

# Can the power of reflection improve our future direction



Royal Tropical Institute

Fernando Maldonado on how the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam is integrating reflective practices into its under- and post-graduate courses

How do I feel while doing my work? Do I have the required skills and knowledge to perform my duties correctly? How do I react when my professional responsibilities challenge my personal point of view and my values? How do I see myself growing both as a person as well as a health professional? These are all valid and very important questions that may pass through our heads at some point in time. For sure everybody has moments of reflection. However, and due to the frantic pace of our 'modern' way of living, most of these moments may be brief and remain at subconscious level. As a result, reflective thoughts will end up vanishing quickly from our heads leaving few or no traces behind once they are gone.

Although it may not be evident at first sight, having a more structured and conscious process of reflection comes along with some benefits. Spending some time to think about ourselves, our ideas, and plans may spare us from 'kicking the same stone again and again'. It may as well provide us with an overview of where we are placed and may suggest us the route to follow to reach our desired goals.

The adult education environment is one of the settings where self-reflection is particularly useful. In the case of adult education, self-reflection is not only a tool for boosting personal and professional development within the classroom walls but also an instrument that enables and fosters continuous development after the training period is finished. Adult learners who 'acquire' the habit of reflecting and who practise it on a regular basis are expected to maintain a critical and constructive point of view about themselves and their surroundings throughout their life.

Self-reflection has been used for a while in undergraduate programmes forming health professionals all over the world. In spite of this, few post-graduate programmes targeting health professionals include it as a key component of their curricula. The Royal Tropical

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Institute in Amsterdam (KIT) has since 2011 started to integrate this element in the curricula of its different post-graduate programmes. Currently, the participants of the International Course on Health Development (MPH), the Netherlands course on Tropical Medicine, and the Master in International Health (MIH) learn how to use this tool to become better reflective practitioners. A series of structured activities, including introductory and wrap-up sessions, a personal portfolio to keep track of milestones and one-to-one interviews with staff invite students to enhance their reflective skills. KIT's efforts on introducing self-reflection are not limited to its training programmes in Amsterdam. Thanks to the collaboration with Ifakara Health Institute in Tanzania, local staff and hopefully soon also trainees will benefit from this approach that improves the learning process, and the learning about oneself.

KIT is convinced about the potential of self-reflection as key element of the process to form responsible health professionals that are aware of themselves and their environment, and who are able to use this information as essential feedback while pursuing personal and professional development.

When was the last time you spent a few minutes to reflect about yourself?