
Reflection

Reflecting on Learning



Reflection on Learning and Reflective frameworks

Key words / concepts:

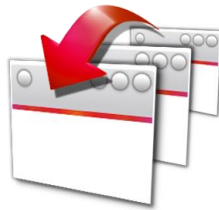
reflective essay: your reflective essay is specifically about what you have learned from undertaking this module. For your essay you will also be reflecting on the learning achieved whilst gathering evidence for your claim.

learning log/diary: a learning log is a journal which evidences your own learning and skills development. It begins with a description of what you have done, but also needs to discuss what it is that you have learned and needs to include a critical reflection on that learning.

critical reflection: Reid (1993) in her definition noted reflection as an active process rather than passive thinking. She states 'reflection is a process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and so inform learning about practice' (Reid, B. (1993). *"But we're doing it already" Exploring a response to the concept of reflective practice in order to improve its facilitation.* Nurse Education? Today 13: 305-309).

Reflecting on practice is an important facet in the verification of experiential learning and assists in the authentication of the evidence gathered. The

process and the supporting material will form an integral element of the portfolio. The RAL module requires that you reflect upon your personal learning based on experience whilst working. There is an additional requirement that you write a reflective essay reviewing learning based on the portfolio. (Section 7) The slides provide essential information on different theories and models of reflection which will support this process.



Aim

Discuss the concept of reflection as a learning strategy

Objectives

- *Discuss the concept and purposes of reflection; models of reflection; levels of reflection.*
- *Analyse the principles of reflective practice*

A great deal has been written about the process and value of 'reflection' as an aspect of learning, especially as an aspect of learning from experience. Some of the important literature in this field is shown at the end of this section.

Kolb (1984), in particular, has usefully distinguished between four different abilities that learners need to use in a cyclical fashion in order to learn from their experience. Learners need to *have concrete experience*. They then need to *reflect* on their experiences and *generate abstract concepts* or 'theories' in order to make sense of their experience. Finally, they need to *test out their theories* through active experimentation and engagement - in other words, use these theories to inform the decisions they make that will result in them having further concrete experience. Throughout the time that you take to undertake this module, we are asking you to reflect on your practice, through your learning diary, through the work that you do in writing about areas of learning and through the reflective essay.

In the reflective essay, we are asking you to reflect on and make sense of the experience of putting together your RAL portfolio. This sort of reflection often involves you in analysing the problem solving strategies you used to juggle the work and study commitments you had while undertaking this module. You may also use this process of reflection to clarify your reasons for taking the module, and to discover more about the particular ways in which you learn

best. In addition new learning could also include the reading you may have undertaken in order to support the justification of both learning achieved and evidence provided.

Such reflection has more value than simply indicating the quality of your learning on this module, though this is the reason we ask you to write such an essay. Reflection develops self-knowledge - that is, informal theorising about your own learning patterns and styles - that you can take with you into future life experiences.

Activities



Activities - for personal development which support learning

A learning diary

Examples of diary headings are given below. Duplicate and use them as necessary.

Activity

(The evidence from these activities, at the appropriate level, can be included in your portfolio if level appropriate.)

Using the following template, and responding to the questions, undertake a critical reflection of a learning event.

LEARNING DIARY – EXAMPLE 1 (Level 4 and Level 5)

Learning Diary

Date:

Nature of learning event: (frequently these occur when our expectations are not met and a situation develops differently from what we expected)

What were your expectations and what actually happened?

Explain why the incident developed differently from your expectation:

How will you handle similar situations differently in future?

Any other learning points:

How can this be evidenced?

EXAMPLE 2 (Level 6 and Level 7)

THE WHAT? MODEL OF STRUCTURED REFLECTION

The model (Driscoll 1994, 2000), contains three elements of reflection:

1. WHAT? A description of the event
2. SO WHAT? An analysis of the event
3. NOW WHAT? Proposed actions following the event.

1. A description of the event

WHAT? Trigger questions:

- What is the purpose of returning to this situation?
- What happened?
- What did I see/do?
- What was my reaction to it?
- What did other people do that were involved in this?

2. An analysis of the event

SO WHAT? Trigger questions:

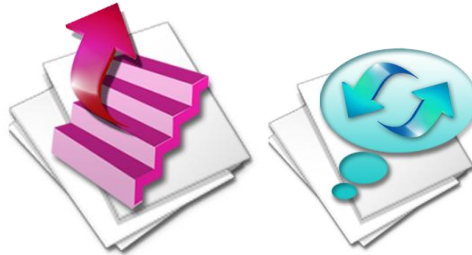
- What way did I act at the time?
- How did I feel at the time of the event?
- Were those feelings I had any different from other people who were also involved at the time?
- Are my feelings now, after the event, any different from what I experienced at the time?
- Do I still feel troubled, if so, in what way?
- What were the effects of what I did (or did not do)?
- What positive aspects now emerge for me from the event that happened in practice?
- What have I noticed about my behaviour in practice by taking a more measured look at it?
- What observations does any person helping me to reflect on my practice make of the change

3. Proposed actions following the event

NOW WHAT? Trigger questions:

- What are the implications for others and me in practice based on what I have described and analysed?
- What difference does it make if I choose to do nothing?
- Where can I get more information to face a similar situation again?
- How can I modify my practice if a similar situation was to happen again?
- What help do I need to help me 'action' the results of my reflections?

- Which aspect should be tackled first?
- How will I notice that I am any different in practice?
- What is the main learning that I take from reflecting on my practice in this way?
- How can I evidence this?



Structured Reflection

Activities - for personal development and support learning

Examples - Duplicate and use as necessary.

Activity

Responding to the questions, undertake a critical reflection of a learning event.

Describe a scenario.

1. Using the What? model of structured reflection to help you, describe on a sheet of paper in as much detail as you can remember, the situation or event (*What?*). You might just want to put in brief reminders, or phrases that were significant at the time rather than write the whole story.
2. Next, take a fresh sheet of paper and again using the trigger questions to help you, analyse in more detail why for you such an experience happened in your practice (*So What?*).
3. Now compare your findings with a colleague to disclose and share your practice with.

Concentrate particularly on your Proposed Actions due to what you have learnt. (*Now What?*).



- Re-visit your learning diary – cross refer to reflective frameworks
- Choose a point in time in your diary and write a paragraph reflecting on your own learning – send it to your adviser for feedback
- Ensure that you relate to levels (Section 4)
- Can you provide evidence?

The Learning Diary

Purpose:

- To help you focus on the learning that underpins your activities.
- To act as an ongoing *aide memoire*, which will be particularly useful when you write your areas of learning and find evidence to support them.
- To capture critical learning incidents and ideas as they occur which can then be used in your essay.

What is a critical learning incident?

A critical learning incident is an experience which is not routine which requires you to draw upon your knowledge/skills in order to respond to it and which tests/extends your learning. The diary is not a compulsory part of your claim but you may wish to use one as a way of identifying, recording and reflecting upon key learning experiences. We recommend spending five minutes at the end of each learning session to record your successes, outstanding issues and areas that you are having difficulties with, which will give you a framework for use when writing your essay. It will also save you time and probably result in a better essay.

What you should do

It is suggested that you keep a diary over the period covering all activities up to writing the essay. Remember it is not intended that you complete a diary sheet for each day but for each learning event. This may be a reflection upon a conversation at work, how you handled a work-based problem, a face-to-face tutorial, reading this workbook, using the website and so on. The diary

will help you to identify the knowledge/skills you are required to use and get you into the habit of thinking about your activities and the learning involved. Keeping a record of your daily activities for a short period may also help you to annotate your CV and job description more easily, and identify areas of learning.

Examples of diary headings are given in the templates in this section. If you do decide to keep a diary you may submit one or more pages as evidence in your claim, if they illustrate the application of skills and/or knowledge for which you wish to claim credit. Keeping a diary will also strengthen your understanding of reflection and reflective practice and prepare you for the writing of your reflective essay.

Peters (1991) describes a four-step protocol called "DATA" (Describe, Analyze, Theorize, Act):

1. **Describe**: the basic elements of the problem, task or situation

2. **Analyze**: identify assumptions beliefs, rules, motives and any other factors underlying the current approach

3. **Theorize**: what alternatives are possible? What are their comparative merits and drawbacks?

4. **Act**: try out the new approach, evaluate the results

Examples of evidence:



Additional Reading:

<http://www.compact.org/disciplines/reflection/bibliography/>

Boud, D., R. Keogh and D. Walker (Eds.). 1985. *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. London: Kogan Page.

Boud *et al.* (1985, 7) note that experience alone is not sufficient for learning and pose the following questions: What is it that turns experience into learning? What specifically enables learners to gain the maximum benefit from the situations they find themselves in? How can they apply their experience in new contexts? They suggest that structured reflection is the key to learning from experience, and that reflection can be very difficult. 'Perhaps if we can sharpen our consciousness of what reflection in learning can involve and how it can be influenced then we may be able to improve our own practice of learning and help those who learn with us'.

Boud *et al.* (1985, 7) tie the timing of reflective activities to the three stages in experience-based learning: preparation, engagement, and processing; underscoring the importance of including reflective activity at each stage. In the preparatory phase, students examine what is required of them and the demands of their field site; during the experience, they process a variety of inputs arising from the field site; finally, they must consider and consolidate what they have experienced.

Claxton C.S., P.H. Murrell. 1987. *Learning Styles: Implications for Improving Educational Practice*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 4. Washington D.C.: The George Washington University.

Claxton and Murrell (1987) describe four 'layers' of learning style research - (1) personality types, (2) models of how people process information, (3) social interaction models, and (4) instructional preference models. One of the most widely used analyses of personality types is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Kolb's experiential learning model is an example of information processing models.

Dewey, J. 1933. *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*. Lexington, MA: Heath.

John Dewey defined reflective thinking as ‘active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends [that] includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality’ (1933, 9).

Daudelin, M.W. 1996. ‘Learning from experience through reflection’. *Organizational Dynamics* 24(3): 36-48.

Daudelin (1996, 39) provides a definition of reflection that explicitly captures its relation to learning, ‘Reflection is the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences; learning is the creation of meaning from past or current events that serves as a guide for future behaviour’. This definition suggests that reflection is integral to learning, when learning is defined as making sense of past experience in order to affect and understand future experience.

Gelman, S., B. Holland, *et al.* 2001. *Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques offers a broad overview of many issues related to assessment in higher education, with specific application for understanding the impact of service-learning and civic engagement initiatives. It builds upon an earlier publication from Portland State University. This version has been substantially revised and has been augmented with narrative addressing assessment issues and strategies; detailed discussion of learning from multiple research projects over the past six years about impact on multiple constituencies - students, faculty, communities, and institutions; and discussion of strategies for data collection, analysis, synthesis, and reporting. Specific assessment instruments for use with each constituency are provided, including suggestions for administration, preparation, and data analysis. This volume will assist individuals seeking a comprehensive resource on assessment issues, with applicability particularly in higher education as well as potential applications to other groups interested in assessment.

Giles Jr., D.E., E. Porter Honnet, and S. Migliore (Eds.). 1991. *Research Agenda for Combining Service and Learning in the 1990s*. Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education.

The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) notes that: ‘an effective service-learning program provides structured opportunities for people

to reflect critically on their service experience' (1991, 25). In addition, NSEE states in the preamble to its guiding principles, 'it is crucial that service toward the common good be combined with reflective learning to assure that service programs of high quality can be created and sustained over time...' (24).

Eyler J., Giles D.E., Schmiede. 1996. *A Practitioner's Guide to Reflection in Service-learning: Student Voices and Reflections*. A Technical Assistance Project funded by the Corporation for National Service. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.

Eyler, Giles and Schmiede (1996) examined students' experiences of critical reflection using in-depth, personal, semi-structured interviews.

Continuous: Students commented that critical reflection must be an ongoing part of the service project. Continuous reflection involves reflection before, during and after the experience. Student interviewees often underscored the importance of reflective preparation as key to getting the most out of the service experience. Reflection during the experience was usually geared towards problem-solving and identifying actions. Reflection after the service tended to focus on evaluating the meaning of the experience, integrating old knowledge and new information, and formulating future course of action.

Connected: Students repeatedly emphasized the importance of integrating service with classwork. Faculty can use reflection to connect service and classwork in two main ways. First, faculty can help students develop conceptual framework required for the service project. Second, faculty can guide students in applying concepts/theories to their project. Connected reflection results in more effective service and enhanced learning of the experience, integrating old knowledge and new information, and formulating future courses of action.

Challenging: Students reported that challenging reflection pushed them to think in new ways, raises new questions, produces new understanding, and new ways of problem-solving. Faculty must challenge students while simultaneously providing support and creating a 'safe' environment where students are confident that their contributions and feelings will be respected.

Contextualized: Reflection should be appropriate for the context and setting of the particular service-learning project. Service projects in courses lend themselves to formal, structured methods of reflection. Informal discussions may be more feasible in co-curricular programs.

Communication Structured reflection can be enhanced by communication with peers and community organizations. Eyler, Giles and Schmiede (1996) found that the most common forms of reflection involved discussions, interactions with others and journals (48). They describe several reflection activities that involve interactions with peers and community partners including structured/unstructured discussions, presentations, interaction with community members and staff and interviews.

Goldsmith, S. 1995. *Journal Reflection: A Resource Guide for Community Service Leaders and Educators Engaged in Service-learning*. Washington, D. C.: The American Alliance for Rights & Responsibilities.

Goldsmith (1995) suggests that reflection should be continuous, noting that 'reflection should be a habitual activity, an ongoing conversation with the self (although the conversation may, at times, include others) that moves hand in hand with the experience'.

Guskin A. (1994). 'Reducing Student Costs and Enhancing Student Learning: Restructuring the Role of Faculty' 26(5): *Change*. 16-25.

Guskin notes coaching is a critical aspect of skills development. An experienced individual uses a combination of tips, advice and example to help students avoid pitfalls. In addition to faculty, coaching can be done by more experienced students and interactive technology. Both upper and lower level students learn through peer coaching. Another advantage of upper level students coaching lower level students may be that older peers may have a better appreciation of how to overcome learning hurdles while for faculty such hurdles may be only a faint memory for faculty. Guskin also notes that in addition to one-on-one faculty/student interaction, small group discussions can be very effective because (1) students receive support from peers, (2) can share their perspectives, and (3) pressure of peers can provide an intensity and excitement to discussions. Faculty can challenge students and provide feedback in such settings.

Kolb, D.A. 1984. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

David Kolb (1984) postulated that learning occurs in a cycle in which students engage in and then observe and reflect on experiences, assimilate reflections in a theory, and then deduce implications for future action from that theory.

Lynch, C. L. (1996). 'Facilitating and assessing unstructured problem solving'. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 27, 16-27.

This paper describes a skill-focused developmental model for understanding and assessing critical thinking and professional problem solving. This paper provides several references on the reflective judgment model and its use in understanding student problem-solving efforts and in designing appropriate coursework.

McCarthy, B. 1987. *The 4MAT system: Teaching to Learning Styles with Right/left Mode Techniques*. Barrington IL: EXCEL Inc.

The 4MAT system relies on several theoretical foundations: the experiential learning model of Kolb, the concept of hemisphericity - the notion that varying skills and behaviours are more likely to be dominated by different areas of the brain or to be associated with neural activity in different areas of the brain - and in part the theory of Jung, which is most typically applied in education via the Meyers-Briggs Type Inventory.

Learning involves two dimensions: perception and processing. Human perception refers to the ways people take in new information (experience and conceptualizing). Human processing refers to the ways people process new information (reflection and action). Four major phases are identified in the learning cycle based on these two dimensions (1) experiencing, (2) conceptualizing, (3) applying, and (4) creating learning. Briefly, the experiencing stage seeks to connect new concepts/skills to learners' existing knowledge and experience. The conceptualizing stage focuses on helping students acquire facts and expert knowledge. The application stage involves practicing new knowledge and skills including open-ended explorations in unstructured settings such as service-learning. In the final stage, students demonstrate and share learning, and explore extensions to other settings.

McCarthy, M.D. 1996. 'One-time and short-term service-learning experiences'. In *Service-Learning in Higher Education*, edited by B. Jacoby and Associates. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 113-134.

McCarthy (1996, 120) recommends that reflection should occur before, during, and after the service experience.

Schön, D.A. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.

Schön (1987, 17) suggests that students learn skills by practicing them. He suggests solving real-world problems competently requires the artistry of problem-framing, implementation and improvisation in addition to technical expertise. Schön underscores the importance of the coaching process for learning the artistry of practice.

Schön (1987, 102) describes coaching in terms of telling/listening and demonstrating/imitating.

A coach can demonstrate how to solve certain types of problems, and students can imitate the coach's product or the problem-solving process. The coach can give specific instructions, criticize students' products or their processes of problem-solving, suggest future actions, help students establish priorities and ask questions.

The coach's description may not match the student's need to know, may be ambiguous, or may refer to concepts unfamiliar to students. Students' actions reveal the meanings they have constructed and the coach may produce

further instructions based on his understanding of the student's difficulty. The coach may ask questions to direct students' attention to issues they may not have considered previously.

The Ladder of Reflection

The dialogue between coach and student involves a chain of reciprocal actions and reflections. Schön (1987, 114) introduces a vertical dimension to this dialogue. Going up the 'ladder' of reflection involves moving from an action to a reflection on that action. Moving down involves moving from a reflection to an action based on that reflection. Diagonal moves occur when one party acts on the basis of another's reflection or when one party's action triggers the other's action. For example, a student could reflect on the coach's demonstration. Or a student could try an alternative approach based on the coach's criticism.

Example - Reflection Ladder

3. Reflection on Description
2. Description of Design
1. Design

In the example, designing is at the base of the ladder.

The student presents a description of the design to the coach. Description may also be embedded in the coach's advice.

Two levels up, the student could reflect on the coach's description (move up) or try out a new design (move down) based on the coach's description. Similarly, the coach could reflect on the student's design.

Bibliography - Reflective Practice

Boud, D., Cohen, R. and Walker, D. (eds) *Using Experience for Learning*., SRHE, 1993

Boud, D., Docherty, P. and Cressey, P. (eds) *Productive Reflection at Work* London: Routledge, 2005.

Kolb, D. A. *Experiential Learning* London: Prentice Hall, 1984.

Moon, J.A. *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice* London: Routledge Falmer, 2004.

Moon, J.A. *Learning Journals* London: Routledge, 2006.

Schön, D. *The Reflective Practitioner* San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1991.