

An Academic Critique of Reflective Practice on Learning and Teaching



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Contents

Introduction	2
John Dewey and His Significance	2
David Kolb.....	3
Graham Gibbs	3
Reflective Practice in Teaching	3
Reflective Practice in Learning.....	4
Conclusion	5
Reference List	6
Appendices	10
Appendix 1 – Kolb’s Model of Experimental Learning	10
Appendix 2 – Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle Model	10

Introduction

The author will discuss the current thinking with regards to the use of reflective practises within teaching and learning. The written piece will include the significance of John Dewey on reflective practises, and how he and other educationalists have had an impact within teaching and learning throughout time. Furthermore, this paper will also discuss the significance that reflective practises have had on teaching and learning today.

John Dewey and His Significance

There are a wide range of definitions that outlines what reflective practice entails, although they all differ in their description. However, the inconsistencies in what it means has proved problematic, as it often leads to confusion with regards to what and how reflective practise can be achieved (O'Regan et al, 2013). The view of reflective practise arises from around the world, with a variety of writers issuing their viewpoint over the subject in matter. However, it is the early work of John Dewey and Donald Schon that have really influenced reflective practice in teaching and learning today (Hickson, 2011).

Concerning the former, John Dewey was a famous philosopher, where his involvement overall was very significant in its own means, as he was an individual of substantial prominence, someone who fashioned a new area of philosophical perfectionism (Morse, 2011). His work has been labelled as the mainstay to the study of reflection at present, providing as a purpose for the clarification of educational processes, and generating a better understanding of human function (Moon, 2004). As a well renowned educationalist, his work on reflection was also suggested as an experience: the capability to think critically about your own choices and activities, and to develop an understanding of the broader contexts in which those decisions were made (McCoach and Smith, 2016).

The work of Dewey has led to the prominent use of reflective practise within education, as it an appropriate way to reflect on experiences gained and to define what can be implemented to enhance future performance and development. There have been many definitions published interpreting what reflection stands for. An educationalist commended for what he has consummated over the years is Boud (1985), where he encompassed that the idea of reflection should incorporate the emotional aspects of the experience, dispensing other influences within reflection. Schon (1991) has widespread knowledge on reflective practice and its diverse meaning, however, in his book 'The Reflective Practitioner', one statement stood out regarding reflective practice:

“Both ordinary people and professional practitioners often think about what they are doing, sometimes even while doing it. Stimulated by surprise, they turn thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action.”

Pondering this extract from Schon, many people may consider to themselves, for example, the features that they observe while doing something, the measures by which they make such a judgement, the skills involved while doing so, as well as constructing a framework over the possible solution to the problem.

David Kolb

Based on the work predominantly from Dewey, a theorist that came to the fore was David Kolb. Kolb has developed a model of experiential learning (See in Appendix 1), where it has been defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.” As a process which intentions are to create a process of constructing knowledge, experiential learning involves a creative tension among the four learning modes that is responsive to appropriate demands (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012). Reflection is an integral part of Kolb’s model, in which instant experiences provide the foundation for observations and reflections, where opportunities for action can be tested through trialling, which in effect, create new experiences (Green, 2011). Kolb has been considered with teaching and learning, as his model enables individuals to be experimental either in their learning or teaching, and evolve as a due to the outcome of those experimentations.

Graham Gibbs

As time went on, another theorist that has come to the forefront is Graham Gibbs. Based on the developments that Kolb has fashioned overtime, Gibbs has presented the Reflective Cycle Model (See in Appendix 2), where he places theory and practice in an iterative circle (Potter, 2015). Gibbs’ reflective cycle suggests that reflection takes place after an experience, with his framework based on fundamental concepts, where it provides an agenda for people to work through, essentially providing a checklist (O’Regan et al, 2013). Over time, Gibbs’ model has filtered its way through education, predominantly with teaching and learning, as it had been recognised as a reflection tool which can enhance the overall learning development of individuals, within a professional or education setting.

Reflective Practice in Teaching

Reflection is recognised internationally as a key to ensuring that students are equipped to address the array of complexities, uncertainties and challenges that they will encounter in contemporary working environments (Wilson, 2013). Donald Schon has recommended that a model should be incorporated within higher education to develop the teacher’s abilities to practise reflective processes in teaching,

as teaching is a complex process, and teachers are inept of applying everything that they have learned (Gheith and Aljaberi, 2018). For a teacher, there are an assortment of facets to consider when reflecting; including reflecting on the subject knowledge, the curriculum knowledge, educational values, personal constructs and identity, as well as the pedagogic enactment (McGregor and Cartwright, 2011).

Teachers learn every day, and it is a significant process for the development of their professional development to reflect on what they learning. Fullan (2016) argues that for individuals to continue on improving, that they need to measure themselves and be honest about what they are doing. Integrating a reflective practise process creates an approach where teachers are able to measure themselves, their performance, and ultimately, provide an honest assessment about what they are doing (Tarrant, 2013).

Teachers interpret how students learn based on their past experiences and this can include numerous factors; including their own past experiences, the research that they undertake, the viewpoints of their colleagues, as well as the response from their students. Critical reflection is an important aspect of teaching practise, particularly as teachers are assessing their reflective practise with self-awareness regarding the detail on their own research, the theory that they acquired, as well as the response from their colleagues and students (Brookfield, 2017).

There are numerous ways in which reflective practice has had an impact overall within teaching. Schon has identified a 'reflection-on-action' approach to learning which has proved to be effective within teaching. (McGregor and Cartwright, 2011). The reflection on action approach involves concurrent reflecting and doing, suggesting that the individual has reached a stage of capability, where they are able to think unmistakably about what is materialising and adapting if need be (Hatton and Smith, 1995).

Reflective Practice in Learning

Early definitions of what reflective practice in learning is heavily focused on its educational origins, with many people viewing it as a method of learning from practice (Paterson and Chapman, 2013). A famous sociologist, Jack Mezirow, established a concept where he placed a significance on the individual to make their own explanations of what particular experience has unfolded, rather than relying on other people and their judgements of the events (Mezirow, 1997). What Mezirow (1997) defines as transformative thinking helps develop the individual learner, as that particular person's 'point of view' can be altered through critical reflection on these expectations, leading to a substantial personal transformation. However, Dewey has recognised that while all students will unquestionably

gain experience within education, the most important element within this process is the quality of experience purchased as this will augment their professional development (Schmidt, 2010).

Within today's educational system, students are supported to consistently reflect within a systematic manner, as speaking from past experiences helps the students recognise their development over a period of time. An example of this being shown is in Scotland, where they are encouraged to retain a reflective portfolio, tracking their own personal log, with a keen aim is to develop personal and professional reflection, which sequentially, fashions a foundation where personal development can be constructed (Tarrant, 2013).

Self – assessments have also been identified as a feature which can make the experience more meaningful for the students, as a more personal and reflective writing exercise has aided the development of students as they are able to individually assess their own ability, skill or performance (Lawrence, 2013). According to Newman and Ober (2013), another form of feedback exercise which has been manufactured within education has been to require the students to provide feedback on their own and their peer's presentations, as this process encourages the students to comment on the strengths and weaknesses, as well as establishing an area of development for the students to endure.

However, to effectively draw analysis of your own presenting ability is a process that should be fostered within an individual without doubt. Barret (2011) has come up with a direction in order for students to pursue improvement in their presentation skills, dissecting the model into two stages. The first stage guides the students to rate their strengths from an assortment of viewpoints; including aspects such as delivery, projection, content provided and overall organisation. The second stage encourages the students to write a plan of action, where they are able to reflect on their experience and come up with areas to progress on.

Nevertheless, to manufacture an environment where it establishes reflective teaching and learning, the idea of a reflective curriculum has been expressed as a viable option to pursue. A reflective curriculum would offer the opportunity for more flexibility, maximising learning routes, and more prominently, learning through reflection will be more expressive for the individual learner as well as the teacher throughout their journey within education (Johns, 2013).

Conclusion

Reflective practice has had a significant impact within teaching and learning, and it is forever expanding in prominence amongst educational curriculums. However, if it was not for the work of John Dewey, then there would be question marks over its status currently speaking. His influence opened the door for more theorists to arise, such as David Boud and Donald Schon. Their influence, as

well as the models inspired by David Kolb and Graham Gibbs prompted their inspiration to be used within education. Across all levels of education currently, various reflective models are being operated to inspire the development of teachers and students. As the author has had an opening to reflective practice this past academic year, he feels that being encouraged to reflect on various instants within education has enabled him to learn from past experiences and apply it appropriately for future instances, inspiring respective development for his benefit.

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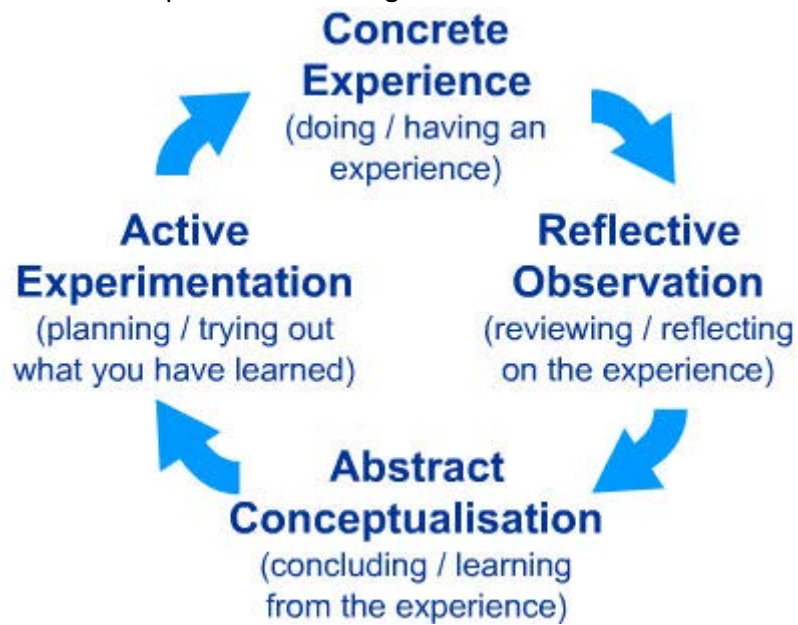
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Kolb's Model of Experimental Learning



Appendix 2 – Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

