Reflection: supporting learning outcomes and graduate employability- ACPET Information Sheet

Overview

Reflection allows learners to be more fully engaged in the learning process by enabling them to be active learners through the production knowledge themselves (Costa and Kallick, 2008). Reflection is an activity used to support people understand: what they are learning; why they are learning it; and how they can apply their learning to different situations (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985). This learning process can then be used when applying for jobs and/or in the workplace.

Why use reflection?

Reflection can help learners to improve their problem solving skills, and/or helps them better achieve their goals (Di Stefano, Gino, Pisano and Staats, 2014). Both of these highly sought after skills in business and the community.

Planning to use reflection

Reflection is a process of helping a learner look back at what they have done or learned to make sense of it. This sense making allows the learner to identify how they can improve what they have done and/or apply this new knowledge and/or experience to other situations.

The reflective process needs to be guided and structured so learners develop the habits of mind which people use when they are confronted with a problem and solutions are not immediately obvious (Costa and Kallick, 2008, Ch 2, p 2), such as (Di Stefano, Gino, Pisano and Staats, 2014):

* Drawing on their past knowledge and experiences for use in a new situation
* Thinking about their own thinking processes and how this helps them achieve an outcome or solve a problem
* Engaging in ongoing learning and information gathering to continuous build upon what they know

There are various **modes of reflective practice**:

* **Writing** – via journals, workplace logs or online blogs. This writing can be: private and only seen by the learner; written to be viewed by another person (eg a teacher / tutor); and/or made public so the learner can involve a wider audience in their reflections
* **Speaking** – via group discussions or interviews lead by a teacher or a peer, or by recording an audio version of individual reflection
* **Thinking** – where learners visualise or recap in their mind what they have done or learned, and then think about how they can do it differently or apply it to another situation

Two models for structuring reflective practice being used in higher education include:

* **STAR-L** – which is an acronym used to prompt learners to reflect:
  * *Situation* – where did the learning situation / experience happen?
  * *Task* – what was the learner asked to do or what were they faced with?
  * *Action* – what actions/activities did the learner undertake to complete the task?
  * *Result* – what was the outcome of the action/activity?
  * *Learning* – what did they learn from the process and how could they use it elsewhere?
* **4Rs to reflective thinking** – which uses four prompts starting with 'R' to help a learner reflect:
  * *Reporting and responding* – what happened or what was the issues/incident, and how did the learner respond to it?
  * *Relating* – how does the issue or incident relate to what the learner already knows and/or has done before?

- o *Reasoning* – why is the issue or incident important – from their own and from others' perspective?
- o *Reconstructing* – how would the learner deal with or do something differently if this issue or incident happened again?

Planning considerations when using reflection:
- Start with a <u>new cohort of learners</u> as they will not know the teaching / assessment has changed.
- <u>Make the reflective process meaningful to the learners</u> by helping they understand how this process helps them to improve themselves and/or helps them understand how they can use their studies in another situation, such as applying for a job.
- Consider whether the reflective process will be <u>over a period of time </u>(the whole course) or <u>for a particular activity</u> (project / group activity) or for a <u>series of activities</u> (work placement).
- <u>Assign a grade</u> and <u>provide feedback</u> on learners' reflections, highlighting key areas of the learner's progress.
- <u>Have a rubric</u> so learners know what they should be including in their reflections and how this will be marked
- <u>Provide structure and support</u> through reflective prompts (see above models) and provide examples of other learners' reflections so they can get a picture of what to include in a reflection
- Encourage <u>different ways</u> for learners <u>to develop and demonstrate their reflective skills</u>, ie:
  - o Through writing, speaking and thinking, and
  - o By reflecting individually; as a group (via a discussion forum or in class/workshop); by involving people outside of the class (eg work colleagues and/or friends/family); and/or by reading and responding to other people's reflections
- <u>Model reflective practice</u> in front of your learners, and by reflecting on your own teaching practice on a regular basis, using all of the modes of reflective practice above

Case study: Using reflection in practice

Sam, a lecturer in accounting, received feedback from some employers that his graduating learners were good at applying basic accounting principles when dealing with regular, every day business situations, however, they really struggled to apply their knowledge to new or more demanding situations. While attending some of his institute's professional development activities, Sam heard how fellow academics were incorporating reflective activities into their teaching program. They explained that this process helped their learners better understand how their studies could be applied to new and different situations, and helped their learners explained what skills and experiences they had when applying for jobs.

Sam did some further investigating and decided to incorporate the STAR-L reflection model into a new group of learners' first project on the impacts of ongoing tax reforms on small businesses. This involved the learners writing about what they had learned from this first project. Sam then asked his learners to record each other explaining what they had learned about tax reform and how this could be used to demonstrate to a potential employer how they had good problem solving and communications skills. Sam also used some of the comments in his learners' journals which highlighted other areas of improvement for his course to reflect on and improve his own teaching practice.

References and useful resources on reflection
- Boud, D., Keogh, R. & Walker, D. (1985) Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning. London, UK: Kogan Page
- Costa, A.L. & Kallick, B. (2008) Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind: 16 Essential Characteristics for Success. Alexandria, USA: ASCD http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/108008/chapters/Learning-Through-Reflection.aspx
- Di Stefano, G., Gino, F., Pisano, G. & Staats, B. (2014) Learning By Thinking: How Reflection Improves Performance. Boston, USA, Harvard Business School http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/learning-by-thinking-

[how-reflection-improves-performance](#)

- QUT fact sheet: The 4Rs Model of Reflective Thinking - http://www.citewrite.qut.edu.au/write/4Rs-for-students-page1-v1.5.pdf
- QUT fact sheet: Using STAR L to show evidence of your experiences - http://www.careers.qut.edu.au/student/resource/UsingSTARL.pdf
- Wildermuth, P. & Ryan, M. (2011) Developing Reflective Approaches to Writing - https://wiki.qut.edu.au/display/draw/Home