UCD TEACHING AND LEARNING/ RESOURCES

Tutor, Demonstrator & Coordinator Development

Reflective Practice: a Practical Guide

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What is Reflective Practice?

Look at the three definitions of reflective practice for a couple of minutes. Then, with a neighbour, answer the questions on the following page.

Definition 1

In reflective practice, practitioners engage in a continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand their own actions and the reactions they prompt in themselves and in learners (Brookfield, 1995; Thiel, 1999). The goal is not necessarily to address a specific problem or question defined at the outset, as in practitioner research, but to observe and refine practice in general on an ongoing basis

(Cunningham, 2001)

Definition 2

Reflective practice… is the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, reasoning, emotions, values and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individuals and communities being served.

(Epstein and Hundert, 2002)

Definition 3

"[practitioners] frame the problem of the situation, they determine the features to which they will attend, the order they will attempt to impose on the situation, the directions in which they will try to change it. In this process, they identify both the ends to be sought and the means to be employed."

(Schön, 1983)

In pairs, think about the following questions:

Which definition do you prefer and why? (Be prepared to share your rationale!)
Based on these definitions, which elements do you think are most important for reflection?
Is there something missing that you think should be included in a definition of reflection?

Why Reflect on Teaching?

Reflecting on teaching is frequently cited as a fundamental practice for personal and professional development (Biggs, 2003; Boud et al., 1985; Lyons, 2002), though for many it remains a slightly woolly, abstract concept with no real practical benefits. In an already cramped schedule, why take the time to reflect on practice?

Teaching changes from one context to the next. The skills you develop in one tutorial session may be markedly different from those required in another, or while demonstrating, or in a lecturing environment.

Because there is no 'teaching template' competent academics continually reflect on their teaching, critically analysing and evaluating their own practices, taking the opportunity to learn from each teaching session.

Reflection is process in which lecturers become aware, or are supported to become aware, of the theory and motives behind their own teaching, to reflect on this, and to take some deliberate steps to develop (Gibbs, 1996).

This reflective process is triggered by the acknowledgement that there is some aspect of their teaching that requires special attention. Eurat (2002) has likened this to pulling the practitioner out of 'auto-pilot' and causing them to focus on some part of their teaching. This realisation may be caused by an unexpected experience or outcome or just a sense that something isn't quite right.

For example if, during a tutorial, students do not respond or engage well, and any questions are met with a wall of uncomfortable silence, the tutor is aware there is a problem somewhere. One option is to attribute blame for this lack of interaction to the students and continue as planned. Another option is to reflect on the teaching and learning to help to identify how the teaching or dynamic may be changed to stimulate more discussion and student response.

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.

Can you think of time that you reflected (no matter how briefly or in-depth) on a teaching session?

Did you think about changing anything? Why?

Did you actually change this for your next teaching session? If so, what was the result?

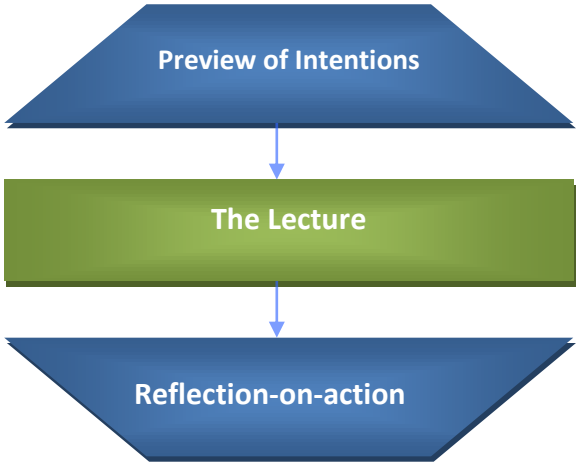
Types of Reflection

Hatton and Smith (1995) distinguish between dialogic and critical reflection and the level of engagement associated with each.

Dialogic reflectionrefers to a less intensive approach that involves 'discourse with the self' to explore a given event or incident. It involves considering the decisions and judgments made and possible reasons for these.

An example of dialogic reflection is the basic model proposed by Brockbank & McGill (2000).

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. Afterwards they then consider how well they achieved their intended goals and which aspects require further attention.



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).

Critical reflection refers to efforts to accounting for the broader historic, cultural, and political values in framing practical problems to arrive at a solution (Hatton and Smith, 1995). This process has been described as Boyd and Fales (1983) as:

> "… the core difference between whether a person repeats the same experience several times becoming highly proficient at one behaviour, or learns from experience in such a way that he or she is cognitively or affectively changed".
>
> (1983 p.100)

Critical reflection facilitates transformational learning that can happen either gradually or from a sudden or critical incident and alter the way people see themselves and their world (Baumgartner, 2001)

Methods of Reflection

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 framed in a way that that can be addressed by the teacher.

Guided reflection

To help progress reflection from dialogic to critical Johns (1994) developed the concept of guided reflection. This involves 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 [*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).

Examples of questions that guide or prompt reflection are noted below:

Guided Reflection 1:

Maughan & Webb

a. What is most important/interesting/useful/relevant about the object, event or idea?
b. How can it be explained (e.g. with theory?)
c. How is it similar to and different from other issues events?
d. What have I learned from this?
e. What does this mean for my future situations?

Guided Reflection 2:

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:

Biggs & Tang (2007)

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?

Based on the examples above produce four or five questions that you think would help to guide you in your reflective process

Frameworks

This section considers four models that may help promote reflection on teaching.

1. Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper (2001) – The 'What' Model

Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper (2001) propose a framework that uses Borton's (1970) developmental model. They state that

> ***"The advanced practitioner is not only conscious of what she is doing, but also of how she is doing it" (p 128).***

They advocate using three simple questions to reflect on a situation:What?So what?Now what?'

In the first level, the individual reflects on the situation in order to describe it. In the second level they construct their own personal theory of understanding about the event/incident in order to learn from it. In the final level they reflect on action, about what can be done to improve the incident and about the consequences of such action. It is this final stage that can potentially make the greatest contribution to practice

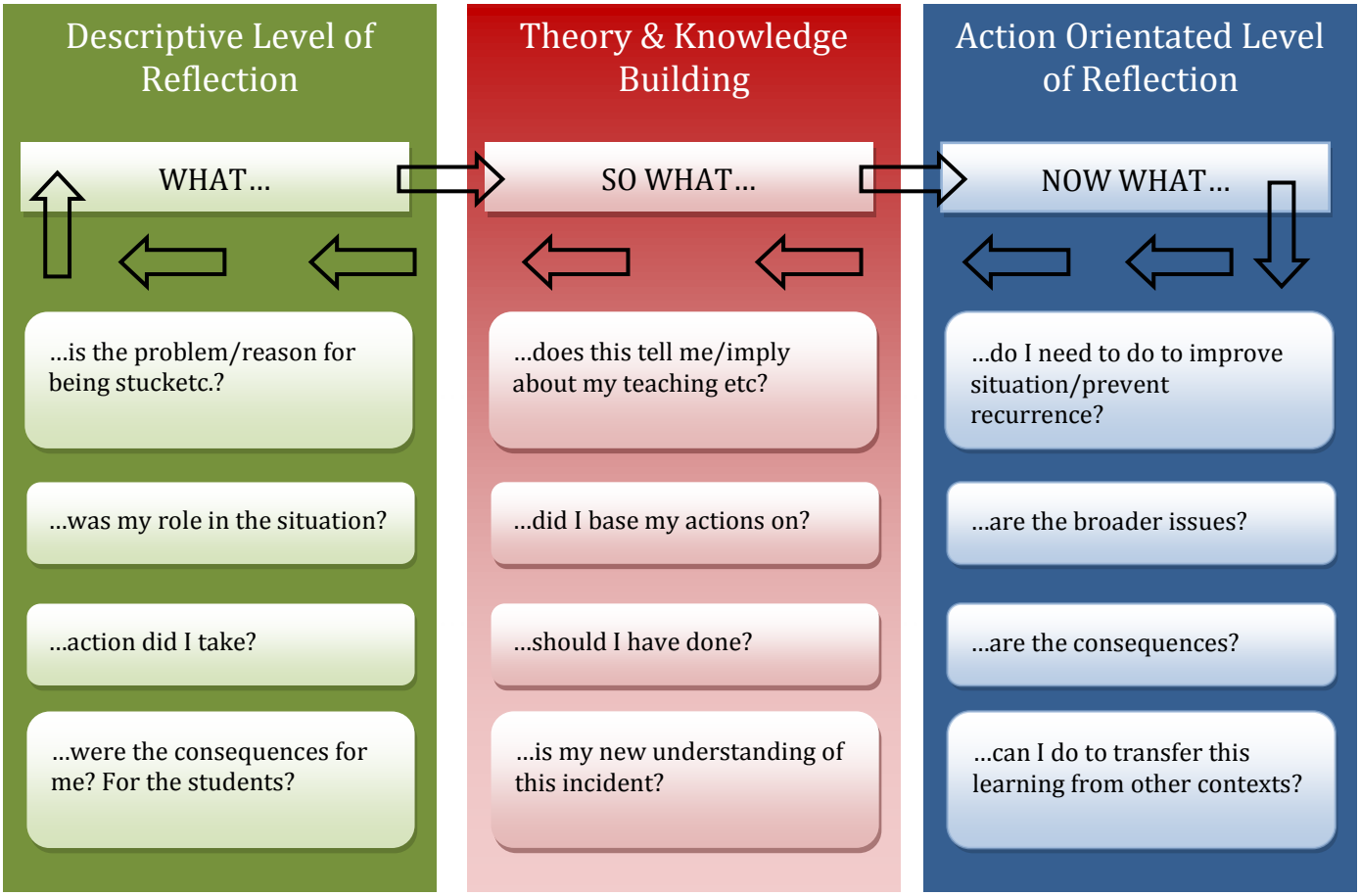


Figure 1: Overview of Rolfe's Reflective Model

2. Gibbs (1998) Reflective Cycle

This model encourages the practitioner to think about different aspects of a given situation or event, to evaluate it, and establish an action plan for dealing with such a scenario should it arise again. It helps the individual to consider how they think and respond within a given and provides insight into self and practice (Johns, 2005).

The model is illustrated in Figure 2, and expanded in Table 1.

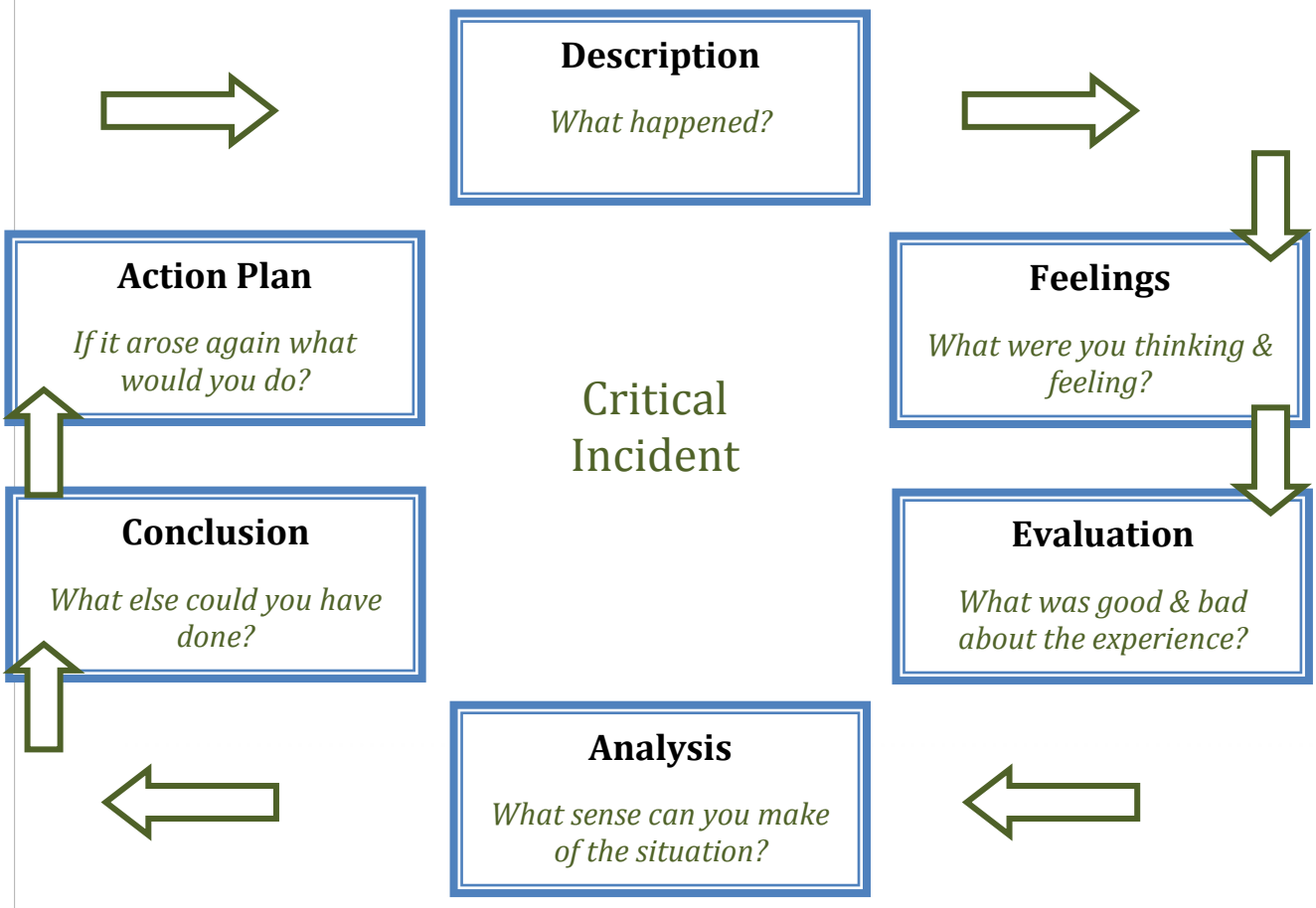


Figure 2. Overview of Gibb's Reflective Model

Table 1. Key components of Gibb's Reflective Model

Description	*What happened?*	Describe in detail the event you are reflecting on. Include e.g. where were you; who else was there; why were you there; what were you doing; what were other people doing; what was the context of the event; what happened; what was your part in this; what parts did the other people play; what was the result
Feelings	*What were you thinking and feeling?*	At this stage, try to recall and explore those things that were going on inside your head. Include: • How you were feeling when the event started? • What you were thinking about at the time? • How did it make you feel? • How did other people make you feel? • How did you feel about the outcome of the event? • What do you think about it now?
Evaluation	*What was good and bad about the experience?*	Try to evaluate or make a judgement about what has happened. Consider what was good about the experience and what was bad about the experience or what did or didn't go so well
Analysis	*What sense can you make of the situation?*	Break the event down into its component parts so they can be explored separately. You may need to ask more detailed questions about the answers to the last stage. Include: • What went well? • What did you do well? • What did others do well? • What went wrong or did not turn out how it should have done? • In what way did you or others contribute to this?
Conclusion	*What else could you have done?*	This differs from the evaluation stage in that now you have explored the issue from different angles and have a lot of information to base your judgement. It is here that you are likely to develop insight into you own and other people's behaviour in terms of how they contributed to the outcome of the event. Remember the purpose of reflection is to learn from an experience. Without detailed analysis and honest exploration that occurs during all the previous stages, it is unlikely that all aspects of the event will be taken into account and therefore valuable opportunities for learning can be missed. During this stage you should ask yourself what you could have done differently
Action plan	*If it arose again what would you do?*	During this stage you should think yourself forward into encountering the event again and to plan what you would do – would you act differently or would you be likely to do the same? Here the cycle is tentatively completed and suggests that should the event occur again it will be the focus of another reflective cycle

3. Johns' (2000)Model for Structured Reflection

Johns' model focuses on uncovering and making explicit the knowledge that is used in our teaching practice. It can be used as a guide for analysis of a critical incident or general reflection on experience or more complex decision making. He suggests that in addition to guided reflection students should use a reflective diary since noting, reflecting on, and sharing such experiences can lead to greater understanding than by reflection as a lone exercise.

The model requires 'looking in on the situation', which includes focusing on yourself and paying attention to your thoughts and emotions. It then advises 'looking out of the situation' and writing a description of the situation based on five sources of knowledge, each of which has a number of cues (see Figure 3).

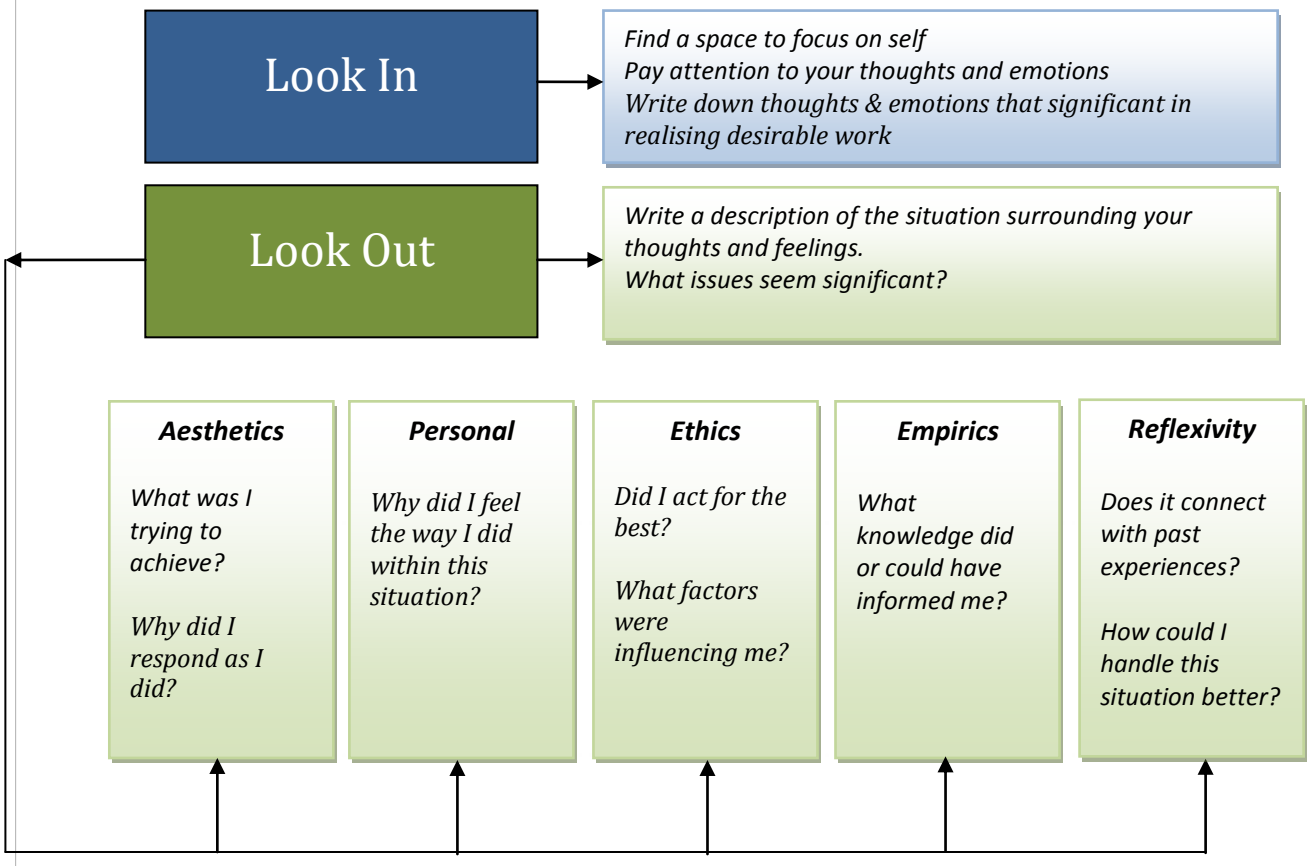


Figure 3: John's (2000) Model of Structured Reflection

4. Kolb's (1984) Model of Experiential Learning

This model is based directly on Kolb's experiential learning cycle where active experimentation leads to a transfer of learning from current cycle to a new cycle. There are four main components to the cycle, and the individual can enter the model at any one of these points.

The model is illustrated in Figure 4 and expanded in Table 2.

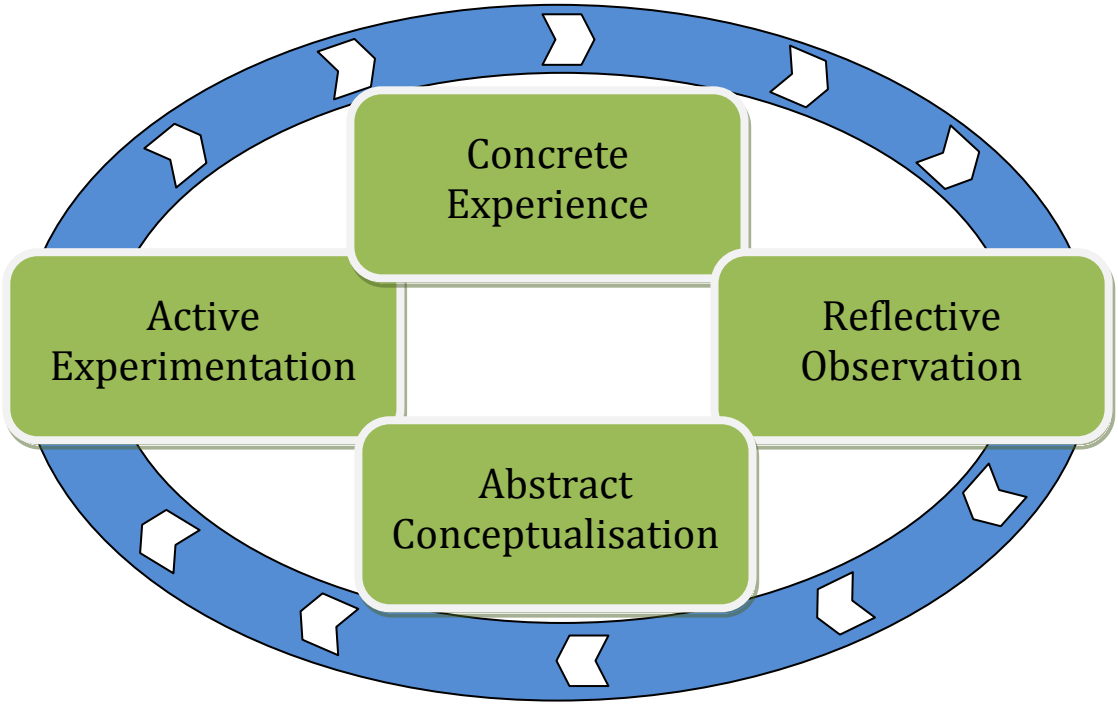


Figure 4:Kolb's (1984) Model of Experiential Learning

Concrete Experience	This relates to the incident or event prompting the reflection and involves the physical act of being involved in, or having hands-on experience. Although in theory you can enter the model at any stage this tends to be the main point of entry.
Reflective Observation	After the event comes the initial reflection. This entails stepping back and viewing the event or incident from an objective perspective. This should provide some insight into what you did and why you did it.
Abstract Conceptualisation	These initial reflections are then explored in greater detail. Conceptualisation involves interpreting events and actions, looking for connections between these, and the process of applying some theoretical premise to make understand events.
Active Experimentation	Once this deeper understanding has been established the individual translates it into predictions about what is likely to happen next or what actions should be taken to refine the way similar events may be handled in future

Table 2: Components of Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning

Take a few minutes to review the four models and think about the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Which do you think would be most helpful to <u>you</u> when reflecting on your teaching?

Reflective Writing

What is reflective writing?

Reflective writingis evidence of reflective thinking. In an academic context reflective thinking usually involves:

- looking back at something (often an event i.e. something that happened, but could also be an idea or object)
- analysing the event or idea (thinking in depth and from different perspectives, and trying to explain, often with reference to a model or theory from your subject)
- thinking carefully about what the event or idea means for you and your ongoing progress as a learner and/or practising professional.

Reflective writing is therefore more personalthan other kinds of academic writing. It also involves writing in the first person rather than the traditional third person associated with academic writing, which can initially be a challenge. Although we may engage in basic reflection on a daily basis reflective writing requires the individual to go deeper and to analyse the rationale and consequences of their actions, and to learn from the experience.

Reflective Diaries

The most common way of capturing this learning is to use a reflective journal or diary. This approach is encouraged because it not only records events and reactions to them, but also helps to provide a different perspective or clarity to any initial thoughts. Additional benefits include:

- Method of storing new ideas, insights, and understanding
- Increasing 'ownership' and confidence
- Developing questioning, problem solving and critical thinking skills
- Allows expressions of intuition, creativity and emotion
- Clarifies achievements, professional goals and career aspirations
- Can be integrated into learning sets and other types of collaborative learning.

A Structure for Reflective Writing

Maughan and Webb (2001) state that while reflective thinkingand writing can be an unstructured process, the individual is commonly required to demonstrate some editorial skills in the presentation and structure of the final diary/journal. As a result they propose a three-part structure to produce reflective writing: description, interpretation and outcome (Figure 5).

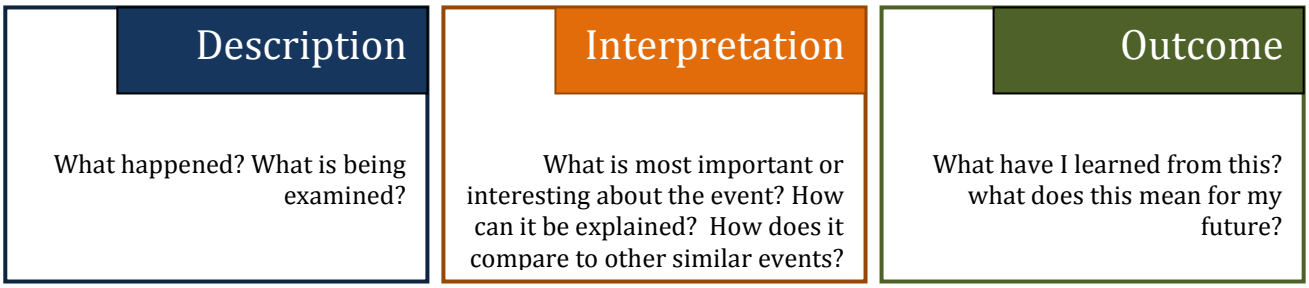


Figure 5: Structure for Production of Reflective Writing

Vocabulary for Reflective Writing

Based on the structure above, Maughan and Webb (2001) provide a fewsuggestions for words and phrases for reflective writing (see Figures 6 – 8). While using any of these words and phrases will not automatically result in 'good reflection' they do help with the vocabulary required in this style of writing.

Description

No specific vocabulary is suggested for this section because the range of possible events, ideas or objects on which you might be required to reflect is so great.

It is stressed, however, that if describing an *idea*, for example a theory or model, it is usually best to use the *present* tense e.g. 'Social interdependence theory recognises…' (not 'recognised').

Events, of course, are nearly always described using the *past* tense.

Figure 6: Suggested Wording for the Description of Reflective Practices

Interpretation

For me, the [most]	significant	aspects(s)	was…
	important	element(s)	were…
	relevant	experience(s)	
	useful	issue(s)	
		idea(s)	
		learning	arose from…
			happened when…
			resulted from…
Previously,	I	thought [did not think]	
At the time,		felt [did not feel]	
At first,		noticed [did not notice]	
Initially,		questioned [did not question]	
Subsequently,		realised [did not realise]	
Later,			

Figure 7: Suggested Wording for the Interpretation of Reflective Practices

Outcome

Having	read	**[X] I now**	think…
	experienced		feel…
	applied		realise…
	discussed		wonder…
	analysed		question…
	learned		know…
Additionally,	**I have learned that…**		
Furthermore,			
Most importantly,			
I have	significantly	developed	my skills in…
	slightly	improved	my understanding of…
			my ability to…
However, I have not [sufficiently]			
This means that…			

Figure 8: Suggested Wording for the Outcome of Reflective Practices

Limitations of Self-Reflection

Literature is replete with examples of reflection improving aspects of professional teaching practice. It has been suggested, however, that in addition to expanding knowledge and facilitating personal development, engaging in reflection may be a limiting experience.

Habermas (1974) suggested thatreflection requires a level of detachment and objectivity which is at threat from self-deception. An example of this is provided by Brockbank & McGill (2000) (Figure 9).

Dr. Brown is worried about his class. He knows that if he doesn't stick to the time allocated for each section he'll run out of time and the material at the end won't be covered.

	Perception	Reality
Problem	Poor time management	Can't relinquish control
Reflection	Questions reduce time to cover material	Time management becomes the problem & the disguise
Solution	Better lesson plans; don't allow questions	Not discovered via reflection

Figure 9: Example of Limitation of Self-Reflection

To make sure this doesn't happen he progresses through the material speedily, and doesn't allow questions that make slow him down or make him dwell on one topic that would then knock his timing off, and prevent him from covering all of the material.

Reflecting in/on action will confirm his concern that he isn't covering the materially quickly enough or that his time allocation system is inadequate.

This reflection, however, may mask another more serious problem – one that Dr. Brown is less keen or able to face up to. In this case, the problem Dr. Brown doesn't want to face up to is that he can't relinquish control of the class: opening up the class for questions means that he has less control. Time management, then, becomes both the problem and the disguise, while the real problem is not addressed.

The concern is, then, 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.

Others have also queried the benefit of a procedure that undermines lecturers' knowledge, authority, and ability and promotes anxiety and insecurity (Hayes, Marshall, & Turner, 2007). This is illustrated in the following quote:

"I don't accept that reflective practice is a good thing. It's a meaningless term that promotes a dangerous anxiety-making, navel gazing that undermines a lecturer's ability to be a good teacher." **(Hayes, 2007, p.169)**

In the last few minutes take a few minutes to talk to the others at your table. How much do you agree with this opinion? What are the arguments for and against?

And finally…

Without looking back (!) take a few minutes to recall the key points that you remember from this session.

How do you think you will be able to apply these to your own teaching?

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