Naomi: Welcome to the Place Change Makers podcast series, brought to you by Sport England and our place partners. In this series, we dive into the world of place based approaches to tackle physical inactivity. Join us as we explore the skills, mindsets, and and behaviours all crucial for driving change across local systems.

Discover practical examples, challenges faced and the transformative experiences of those at the heart of this work. Tune in for insights and inspiration for your own journey towards positive change. You can also watch these episodes and access the transcripts by visiting www.sportengland.org/placepartnerships

Kath Lord-Green: Hello and welcome, I'm your host Kath Lord-Green, and today's episode is Reflection in Action, the power of reflective practice.

Today, we talk about the significance of reflective practice in driving systemic change, skills, mindsets, and behaviours that are important. We'll hear stories of reflection and its impact on continuous improvement. Today's guests are Emily, Katy, and Jennifer, and I'll let them introduce themselves.

Emily Brady-Young: Hi everybody, my name is Emily Brady-Young.

I'm currently based and working around the Pennine Lancashire area, so that's East Lancashire, Burnley, Blackburn, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale areas in the Northwest. And my role is research lead. However, what I do day to day doesn’t really reflect that. I don’t find myself doing a lot of research.

I have a phenomenal team of researchers across different organisations and a comms team. And together we're trying to communicate the learning and the science in ways that's meaningful to our area. So we're one of the local delivery pilots (now place partners) from Sport England and we have an objective to look at whole systems approaches to physical activity in a place.

My background is academia in a way. I've worked through education, I work from a social psychological point of view and I focus on children and young people. I've also got a background in international development, again, mostly around access to education, but really I started out as a PE teacher and a dance teacher, and my heart is still in that movement there.

Jen (JU:MP): Hi everyone. I'm Jen Hall. I'm a senior research fellow at Born in Bradford and I'm part of the evaluation team for the Bradford Local Delivery Pilot (now Place Partnership). So I've been part of this work pretty much from the beginning since 2019 and I lead the process evaluation side of our work.
But similar to Emily really it is a research and academic role, but it’s very much research practice partnership, and it isn’t your traditional research role. So in terms of my background, I did an undergraduate degree in sports science and then a PhD in physical activity and health from more of a sociological point of view.

I’ve got a lot of experience in developing and evaluating complex interventions. So alongside the work that I do with the Place Partnership, I lead our centre for qualitative research within Bradford. I’m also involved in a range of different qualitative research projects related to health and health inequalities.

**Katy Thompson:** Hi everyone, I’m Katy Thompson and I’ve recently just started with the Active Partnership National Organisation as the Programme Manager for the new National Sport Welfare Officer Network. Previous to that, I was within an active partnership with County Durham Sport, leading their police based work, which is how I got involved in this podcast.

My background is actually policing. So I was with Northumbria Police for 11 years as a police officer, but I’ve always been really passionate about the power of sport and physical activity, and hence the move to the sector, using physical activity to keep myself physically fit for my frontline duties, and also to look after my wellbeing.

Within all of these roles I’ve engaged in reflective practice personally, but more recently, in my role at County Durham Sport and the Active Partnership National Organization, I also encourage and support others to do so through advocating for learning and reflective practice, and also facilitating spaces and implementing the cultures to support reflective practice as a way of working.

**Kath Lord-Green:** What does reflective practice mean to you and how and why is it important in the context of the roles that you do?

**Katy Thompson:** Yeah, I mean for me, reflective practice has been important throughout my career in helping to unpick why something either did or didn’t work or happen as intended, what I want to do more of and dial up more, what I’ll never do again, and what needs to happen or change going forward.

I started my reflective practice journey as a fresh-faced probationer in the police in the context of the national decision making model which is a framework used by the police to guide decision making in challenging and high pressured environments. And I sort of used that model to think about my actions and my
decision making both individually, but with the team or my partner, just to help us to improve my decision making in those challenging environments and be able to apply that learning to future incidents.

And that’s sort of where it started. But what is a little bit strange is I didn’t view it as reflective practice at the time. It was just part of a process. And it was just the way we worked. And I still live by the National Decision Making Model now because it’s just part of how I work. But I had to change how I engaged in reflective practice in line with the organization’s approach. And that was through using things like reflection logs and monthly team sharing meetings around success and reflection. And what that meant was I had to sort of be more intentional with it.

It was a different way of working, but still with the same outcome. It was still to be able to improve and look at why something worked and why something didn’t work. What made that easier for me was that the organisation valued learning and reflection. So they supported us to take that time and dedicate the time to it. And through the place based work we used ripple effect mapping as an approach and that was really good to help reflect both individually and with the network of partners.

**Emily Brady-Young:** Katie, can I ask a question? I’m reflecting on this as well. It feels like we’ve all introduced ourselves and we’ve all talked about how we got to where we are, but there’s definitely that question of ‘What did you start with?’ ‘How did you start reflecting your early career?’ Even if you didn’t realise it was your early career that actually when you go back to it, it’s the stuff that sticks that you draw on.

Like I look back to my early career as an educator and I can’t help but go back to ‘how did I help children reflect and identify their learning?’ ‘How am I evaluating what worked and what I do next?’ And those small scale things in your profession. I feel like I’m now going back to that more and more because maybe it’s in me, and I don’t know if that makes it translate and therefore you can jump into different sectors or different places because you’re grounded in this process of stop, think, decide.

**Katy Thompson:** Yeah, it was an automatic way of working. I don’t know if you know what the national decision making model is, but it starts with, gather information and intelligence, and then it moves on to assess threat and risk and develop a working strategy, consider powers and policies, identify your tactical actions and your contingencies, and then take action and review what happened.
And that is where it sort of intersects with that reflective practice as what you would do in a post incident statement, is you would reflect on every part of that model and why you took that action and why you made the decision at each stage. And I suppose as a program manager, that is why this model is still effective for me because those are all those stages that I still go through within a program.

**Emily Brady-Young:** Yeah. Because it was essential in policing. It’s essential in education. It’s essential in health. Like those are essential reflections. If you don’t reflect and change and think and review, things can occur, good or bad. It doesn’t feel so essential in our work, which is why we have to talk about it and unearth some of that stuff, I guess.

**Katy Thompson:** I think that comes back to why we have to make it more intentional. Because we might not have that initial capacity to do it, but you’ve got to have that value.

And I suppose the value for it came from those early days for me, but as I say, I had to change how I engaged in it because different sectors do it differently.

**Jen (JU:MP):** Yeah, definitely. And I think thinking about the sport and the physical activity sector, that value is absolutely there isn’t it.

If you don’t engage in reflective practice and if you’re continuing to deliver programs and work in certain ways that aren’t as effective as they could be, or aren’t as effective as something else, then there’s a real risk to life and to life satisfaction and wellbeing and health.

So, it’s getting across that importance that it might not be that immediate life threatening situation but actually it is massive. It’s just that longer term effect rather than that immediate effect. And I think for me with the background more in academia it is kind of built in that you engage in that reflective practice.

And I was quite shocked when I first got exposure to parts of the sports sector here in some areas it was very kind of do, do, do. Like very, very fast paced. And I kind of had to adjust to that a little bit, but then also try and influence that and change that.

I think there was really a perception of if we’re not doing, doing, doing, then, we’re not being productive or, we’re not doing our job right. So it’s changing that perception about what good is, I suppose.
Emily Brady-Young: Yeah. And I don’t know if you ever feel this Jen, but like as a research lead, I’m always knocking on doors going, just pause for a minute, pause the work. That sort of review and debrief stuff really isn’t in some of this work.

We work across different organisations and it’s there in moments and elements, but it’s really hard to hold the space to get that. And you feel like you’re constantly chipping, chipping at people’s door, but I’d probably say it’s worth it. It’s worth doing it. And most of the time people appreciate the nudges because when they get to that reflective space, there’s so much appreciation for it.

But I feel better for it as well. Like I go through a mode of reflection when I’ve created a space for other, people to reflect. And also it depends on the people, right? They’ve probably got things in their background. We’ve talked about our background that is reflected. Like I do a lot of yoga. And I know that it probably really informs me making some stillness.

And, I know that other people have stuff that they do. So where are they reflecting? And that’s what it means to me is when it connects back to, yes the work and the people on the present thing I’m working on, but also who am I out of work and how does that play out for me?

Where does that reflect and how do I use time and space? That’s something that comes up for a lot. Our teams are always saying, when we talk about what enables success, time and space, time and space, time and space. And then quite often we all trip up over that and don’t make the time and space.

So one of the practices we use is thought partner practice. So pairing people up with others that they don’t normally work with. And in fact, there’s a stage before that. The whole approaches that we do to connecting across and within organisations and collaboration, we use something called creative engagement.

And it’s, adult active learning, but everything starts with something a little bit personal and a little bit related to the objective of the session, the workshops, the meeting, or whatever. And when you do something a little bit personal, people get to know each other as humans, not as the goals. So then we introduced this thought partnership.

We called it learning pods and just ask for bi weekly calls or walk and talks. And a little bit of a guide, mostly around a kind of appreciative inquiry model. To, to look back and look ahead, exactly that decision making, like, you know, what’s a dream,
what’s a possibility what’s plausible and to do that in partners and then go back to their teams and then go back to larger groups and talk about it.

Now, those thought partners have been successful in varying degrees, but now our work’s got so big it’s falling off a little bit. I do know some people have continued it because just making it about getting to know people has been the way in, I think. But there is a little nudge that has to happen and I hope and think within some of the teams that we work across some people have owned it and then made it ripple, made it happen within their teams as well.

**Jen (JU:MP):** I think similar to what Katy was saying before about how, when you move to County Durham Sport and you kind of had to adjust because it is reflective practice, but actually it’s packaged a different way.

And I suppose that making it real for people, it’s just going back to, what does it mean to those different people? Because everybody has engaged in reflective practice in their lives. Whether that’s work, personal life, or whatever it is, we all stop and think about things, reflect on things and it’s about whether or not that then translates into learning and into adapting your practice.

So for me, I think it’s asking people, what are your experiences of this? Maybe not calling it reflective practice, but referring to it in lots of different ways. So that people do relate to it and go, Oh yeah of course, I’ve done X, Y, Z and, kind of developing a process that will work for everybody and that will be familiar for everybody.

So it doesn’t feel as though you’re kind of doing something new.

**Katy Thompson:** A really good example of where we’ve facilitated a space for partners and what Jen is talking about worked really well is the Ripple Effect Map and Workshop. Specifically one particular partner, a wellbeing service who engaged in the Ripple Effect Map and Workshops and those collaborative discussions really enabled them to use that time and space to reflect on their existing practices and ways of working.

And as a direct response to being part of it, changed their service delivery in that place based area. But what is really key about that is that it was the individual who engaged in that workshop that really had that open mindset and was willing to think critically about their work and processes to enable change and open and willing to change.
And it just shows that it’s not always the organisation that sits around the table, but actually the individual that engages in the work that is key to seeing change happen.

**Emily Brady–Young:** Yeah. And I think we have to call out ripple effect mapping as being a tool we’ve all engaged in. It’s just this fantastic development and evaluation tool now that has sort of stemmed from the academic world, but is finding a lot of use in our work.

You’ve probably all got examples where you’ve used ripple effect mapping to lots of different degrees. We’ve got people working in leisure trusts and councils and voluntary sector and faith sectors.

They’ve got stories and scripts from 10, 15 years ago of what worked and didn’t work in their place. And we need that to look forward as well.

Why are we replaying that script? And that comes out so nicely. And we’re getting onto the sort of research end of it with this, but I think when you report your learning, it doesn’t feel like it can be used. And that sort of visual stuff you create with ripple effect mapping is about use.

Again, I’m back to use, accessibility and digestibility, all that visual stuff, whatever we can do visual. We’ve done giant door size posters recently. I asked for door size. And we’ve hung them around the offices and they’re, linked to the 10 conditions and ways of working that have come out of our learning and others learning from our national evaluation partner.

And we just got little cards, where people can write up what’s happened and stick it to it. And there’s little codes like what area they’re in, but really just, success, change, or impact.

It’s not formal, it’s not measured, but the writing of it then starts to map it in a way onto these giant doors, and then we log it and throw it in a spreadsheet but the process of sitting down together and talking about that at some of the away days and the team days we do has led to these huge posters all around the office.

And I’m just linking it back to ripple effect mapping because it’s just colorful and it’s just visual. I’m going to pull all the way back to when I was an educator, like just make really complex things look good, feel good, sound good and colourful, like we’re engaging young people again, because adults like that too.
Kath Lord-Green: Absolutely. I think that ripple effect mapping is something that everyone listening is going to be rushing out to go and do because whatever organisation you are in, you can certainly be using that. And it sounds amazing from your experience. What would you say the critical factors are to consider when creating the environment or the conditions to support and enable this?

Jen (JU:MP): I think we’ve already started touching on quite a few of these things, haven’t we? In terms of being open to what different staff members want and need and how we can support that. But I think something that I wanted to pick up on specifically was how you can support that amongst wider partners that you’re working with and how the organisation can support that.

And within our context as a local delivery pilot funded by Sport England. We do commission quite a lot of work so we have that kind of commissioner relationship with people that we’re working with, and I think traditionally providers, whether it’s sport and physical activity providers, or social marketing for example, there’s a tendency because of a history and how that relationship works to kind of report back on what’s going well and their successes and the impacts in terms of numbers and things.

So we’ve tried to work really hard to try and shift that and build that really supportive culture around learning. So that actually, we want the social marketing company that we’ve commissioned, or the sports providers that we’ve commissioned, to tell us about failure or where things have not worked so well and why and how that’s important for other people and for thinking about how we can do things differently in future. So for us, it’s been really trying to get that message across that it’s more valuable to know about how things haven’t worked than to just know that something has worked. Early on we’d get a report in saying a hundred people came to this and that will be the learning. And for me, that’s not really learning. It’s just a number, but we don’t know how they were there, why they were there. So actually when we get a learning back that says, nobody came to this, but this is the reflection that we’ve done.

These are the people that we’ve spoken to, and this is why they didn’t come. For us, that’s better than something being positive, but us not knowing why and not being able to unpick that. So yeah, it’s trying to build that culture where people feel safe, I suppose. And secure to talk about where things might not have gone as well as they would have wanted or hoped.
And knowing that not going to affect that relationship, whether it’s a commissioner relationship or if it’s within your internal team, that’s not going to affect, your own personal development or your role within that team. So it’s building that really supportive culture for me.

**Katy Thompson:** It’s about us modelling those behaviours. I encourage people to feel able to be open and honest and see when things go well and don’t go well. Do you know what I mean? We all make mistakes. We all face challenges. And I suppose for me, I’m quite happy to sort of put my hand up and when things don’t go well and say, Oh, I need to change my approach there.

And sort of proactively ask for feedback. And sometimes that can actually give other people confidence to go ah well Katy said this is not working so actually let’s have a chat about it. You know what I mean? And it can encourage other people to do the same. But where we found it to be more of a struggle is where the funding and the commissioning is linked to the work and funders are maybe looking for those KPIs and successes.

So you’ve got to be mindful of that, but I do think modelling those behaviours and going back to what we’ve just been talking about, that creating those purposeful spaces and facilitating those conversations that help and support partners to reflect and those thought provoking questions. And again, it just goes back to that ripple effect map and all of those things, doesn’t it?

**Emily Brady-Young:** We’ve started investing in sort of strength based approaches. We actually use the Clifton Strengths model and many of us have been through that sort of program so that we invest with partners with it as well. Like what’s great about your place? What’s brilliant about you? What really works? Like let’s invest in that more and let’s deploy the strengths more.

And that really helps us step into the culture change and how those conversations across partners change. Like, Hey, I’m really good at adapting. Hey, I’m really good at strategy. Hey, I’m really good at winning others over. Hey, I’m really good at analysing. And then we can see as a collective that we’ve got a way forward across organisations and within organisations. And we found that to be a great door opener as well to make people feel that we’re not here to tell you what’s wrong with you and your place.

We’re here to collectively say what’s great. And so taking a strength based approach. And I’m referencing Clifton Strengths in particular as it has been
another way in. And again, some places maybe it’s not shifted too much, but we’re finding big gains with that approach too.

**Jen (JU:MP):** And that’s a lot of parallels with the asset based community development, the ABCD approach as well.

And I think there are people listening that come from that more sport development or community development kind of world. You know, we’re all listening. We’re taking that approach with the communities that we’re working with. So have some compassion for yourself as well and for your team.

And you know, it’s possible to take that similar approach to your own practice, as well as when working with others.

**Kath Lord-Green:** We spoke about critical factors to consider. We spoke about practical approaches. You’ve actually touched on a lot of them. Is there any other practical approaches that your organization, or you could take to support others and other organisations to commit to reflective practice.

**Emily Brady-Young:** Yeah. And so here’s the thing. This reflective practice can feel really like it’s on you, off you go and do it. But actually what we’ve really learned is you have to hold the strings to this. There is an element of coordination needed for now. I don’t think in our organizations we’re working across, there’s a readiness to take this on independently.

There may be a few individuals, so we’ve got a bit of a cycle. So there’s weekly sort of home based points where we have a sort of central office. And anybody can drop into that at any time, but we try and encourage that everybody’s in on a Monday coordination team and other teams on a Tuesday.

So we just try and create that space for people to drop into. To be honest, when I go in sometimes I get no work done. We’re doing so much chatting and reflecting and connecting. And that’s a really good thing, but I have to be careful with what I’m trying to achieve because I’m doing so much catching up and reflecting.

It’s really powerful and informal. We’ve got a monthly breakfast club. So, that’s kind of formalised and every time there might be a different theme or a different sharing, but it’s completely structured around reflective practice models. It’s not labelled as that, and there are croissants and coffee and oranges and stuff as well.
We then have a quarterly away day. We may not go away, but we call it away day because it’s about remove yourself from your task list and we’ll create something. And so we facilitate that. Sometimes it’s in line with some research output we have to do. It becomes a participatory workshop.

Sometimes it’s something else. Sometimes it’s completely unique. So that’s the quarterly. And then Six monthly everybody has to submit a report. Now, it’s not called that, it’s called a ‘share in the learning’ and it’s about identifying a significant change, impact or success.

So I know by setting a deadline, there’s a process of reflection, engagement on any evidence, and to get to submitting something. And that gives me a lot of content to think about what I’m reporting on alongside our other reflection.

So we have put stuff in place, timetabled, and I’ll call it holding space because nobody has to do it. But my key to that is there is a stewardship to this right now. I don’t think it would continue if we didn’t hold that space because I’ve seen examples like our thought partners fall apart where I stopped structuring it.

**Jen (JU:MP):** Yeah, I agree. I mean, I think our process in Bradford, obviously there’s differences, but it’s really similar in terms of having those informal things and then there’s more structured processes. I just wanted to pick up, Emily, when you said careful that I, that I’m not doing any work.

But actually, re framing it as this is work and this is improving the work and what we’re doing.

**Emily Brady-Young:** That’s the trap we all fall into. And I’m like, Oh God, have I got the work done? Of course I did. That is the work. That is the rich work. But then the pressure where people stop showing up is, I didn’t get my list done and actually lists are really dangerous aren’t they Jen?

**Katy Thompson:** Do you know what though that’s when that comes back with need and actually senior level buy in as well as operational buy in because you need both to put value on and commit to the learning and reflection and see the benefits at both an individual and organizational level. One without the other isn’t as effective.

**Jen (JU:MP):** Yeah, definitely. And just to pick back up on what Emily was talking about in terms of would it happen without that kind of facilitation. And I think
something that we do within Bradford, which is really similar to your away days, is we have these R & I meetings, which is Research and Implementation meeting.

And that’s our formal space for that reflection. And we follow a learning cycle model of thinking about what, so what, now what in relation to different research findings. And I actually think that that would potentially continue without that direct facilitation.

But at the moment, what I think wouldn’t is that step after that of, okay, we’ve reflected now, how do we embed that into our day to day and into our practices? And that’s where I and some other members of the team play a significant kind of facilitation role in bringing that back to agendas of different meetings and, saying, these are the things that we discussed. What do we actually want to take forward?

How are we embedding that into the different ways that we’re working? Whose name are we putting towards these different items and things? So definitely don’t have the answers for that in terms of how you sustainably embed that without this input, or, maybe we just need to recognize that you do need that. It is that important and you need that role and that person to facilitate that on an ongoing basis.

Kath Lord-Green: It sounds like you’ve all learned so much. What would your advice be to anyone else seeking support to enable them to build capacity around reflective practice, if we haven’t already touched on it?

Katy Thompson: I would say persevere. If it doesn’t come easy first time, don’t worry. Keep going with it as I keep banging on about. Be intentional with it and find a way that works for you.

Even something really simple like the reflection log that I mentioned, which is literally just four thought provoking questions. What went well, what didn’t go well. What did you learn? And from what you learn, what should we do going forward in the future? And I suppose by reflecting on what went well and what didn’t go so well, those successes, however small, will keep you motivated while you are working through those areas of development.

And I suppose it’s what you do as a result of your reflection that makes it meaningful. It’s how you apply that in your future work.

Jen (JU:MP): I completely agree with all of that. I think for me from an organisational point of view, trying to embed it into existing practices and existing
structures. It’s always easier, I think, for something to get off the ground if it’s not something entirely new. You know, we’re not adding a new meeting into the diary or we’re not adding in something completely different to what you’re already doing. So for example, if your team has a team meeting once a week, can you add in 10 minutes onto the agenda for reflective practice.

And then it might be that once you start to develop that it doesn’t stay in that meeting and it can happen in other areas, but it’s how can you build it into things that you’re already doing to start to develop that practice. But then I think linked to that everybody is different and you know yourselves best and you know what will work for you.

So if for one person, they might like the idea of having a calendar and putting it in their calendar for every Friday or whatever it might be. And so that alert to pop up and for them to do it. Whereas other people know that they’ll just ignore that calendar invite and it’ll annoy them because they’re in the middle of doing something else.

So it’s understanding your own working practices, which you’re the expert of, and fitting it in, in a way that works for you.

**Emily Brady-Young:** My key takeaways are: whatever your goals or objectives are, start small and have a commitment device, and maybe that’s to one person. Pick one thought partner who maybe has something to do with your work or not at all and, create a few questions that you commit to each other to do. So just one thought partner, maybe bi weekly and then see where it takes you.

**Naomi:** Thanks for joining us for this episode of the Place Changemakers podcast series. Remember though, the conversation doesn’t have to end here.

Check out our other episodes and take a look at our online resources by visiting www.sportengland.org/placepartnerships Why don’t you come and join our community of learning, where we’ll keep you connected to the latest thinking and learning being surfaced by places. So until next time, stay curious and keep exploring.