

Think about it... Turbocharge your Students' Learning through Reflection



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Today's students will solve tomorrow's problems. To support this, teachers in higher education should create opportunities for their students to work across disciplinary/cultural boundaries, negotiate complex challenges and learn from their experiences. In this context, reflection is an integral component of learning in all disciplines. In the 21st Century, the capacity to reflect is an essential graduate capability.

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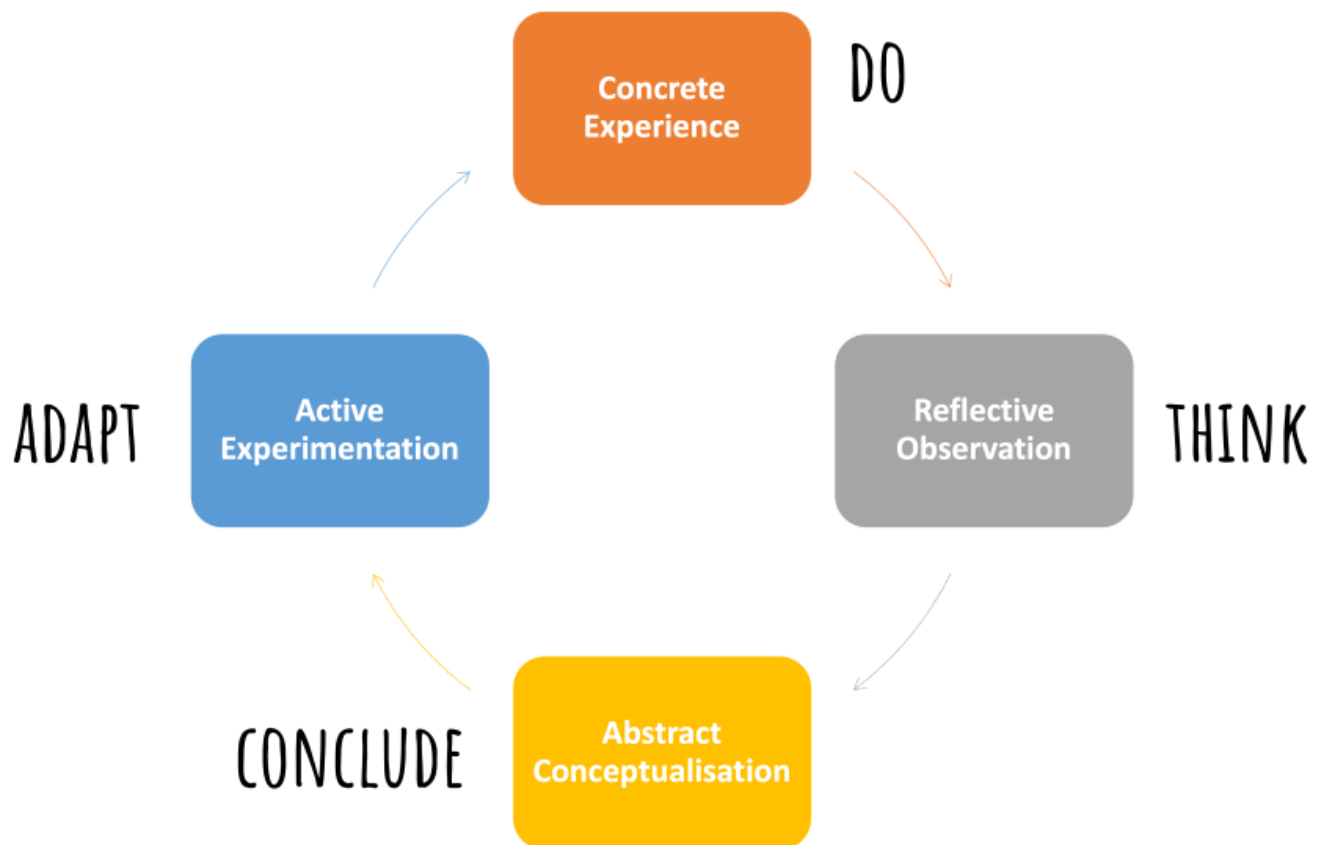
In the context of learning, reflection can be defined as: the conscious examination of past experiences, thoughts and ways of doing things. Its goal is to surface learning about oneself and the situation, and to bring meaning to it in order to inform the present and the future. It challenges the status quo of practice, thoughts and assumptions and may therefore

inform our decisions, actions, attitudes, beliefs and understanding about ourselves .

What does learning through reflection and action look like?

To describe the ways in which students learn through action, David Kolb (1984) developed a four-part experiential learning cycle:

- In the first stage, students have a concrete experience
- In the second, they reflect upon that experience
- In the third, students build on or modify their conceptual understandings
- Finally, students use and apply these concepts in new situations to gain new experiences and start the next learning cycle



Kolb's Reflective Cycle (adapted)

The benefits of reflection as an activity

Beyond Kolb's notion that learning may be 'incomplete' without reflection, we recognise the ability to reflect as a **capacity** that has a number of direct benefits for

students.

The capacity to reflect can:

- help students 'escape the abstract' and relate what they know to specific situations
 - prepare students to navigate complex situations that are unclear, confusing, complex, and unstable, where the outcome may be highly uncertain, and the goals may be conflicting
 - help students become more critical, for example through questioning the validity of what they read, see and hear
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How can I support student reflection in my classroom?

The following are a list of ways in which structured student reflection can be introduced or supplemented in your classroom. As always, consideration should be given to the disciplinary context, the level of study and the overall objectives of the module/programme:

- **Ask students to fill in reflective journals/diaries.** These might include descriptions of events they have experienced, what those events mean for them, and what they might have learned from the experience. Remember to persevere and support your students in these activities! Students can be unfamiliar with reflection and reflections can remain at quite a superficial or descriptive level, initially at least
- **Ask students to blog** using the [OU blog tool in MyPlace](#)
- **Build in reflection breaks.** This could involve simply asking students to share what they have learned with the person sitting next to them or to update a reflective diary
- Encourage students to **supplement written reflections with images/videos**
- **Model reflection in your teaching.** Demonstrate to students how you work through scenarios, learn from new experiences, and respond to/incorporate divergent concepts or perspectives
- **Use simple tools such as [Minute papers](#) and 'exit slips'** to help students evaluate their understanding during or after a learning activity
- **[Think, Pair, Share](#)**
- **Get students to assess their own work** using a rubric or marking guide

For more information about implementing reflection in your classroom, we recommend the [University of Edinburgh's Reflection Toolkit](#).

What does reflection look like in your discipline? How do you support reflection in the classroom? What are the challenges? Please consider adding a comment below to join the conversation