UCD TEACHING AND LEARNING/ RESOURCES

Teaching Toolkit

Gathering Feedback 2

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Self-Reflection

There is value in partaking in reflection at a personal/private level (Brockbank & McGill, 2000). While there's a base level of reflection that tends to follow the delivery of a class, but in general our opinions of teaching and learning don't change unless something arises that forces us to question our methods or techniques (Eraut, 1994). Engaging in self-reflection should involve a move from this semi-conscious, informal approach to a more explicit, intentional approach. This enables the teacher to learn from and potentially enhance their practice (and their awareness of the reflection process) and can be applied to any aspect of teaching.

[**NB**: Discussion of evaluation in this section refers to formative evaluation]

Methods of Self-Reflection

1. Basic Process of Personal reflection

The basic model proposed by Brockbank & McGill (2000) is a relatively simplistic approach. The individual thinks about what they're going to do in their lecture, about the information they'd like to convey, the methods they intend to use, the level of engagement and so on, in advance of the delivery of the class. Shortly after the class the individual takes time to reflect on how well they achieved their intended goals, which aspects require further attention, and how these can be achieved etc. This may also incorporate student reactions or comments, their own past experiences of delivering the same class, or any potentially confounding variables.

As with all forms of reflection this approach is couched in constructivism (Moon, 2004), and requires the individual to re-evaluate their own personal view of education, teaching and learning. While this is an important first step, and may lead to increased confidence or sense of pride, awareness alone doesn't necessarily result in an improvement of the situation (Moon, 2004). One suggestion to build on this initial stage through the use of guided reflection.
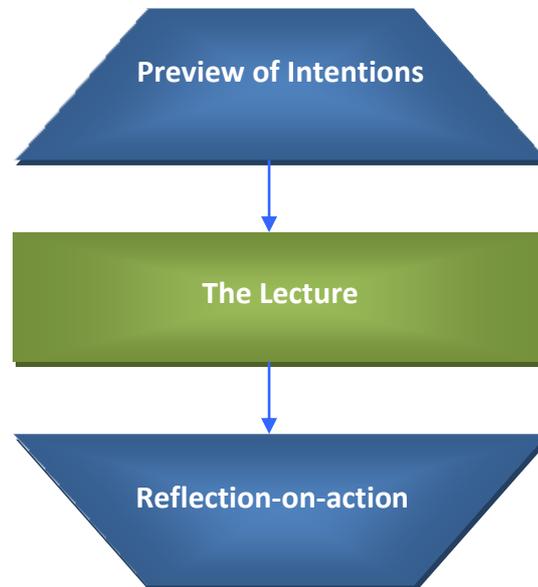
Figure 1: Personal Reflection

2. Guided reflection

Progressing reflection from a simple 'mental exercise' Johns (1994) developed the concept of guided reflection. This entails engaging with a series of questions that help you to explore and reconsider your motivation or rationale for your actions. These can be designed by a third party or by the individual themselves and serve as a guide through the reflection process. Questions can include: What was I trying to achieve? Why did I do [*activity*] as I did? What were the consequences of [*an activity*] etc.
This can be designed to form a reflective diary, with one side of the page consisting of the descriptive material and the other consisting of the reflection and exploration (Moon, 2004).

3. Action Research

Reflective practice can be more formally encouraged and directed as action research (Kember & Kelly, 1993). Action research involves systematically changing your teaching using 'on the ground' evidence that suggests the changes you make are in the right direction and enhancing student learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007). The target of action research is the teacher, not the change that's being implemented.

> Learning new techniques for teaching is like the fish that provides a meal today; reflective practice is the net that provides meals for the rest of your life.
>
> (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p.43)

In action research the term 'reflection' is considered misleading. Transformative reflection (Brockbank & McGill, 2000) suggests that teaching is being altered as a result of the reflection and is deemed more accurate. Engaging in action research to improve teaching practice however involves a more explicit theory of teaching (Biggs & Tang, 2007). While many teachers have an implicit theory of teaching there is a need for a more consciously worked-out theory that generates answers to teaching problems. This helps to rephrases the unhelpful and not very useful 'there's something wrong with my teaching' to the more manageable and approachable 'students are only regurgitating what I give to them in class'. The latter also brings it back to the teaching, not the students, and allows the problem to be framed in a way that that can be addressed by the teacher.

To help with transforming your teaching Biggs & Tang (2007) suggest the following framework for reflecting on a critical incident:

Reflecting on a critical teaching/assessment incident

Reflect on a critical incident in your teaching – a situation in which you thought that your teaching or assessment had not gone quite how you would have liked it to have gone. Consider the following questions:

a. What was the problem? What went wrong? What was the evidence for the problem?

b. What was (were) the cause(s) of the problem?

c. How did you deal with the problem then?

d. How did your solution to the problem relate to your theory of teaching and learning?

Limitations of self-reflection

As well as enlarging our repertoire of ideas on practice etc, reflection may also be limiting it since, as Habermas (1974) suggested, this process required a level of detachment and objectivity which is at threat from self-deception. Brockbank & McGill (2000) discuss the example where a lecturer may be conscious of a particular fear but may still resist it. An example is the fear that failing to rigidly adhere to pre-determined time markers will result in running out of time and failing to get everything covered.

Material is therefore covered in a rush with no time for engagement with the students. Subsequent reflection will still endorse the concern of not covering enough material, which justifies the lack of engagement but may conceal a deeper problem, such as the apprehension of relinquishing control in the session.

Time management therefore is both the excuse and the disguise, and the real issue is never truly addressed. This means that there may be much that you keep from you self (consciously or otherwise), and some of the 'black box' about your own process may remain unknown and unexplored.

Other lectures have also queried the benefit of a procedure that undermines lecturers' knowledge, authority, and ability and promotes anxiety and insecurity (Hayes, Marshall, & Turner, 2007).