

Discussion Forums

Learning through Reflection

We learn by experiences that allow us to (Wertenbroch & Nabeth, 2000):

- Absorb (read, hear, feel)
- Do (activity)
- Interact (socialize)

In addition, we also learn by reflecting on such experiences (Dewey 1933). Reflection is thinking for an extended period by linking recent experiences to earlier ones in order to promote a more complex and interrelated mental schema. The thinking involves looking for commonalities, differences, and interrelations beyond their superficial elements. The goal is to develop higher order thinking skills.

Many educators consider Dewey (1933) the modern day originator of the concept of reflection, although he drew on the ideas of earlier educators, such as Aristotle, Plato, and Confucius. He thought of reflection as a form of problem solving that chained several ideas together by linking each idea with its predecessor in order to resolve an issue.

Essentials of Reflection

Hatton & Smith (1995) identified four essential issues concerning reflection:

- We should learn to frame and reframe complex or ambiguous problems, test out various interpretations, and then modify our actions consequently.
- Our thoughts should be extended and systematic by looking back upon our actions sometime after they have taken place.
- Certain activities labeled as reflective, such as the use of journals or group discussions following practical experiences, are often not directed towards the solution of specific problems.
- We should consciously account for the wider historic, cultural, and political values or beliefs in framing practical problems to arrive at a solution. This is often identified as critical reflection. However, the term critical reflection, like reflection itself, appears to be used loosely, some taking it to mean no more than constructive self-criticism of one's actions with a view to improvement.

Critical Reflection

Going one step further is *Critical Reflection* — the process of analyzing, reconsidering and questioning experiences within a broad context of issues (Murray, Kujundzic, 2005). Four activities are central to critical reflection (Brookfield 1988):

- Assumption analysis - This is the first step in the critical reflection process. It involves thinking in such a manner that it challenges our beliefs, values, cultural practices, and social structures in order to assess their impact on our daily proceedings. Assumptions are our way of seeing reality and to aid us in describing how the order of relationships.
- Contextual awareness - Realizing that our assumptions are socially and personally created in a specific historical and cultural context.

- Imaginative speculation - Imagining alternative ways of thinking about phenomena in order to provide an opportunity to challenge our prevailing ways of knowing and acting.
- Reflective skepticism - Questioning of universal truth claims or unexamined patterns of interaction through the prior three activities - assumption analysis, contextual awareness, and imaginative speculation. It is the ability to think about a subject so that the available evidence from that subject's field is suspended or temporarily rejected in order to establish the truth or viability of a proposition or action.

Encouraging Reflection

Most educators believe that "reflection is useful in the learning process, even without the supporting research data." However, it is often difficult to encourage reflection among the learners. Gustafson & Bennett (1999) found that promoting reflection among military cadets by means of written responses in "diaries" was difficult. Cadets across three different years generally did not produce responses indicating any deep reflection. Although the results were disappointing, they are consistent with the research literature on promoting reflection that generally indicates it is difficult to accomplish (Stamper, 1996).

In their work, Gustafson and Bennett identified eleven variables that affected the cadets' lack of reflective behavior. These eleven variables are grouped into three main characteristics:

- Learner
- Environmental
- Reflection Task

Source: Clark, Don.(2000) "Performance, Learning, leadership & knowledge".

<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/development/reflection.html>

Discussion Forum Etiquette for Students

How to Communicate Effectively in a Discussion Forum

A Discussion Forum is an opportunity for students to get to know their classmates, their instructor, and to share relevant information. The **way** this is done is very important since your voice and facial expressions cannot be heard or seen, your text postings must be very clear, polite, and friendly. Below is a list suggestions created to help you succeed in an online Discussion Forum.

Your instructor expects from you:

Courtesy

- Be nice.
- Please be courteous to the other students in the class. You might find it helpful to read your posting out loud before you submit it: the "tone" is a very important part of electronic communication. When you read your message out loud does it sound the way you would speak to another student in the classroom?
- Please refrain from inappropriate language.
- **Never** make derogatory comments toward another person in the class.
- Disagree with ideas, but do not make personal attacks.

Commitment to Learning & Participation

- Make a personal commitment to learning about, understanding, and supporting your peers.

- Assume the best of others in the class and expect the best from them.
- Recognize and value the experiences, abilities, and knowledge each person brings to class. Value the diversity of the class.
- Participate actively in the discussions, having completed the readings and thought about the issues.
- Pay close attention to what your classmates write in their online comments. Ask clarifying questions, when appropriate. These questions are meant to probe and shed new light, not to minimize or devalue comments.
- Think through and re-read your comments before you post them; read it out loud: does it say what you want it to say?
- Encourage others to develop and share their ideas.
- Remember to read what has previously been posted by others to avoid repeating comments.
- Make sure you are posting under the appropriate heading or thread.
- Cite your references.

Writing Excellence

The Discussion Forum is part of a college course, so your writing style should conform to the rules of Standard English. Here are some guidelines for all postings to the Discussion Forum:

- Avoid slang (e.g., "Wassup?", "Yo," "Dude", and so forth)
- Don't curse
- Use standard spelling:
- You (not u)
- Are (not r)
- To or too (not 2)
- You're (not ure)
- Right (not rite)
- I (not i)

The instructor reserves the right to delete any student postings they feel are inappropriate.