resource was produced with views of foster carers taking primary importance, recognising foster carers as autonomous and motivated learners.

Service managers supported the design as 'self-directed', especially given the fact that documentation processes already in place take considerable time to complete.

Ixer (2016) provides a caution over the effectiveness of reflective process when it is assessed, mandatory and not led by the individual.

Service managers also considered the demands on time. This tool needs to be accessible for foster carers to complete in a timely manner which suits them. Bassot (2020) provides a commentary about time, recognising that when personal benefits are found, 'time will be made'. Despite some fleeting comments about time available, foster carers commented about the need to make time for themselves.

Recognition for diverse learning styles and potentially different environments foster carers choose for their reflections also needs consideration. Only three of the 40 foster carers consulted did not think they would complete a reflective journal when presented with a Microsoft Word document. While Ixer (2013) challenges written reflections and claims that language can limit expression of thought, Bassot (2020) argues that writing slows down our reflective process in beneficial ways. Taking the time to consider the way in which a matter needs to be written allows us to develop a sense of clarity and prioritisation of the details.

A key theme in foster carer responses to the principle of a reflective journal was the use for evidencing the process, and for use in supervision and review. Written reflections will, therefore, be promoted, but the format of this will be decided by the individual. 'Pen to paper' is encouraged in the guide, however, this is inclusive of carers' own notebooks, creating mind maps or typing onto an example document provided. Basic 'tips for reflective writing' are also provided (based on guidance from Bassot, 2020) along with an example of a reflective record.

For those who are new to reflective processing, consciously engaging in reflecting can itself be anxiety provoking so is not always a positive and constructive experience (Wilson, 2013). It is essential that the journal and accompanying guide offers an easy-to-follow introduction to reflection which can be developed over time into an intuitive process.

Bager-Charleson (2020, p7) points out, 'Reflective practice is likely to disappoint if we seek a neat and tidy structure for it'. This tool must be carefully constructed to allow carers to use it at will, in a way which works for them. Fortunately, some foster carers have provided detailed accounts of the elements they would like included in the design of this resource. Examples include situational reflection, such as offering a guided process when they receive a phone call from the placement officer about a potential match. Where possible, these features have been included.

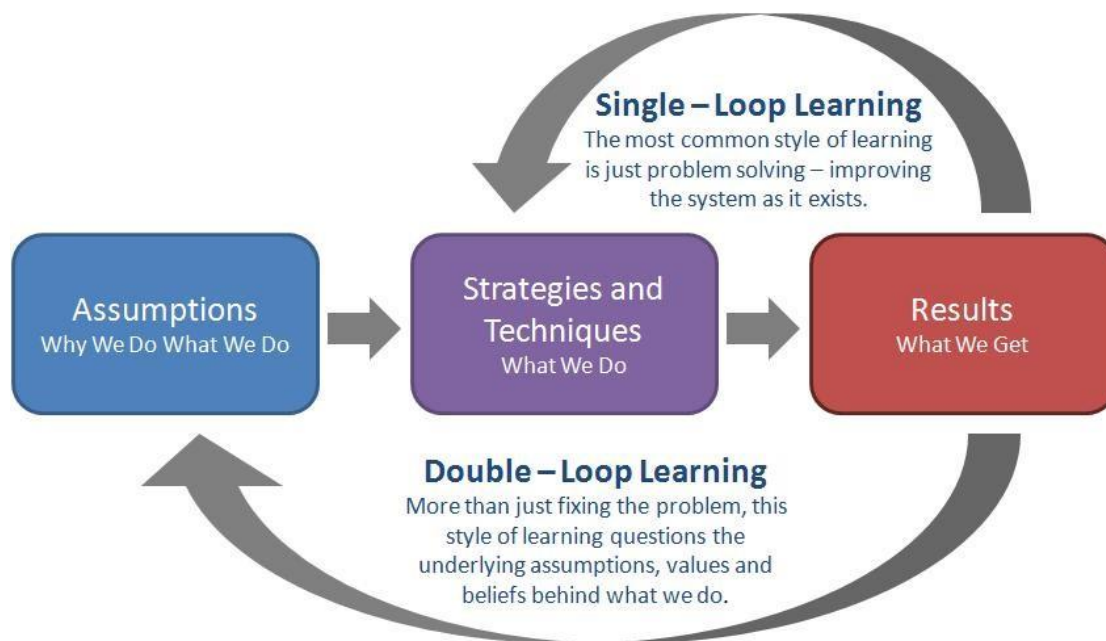
Several models of reflection have been considered including Bassot's Integrated Reflective Cycle (2013, in Bassot, 2020), Gibbs' emotions into reflections (2013, 1988, in Bager-Charleson, 2020) and Kolb's transformation of experience (1984, in Bager-Charleson, 2020). These models were rejected for this resource owing to the multidimensional components and the challenges in application to the range of situations that foster carers want to use the journal for.

The Personal Reflective Journal features basic introductory information about reflecting. Reflection is defined in the resource as '*a natural process where our brain*

works to organise our experiences (and relationships) to help us make sense, tidy up and be ready for the next experience' (as in North, 2014).

Double loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978, Schön, 1983,2016) is explained with the widely known analogy of a thermostat. In single loop learning, thermostats learn to respond to the changes in temperature by switching on and off. Exploring why a thermostat is set at a particular temperature to evaluate effectiveness is double loop learning.

Figure 3. Single and double loop learning



Argyris & Schön, (1978, Schön, 1983, 2016).
Image widely available: Source unknown:
Image included in PRJ

This wider and encompassing loop is put to work in Driscoll's 'What? So what? Now what?' model (2007, in Bassot, 2020). This model was chosen because it is simple to follow but may allow foster carers to develop and generate their own prompts through practice.

Figure 4. Table developed in PRJ

Step 1: What?	Describe	Describe the situation/learning/event.
Step 2: So, what?	Reflect	Looking at perspectives, assumptions, asking why.
Step 3: Now what?	Action	Thinking forward, what we will do with this information.

Research shows that individuals who engage in reflective practice have increased cognitive flexibility and increased learner autonomy (Orakci, 2021). The focus of the PRJ is increasing the likeliness of foster carers to engage with reflective practice, which will in turn help them generate new ways of thinking and increase their confidence to do so. A key objective of the PRJ is to support consolidation of learning and help turn learning into practice. The three-step approach provides a basic structure for guiding reflections with a planning/action component.

In response to foster carers' requests that the guide supports reflections on situational experiences, the following reflection topics are included:

- training events
- self-directed learning
- discussions and meetings
- a one-off interaction
- a recurring challenge
- general reflecting
- a call about a new placement.

The three-step structure is applied with a series of questions relating directly to each topic. The guide explains that questions may be skipped, providing the individual considers why it was asked.

6.1 Elements omitted from the PRJ

It is necessary at this stage to consider elements which are purposefully omitted from the PRJ. Reflection is often a natural process initiated when an individual experiences a sense of discomfort (Schön, 1983, 2016; Bassot, 2015) and it is necessary to hold this in mind when planning for the process. While practitioners in anxiety provoking situations can benefit from reflecting to avoid becoming restrictive and ritualised (Ruch, 2000), a great deal of sensitivity is required.

Yip (2006) provides a 'note of caution'. The human brain strives towards internal and external harmony (Schön, 1983, 2016), and through the process of reflection we consider both internal and external factors. When internal and external factors may be at odds, individuals may become uncomfortable with their role. Prior life

experiences may also be triggered through increased self-awareness and may not always be resolved through reflection.

For these reasons, emotive and challenging scenarios that foster carers may experience have been muted and generalised. However, it is possible that a carer may use this journal to self-direct reflections at extremely challenging hurdles as they develop self-reflection skills.

Each three-step guided reflection concludes with the question, '*What will I take to supervision?*' to reinforce the connection between the reflective process and the support systems in place for both situational challenges and a continual process of training and development.

7. The implementation

The next step is to disseminate the PRJ to foster carers throughout Wales and to embed it in fostering services' systems and cultures (Wilson, 2013). Given the promising responses from foster carers, service managers and training officers, it is hoped that the resource will be highly used once shared. An effective step in the implementation of this resource will be for all supervising social workers to familiarise themselves with the content of the guide. The model of reflecting is relatively intuitive once an individual has been made aware of the structure.

One foster carer did feel that for accessibility, some foster carers would require a printed copy while others may choose to view theirs digitally.

It is recommended that The Fostering Network may wish to obtain the feedback of stakeholders once this resource has been disseminated and consider gathering information about the uptake, implementation and impact of this resource.

You can access the revised (2022) Personal Reflective Journal [here](#).

The Draft 1 Personal Reflective Journal (2021) and guidance is also still available for reference [here](#).

8. Resources and further reading

Argyris, C. & Schon, D. (1978). *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.

Bager-Charleson, S. (2020). *Reflective Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy*, SAGE Publications, London. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central.

Bassot, B. (2020). *The Reflective Journal*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central.

Bassot, B. (2015). *The Reflective Practice Guide: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Critical Reflection*, London: Taylor & Francis Group. ISBN: 978-1-138-78431-4.

Boffey, M. and Thomas, A. (2021) Co-production: Reflecting on professional learning and development for foster carers. The Fostering Network. Available [here](#).

Ferry, N. M. and Ross-Gordon, J. M. (1998) 'An inquiry into Schon's epistemology of practice: Exploring links between experience and..', *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(2), p. 98. doi: 10.1177/074171369804800205.

Orakci, Ş. (2021). Exploring the relationships between cognitive flexibility, learner autonomy, and reflective thinking. *Thinking Skills and Creativity* (41) 1-13.

Ruch, G. (2000) Self and social work: Towards an integrated model of learning, *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 14 (2), 99 - 112. (doi:10.1080/02650530020020500).

Schön, D.A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Routledge. (2016: Republished).

North, J. (2014). *Mindful therapeutic care for children: A guide to reflective practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers ISBN: 978-1-84905-446-1.

Wilson, G (2013). Evidencing Reflective Practice in Social Work Education: Theoretical Uncertainties and Practical Challenges. *British Journal of Social Work* 43, 154-172 doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcr170.

Yip, K. (2006). Self-reflection in Reflective Practice: A Note of Caution. *British Journal of Social Work* 36, 777–788 doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch323.

9. How The Fostering Network can help

The Fostering Network offers advice, information and support. Our expertise and knowledge are always up-to-date and available through our vital member helplines, publications, training and consultancy.

Advice

[Fosterline Wales](#) provides a free help and advice line, providing information about all aspects of foster care, including tax and national insurance, benefits, allowances and insurance. It also offers confidential support, including to those who face an allegation, or who may be concerned about a care plan, or who are unclear about the legislation and guidance related to foster care in Wales.

Call us on 0800 316 7664 from 9.30am - 12.30pm Monday to Friday.

If you call outside this time, please leave a message and someone will call you back as soon as possible.

You can email us at fosterlinewales@fostering.net

Support and resources

Our website is an essential source of information, while our online community brings together foster carers for peer support and advice. Members can log in to share their experience and get advice from other foster carers. Our online community is a safe and secure area to discuss foster care matters.

thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

Training and consultancy

Wherever you are in your fostering career, as a foster carer, social worker or manager, The Fostering Network has a range of [training](#) designed to meet your development needs. For more information, please email wales@fostering.net for more information.

Contact details

If you would like more information please contact:

maria.boffey@fostering.net

The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9HB.
Telephone: 029 2044 0940
Email: wales@fostering.net
Website: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

Get in touch

To find out more about our work in Wales, please contact:

The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9HB

Telephone: 029 2044 0940
Email: wales@fostering.net
Website: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk



/thefosteringnetwork



@fosteringnet



@thefosteringnetwork

© The Fostering Network 2022

Fostering Network Registered in England and Wales as a limited company no. 1507277. Registered charity no. 280852. VAT Registration no. 231 6335 90 Registered office 87 Blackfriars Road London SE1 8HA