12 Success Reflection

A group of teachers from a variety of backgrounds take part in a training course. They have already had an initial meeting together. They have enjoyed the fact that everyone can bring in different experiences from their own position within the institute. Many situations are extremely recognisable. Whether the subject at hand is nursing or technical ICT, encounters with students bring up the same questions. It is now time to take things to a more personal level. The participants want to know more about each other. 'What do you actually do during your lessons?'

12.1 Description and use

A positive experience serves as the basis for Success Reflection. By using a positive experience as the starting point, people become enthusiastic and involved, and reflection starts to take place. Successful experiences touch upon possible solutions for other situations. They generate energy and contribute to a positive self-image.

By working in a structured fashion from a positive experience, a process of awareness arises. The reflection tool then prompts the participants to experiment with new approaches. Knowledge can be shared in a group. Cooperative learning can considerably expand insight and the ability to delve into a theme or area of study. Success Reflection is meant to stimulate larger groups to reflect on practical experience.

Figure 12.1 depicts success reflection.

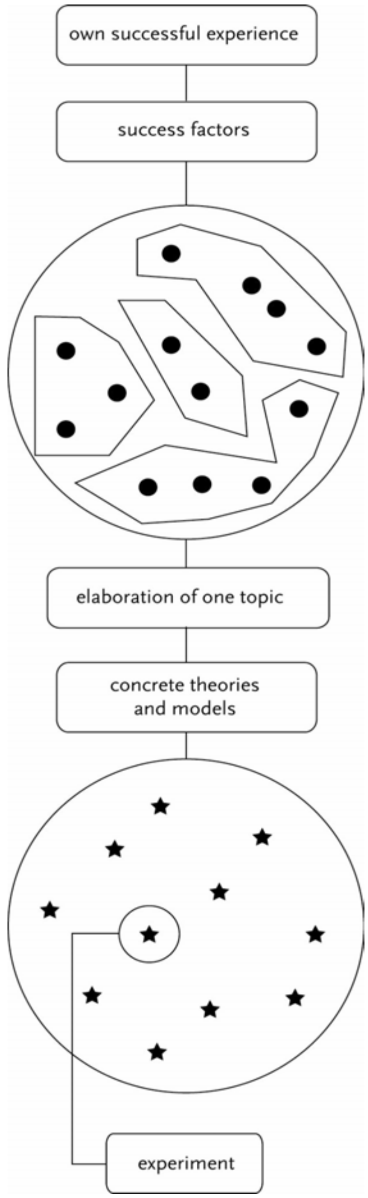


Figure 12.1

12.2 Input

The facilitator, Michael, asks the participants to think back to a successful lesson, “A lesson to which you can think back with pleasure and satisfaction — a real success. What was your most successful lesson, and why?” The participants think for a while and then tell each other animatedly about their most successful lesson. In the meantime, they make notes on ‘Post-Its’ of all the factors that contributed to that success. The working atmosphere is active. Everyone is busy talking. There is much laughing and waving of hands by people emphasising their examples while others listen actively and ask further about the aspects that contributed to the success. After fifteen minutes, the participants hang their Post-Its on a flip chart which Michael has hung up. At the top, he has written the initial question: ‘What was your most successful lesson, and why?’

Steps 1 and 2

In contrast to most other reflection tools, Success Reflection does not involve one single reflector. Rather, it involves the successful experiences of all those present. As facilitator, you can suggest a theme beforehand on which the group can reflect. The group can also jointly determine the theme as a first step. Following this, the participants will be asked to name a successful experience within this theme. This should involve a successful experience from their professional practice.

The facilitator gets the reflection process going by telling the group to pair up and share a successful experience within a specific theme. The pairs take it in turns to share their successful experiences, during which time one speaks and the other listens actively and asks questions. When both have shared their success stories, the facilitator tells the participants to make an inventory of the factors that contributed to that success. In their opinion, what made the event a success?

Good practice
Experience shows that most people find it complicated to list what went well and why. Examining a successful experience generates a positive process and contributes to a positive self-image. Looking together at what went well offers the participants new opportunities to experiment and stimulates them to translate their experiences into new skills.

12.3 Implementation

Michael reads all the Post-Its aloud. Following some discussion, the participants decide to group the notes into four categories — ‘Method’, ‘Teacher’, ‘Process’, and ‘Other’. After ordering the notes into the various categories, they choose to continue with the category, ‘Method’. This includes other remarks such as ‘good structure’ and ‘appealing’. Based on this, the participants formulate the question, ‘How do I create a well-structured, appealing lesson for my students?’ Michael asks the participants for examples of the theories and models they have applied to create a well-structured, appealing lesson.

Continuing in the same pairs, the participants tell each other how they work. One tells something about how she has applied the work of David Kolb. Another explains that he thought up a successful way of playing a game based on the rose of Leary. A third tells about how, ever since he took a course on coaching, he likes to make use of Hersey and Blanchard’s situational leadership model. All models, tips, and successes are recorded on the flip chart and are explained briefly.

Step 3

After collecting the success factors, the next step involves the application of structure. Together with the facilitator, the participants can cluster any success factors that relate to each other. Clustering can occur either by creating a ‘mind map’ or by writing down the factors on Post-Its and sticking these next to each other. By creating a structure, an overview arises with new points of view and connections between approaches. Once this is in place, the participants can choose a theme within which they wish to continue.

Good practice

If the group is large, there will be many different factors. Don’t panic if you have the feeling there’s a mass of unrelated ideas scattered everywhere on the chart. By reading the factors aloud and putting them to the participants, you can often manage to cluster the ideas easily. Consider clustering according to differences and similarities, or according to person, method and process.

Step 4

By zooming in on a subject, you can create a link to a theory that suits the subject matter. The right question can help in the process of zooming in on the subject. For instance, which theory or model are you using for this subject? Another way to do this is to ask participants to seek out theories or models from the Internet or in the literature that they deem suitable. These can then be considered in a subsequent meeting.

The theory remains concrete; this can consist of a theoretical model or rule of thumb. In either case, it involves giving practical substance to the theory. By re-examining the success experiences — though, this time, with the help of a theoretical model — participants gain insight into their actions and choices of actions become greater. By linking their successful practice to the theory, participants get a clear indication of what they can do at what time.

Good practice
To study the experience in greater depth, it is sufficient to work on one subject per meeting. Other subjects can be kept for another time.

12.4 Conclusion

Practical examples engender enthusiasm among the participants and stimulate them to try out different possibilities. They can conclude the meeting by having everyone say what kind of experiments they will be carrying out.

Step 5

This step concludes with the participants drawing links with various courses of action. For this reason, the facilitator asks the participants to discuss in pairs:
– What are you already doing?
– What else could you do?
– What kind of experiments are you going to do?

When reflecting on success together with students, the facilitator can ask the participants to record their findings and intentions and include them in their portfolios. By completing the tool for reflection in this way, the participants take real possession of their theory by showing how they will continue to use their findings. Following this, they can formulate new, positive experiences and work them out further. Including them in a portfolio or a personal development plan gives each participant their own, theoretically well-founded story.

12.5 Preconditions and variation

– Success Reflection lends itself well to groups of between eight and twenty participants.
– Success Reflection takes between sixty and ninety minutes.
– The reflection exercise requires a flip chart, Post-Its, and one marker pen per pair.

One variation in the reflection process involves the facilitator asking the group to think about success experiences concerning the chosen theme. Following that, he can choose one person to share their success story with the whole group. The facilitator then asks questions, goes into the example in depth and shows how active listening and specific questions help explore the story in greater depth. Thereafter, the facilitator instructs the participants to pair up, share experiences and take stock of which factors contributed to their success. Each pair makes their own list. They can also write the factors on separate Post-Its.

12.6 Source

Success Reflection is based on the VESIt model developed by Fred Korthagen, Ko Melief and Anke Tigchelaar. However, Success Reflection differs from VESIt in the following ways:
– Success Reflection works from the premise of success experiences.
– The various phases of the VESIt model are summed up in four steps. (VESIt is a Dutch acronym for Prestructuring, Experience-sharing, Applying Structure to the Experience, Zooming In, and Theory Application.) A fifth step has been added — to make an explicit connection to actions by having students include their findings and assumptions in a portfolio.

Korthagen, F., K. Melief & A. Tigchelaar (2002) *De didactiek van praktijkrelevant opleiden* ('The pedagogy of a practice-relevant education'). This brochure was published by the National Programme Management Educational Partnership of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences and can be found on the EPS website www.educatiefpartnerschap.nl/lero/publicaties. Success reflection is also based on the theory of Appreciative Inquiry developed by David Cooperrider, see http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu.

Plan for Success Reflection (version 2.0)

This tool is based on the VESIt model developed by Fred Korthagen, Ko Melief and Anke Tigchelaar as well as David Cooperrider's Appreciative Inquiry method.

Success Reflection stimulates a consciousness-raising process through working in a structured manner from one's own positive experiences.

INPUT

Step 1 The facilitator nominates a theme which concerns the participants. In pairs the participants tell each other recent 'success' stories related to this theme; one person talks while the other listens actively and poses questions. These should be open, non-directive questions which help to clarify the 'success' story, such as 'who, what, where, when and how' questions.

Step 2 The facilitator asks the participants what factors contributed to the success: what makes this experience a success? The participants go into the experience in further detail in pairs. The pairs write down factors which lead to success on a post-it (one factor per post-it).

IMPLEMENTATION

Step 3 Together with the participants, the facilitator groups together the factors which are related. This can be carried out, for example, by sticking the post-its in a *mind map* or by asking the participants about the similarities and differences between the factors. This structuring process produces an overview of new perspectives or points of recognition.

Step 4 The participants choose a topic with the help of the facilitator. By zooming in on this topic a link can be made to a theory which suits the topic. To ensure that participants really go deeper into the experiences, it is advisable to address only one subject per session. If more than one interesting topic emerges, the facilitator can choose to deal with this in the next session(s).

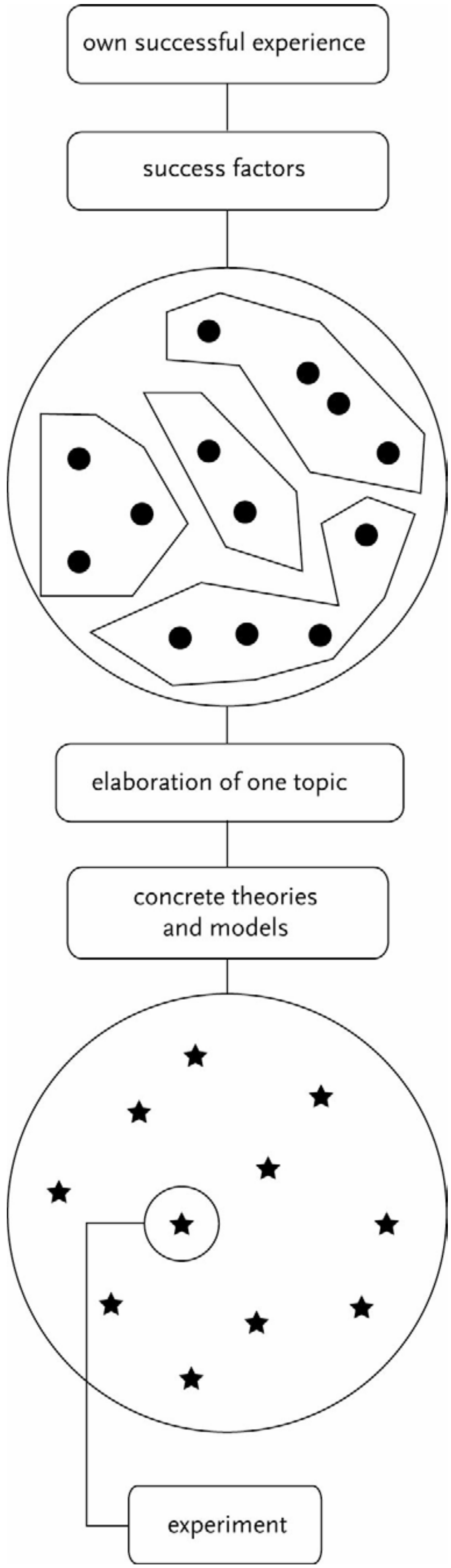
The suitable theory is concrete and intended, above all, for formulating rules of thumb for ways of acting. Because it is an 'open' model, it is not known in advance exactly which theories will be important. The facilitator will thus need to be prepared for a variety of theoretical notions, linked to the starting theme and expectations in regard to the participants' experiences.

CONCLUSION

Step 5 Success Reflection is concluded by asking the participants to make a link to various possibilities for action. This provides participants with concrete guidelines on what can be done, and when. The facilitator asks the participants to discuss the following questions in their original pairs:

- What do you already do?
- What could you do differently?
- What are you going to experiment with?

The participants can report back in the next session.


own successful experience
success factors
elaboration of one topic
concrete theories
and models
experiment