Reflective practice

Reflective practice involves reviewing and analysing your experiences for the purpose of learning from that experience. Reflective practice is an integral part of action learning. Action learning involves producing a plan of action (e.g. a lesson plan) or designing an experiment (e.g. a new activity). Boud et al., defines reflection as ‘a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations’ (Boud et al., 1985, p. 19). The cultural and didactic challenges inherent in transnational education make reflective practice a particularly important aspect of course delivery. The action learning cycle provides a structured approach to reflective practice and it can be a very useful tool to enhancing the effectiveness of your teaching.

Academic and teaching staff who are new to transnational teaching often find themselves on a steep learning curve. Experience is often a primary source of learning. As a result adopting the discipline of reflective practice can assist in quickly integrating the lessons of experience.

Becoming a reflective practitioner

The starting point for reflection is usually the individual’s own experience. Practitioners must draw from different experiences and contexts, and identify linkages to critically analyse their own beliefs and assumptions relating to their own practice. Katy Newell Jones provides some insights into the global dimensions of higher education in the 21st century and the challenges and opportunities we face:


There are several ways in which to become a reflective practitioner:

• The most critical factor in effective reflective practice is making the time to do it. Set aside a regular time to reflect on your experiences.
• Establish a structure to assist your reflection. The structure could involve setting yourself some specific goals in areas of teaching practice you want to develop such as teaching styles and methods, assessment and feedback methods, assumptions about students and the learning process.

• Use a learning journal to record your experiences and focus your reflections.

• Document the ways in which you have attempted to improve and extend your knowledge of your teaching. What has worked? What hasn’t? Why? Where to next?

• Consider engaging a mentor or peer to assist your reflective practice. Others may help you to focus and to think about your experiences more broadly.

• Reflections may also include ideas and learnings that come from relevant literature and any professional development activities you undertake.

• Create a blog or online discussion group focusing on the development of best practice in teaching in your discipline.

• Periodically evaluate the rigour and effectiveness of your reflective practice.

Sample reflective practice
Take time each week to reflect on and review your teaching practice. You can ask yourself questions such as:

• What am I trying to achieve? What actions am I taking to achieve it?

• How effective are my actions?

• What impact is this having on my students?

• How can I do it better?

The reflective practice online guide provides an example of how one staff member uses tasks such as reviewing content and writing and moderating assessments cause her to reflect on her practice
http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=42y49n66wmp1

Useful resources
Support is available from your Deputy Head of School (Learning & Teaching) or equivalent. Your College Academic Development Group or learning & teaching specialist can also provide advice, support and professional development.

For additional information on the process of reflective learning and teaching and fundamental benefits of the practice, visit:

Cornell University’s online teaching evaluation handbook discusses ways to improve teaching practice through reflection and feedback, and presents case examples http://www.cte.cornell.edu/documents/Teaching%20Evaluation%20Handbook.pdf
References


