

Reflective Learning

Objectives of the Lesson:

By the end of this lecture, students will be able to:

- ✓ Define the concept of ‘reflection’ and ‘reflective thinking’
- ✓ Get key features of reflection
- ✓ Be familiar with the tools that support reflective learning

Introduction

Reflection plays an important role in the field of education. It is an active and aware process that can occur anytime and anywhere. It functions to help us, or our students, to recapture, relive, make sense of, think about, contextualize and evaluate an experience in order to make decisions and choices about what we have experienced, how we have experienced, and what we will or will not do next. It is more than just memorizing some facts, formulas or dates. Thus, the benefits of reflection include:

- Improved performance, for example in assignments.
- Increased motivation and confidence.
- Better understanding of the links between theory and practice.

1. What is reflection?

As a term used in academic and professional contexts, ‘reflection’ broadly encompasses ‘reflective thinking’, ‘reflective learning’, and ‘reflective practice’.

2. What is reflective thinking?

At its core, ‘reflective thinking’ is the notion of awareness of one’s own knowledge, assumptions and past experiences. As a learner, your past learning and experience provide the context for your thoughts, and are therefore unique to you, but reflective thinking is a dynamic process that continues to develop and evolve as you learn and respond to new experiences, situations, events or information. In practical terms, this is the process where you interpret and evaluate your

experiences, check that they make 'sense' to you, create meaning, justify actions and solve problems, and it helps with your future planning.

3. Key features of reflection:

- ✓ Reflection results in learning: It can change your ideas and understanding of the situation.
- ✓ Reflection is an active and dynamic process: It can involve reflecting 'on' action (past experience), reflecting 'in' action (on an incident as it happens), or reflecting 'for' action (actions that you may wish to take in the future).
- ✓ Reflection is not a linear process, but cyclic: It leads to the development of new ideas which can be used to plan the next stages of learning.
- ✓ Reflection encourages looking at issues from different perspectives: It helps you to understand the issue and scrutinise your own values, assumptions and perspectives.

4. Models of reflection – core concepts for reflective thinking:



Figure 1: Gibbs' reflective cycle (adapted from Dye, 2011)

5. Developing a habit of reflective learning

Developing a habit of reflective learning will help you to:

- ✓ Evaluate your own progress.
- ✓ Monitor and manage your own performance.
- ✓ Self-motivate.
- ✓ Keep focus on your learning goals.
- ✓ Think differently about how you can achieve your goals by evaluating your study techniques, learning strategies, and whether these best fit your current needs, identifying your skills development needs or gaps in knowledge.
- ✓ Think about and overcome what may be blocking your learning by using a different approach, or setting more pragmatic (realistic/achievable) goals.
- ✓ Support and enrich your professional practice ensuring that you are better placed to respond to and manage new, unexpected and complex situations.

6. Tools to support reflective learning:

There are different tools and methods for reflective learning. Some tools include: **learning journals** and **mind maps**.

6.1. Learning Journals:

A learning journal encourages you to reflect on your learning in relation to specific activities (e.g. an assignment, a development framework, a topic of study), and can be used for different purposes including project development, experiential learning, and personal development planning. Use specific questions to structure your reflective thinking. You can adopt a structure for each entry, which could include the topic, activity or setting and date, the learning objectives, and key critical notes on your reflections about what you did (experienced, observed etc.) and what and how you have learned. Keep your portfolio up to date, and review, reflect on, evaluate and record your progress. Monitor your performance, relating the activity to your coursework, for example, by making constructive use of any feedback received from your tutor, acting on this to improve your existing work or future assignments by considering how you would do things differently.

6.2. Mind maps:

Mind maps are also known as concept maps or ‘spider’ diagrams. These and other visual representations involving diagrams, sketches, cartoons and the use of colour, are useful creative tools that help to structure, categorise, and make connections between ideas. They steer away from ‘linear’ thinking, provide you with an overview of key concepts and their connections, and help reflective learning become visually engaging, dynamic and memorable. Mind maps are also useful tools for structuring your thoughts for an assignment, and for planning and drafting essays, reports, projects and dissertations. They will help to motivate you, and get your academic writing off to a good start. Mind maps are also known as concept maps or ‘spider’ diagrams.