



Resource Review

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Introduction

This second edition of the book offers new and experienced staff a breadth of approaches to Reflective Learning in Higher Education. Firmly grounded in academic theories and methodologies it describes a range of pedagogic approaches to developing and owning reflective learning. Divided into three main sections around concepts, practical context and exemplars the possibility exists of using these as stand alone aspects or to follow a theme from the theoretical underpinning through practice to example and a final conclusion. Each chapter includes an introductory section outlining the content and there is little emphasis on subject, rather on the learner making it relevant in their own personal context.

Content

Introduction - this sets out to advocate reflective learning, approaching this from a theoretical basis, the contemporary context of practice and its facilitation enabling the reader to use the book as separate aspects or in threaded approaches. Its stated intention is to "*promote learning that is critical*" and enable us as learners "*to take risks beyond that which is necessary*". Choice and responsibility is advocated on where the learner is now and how s/he relates to the journey towards reflective learning.

Part one - this starts with themes of learning in Higher Education, the purpose of types of learning and the relevance of approaches to promoting learning. The authors discuss the aspirations of UK HE aligned to student progression from undergraduate to postgraduate and going beyond the instrumental conditions for learning, asking

how reflective learning can be promoted and encouraged. They articulate an aim to “*support those in HE who wish to create the conditions for learning at the transformational end of learning*”. Drawing on theoretical models and methodologies we are introduced to the significance of the relationship to learning with a focus on the student at the centre.

The philosophies and principles of learning are drawn from key literature including social constructivism and social activity theory and an emphasis on the commitment to reflective practice in identifying personal philosophies. The review of learning theories explores research approaches and the models underpinning reflection, practice and reflective learning. A view is put forward that the understanding and practice of reflective dialogue is the responsibility of all teachers in HE. The requirements for reflection/reflective practice are considered and the complex factors affecting the student learning experience including enthusiasm, openness, communication (two way), empathy and co-management. The final part of this section deals with the meanings of reflection and reflective practice and its importance in promoting deep and significant learning in HE. The experience of personal reflection enables a dialogue from a position of knowledge and enhances individual practice through the use of the (Schön) reflection in and on action model.

Part two - introduces us to the facilitation of learning and reflective practice – its development, facilitation and use by staff and students to enhance learning. Approaches to reflective practice through reflective dialogue are developed in these chapters which deal with academic practice and learning, methods of reflection, assessment, enabling reflective practice and facilitation in practice. The use of technology to support reflective learning is linked to the HE agenda to move to blended and e – learning.

The inclusion of staged workshops incorporating reflective dialogue into practice and based around a teaching session are a useful tool for staff developers in the context of postgraduate programmes for staff. There is consideration given to the facilitation, difficulties and the benefits of adopting these methodologies while still maintaining subject expertise. The possibilities for reflective dialogue in creating conditions for reflective learning, whilst recognising that critically reflective learning can be challenging as well as exciting, is discussed. As in part one the chapters draw on seminal and recent research in reflective practice and learning and address issues of concern in the assessment of reflective learning.

Part three - this offers exemplars to promote reflective dialogue and learning which resonate with three activities in common use by staff developers, particularly in the context of postgraduate programmes for new staff, namely action learning sets (group work), academic supervision and mentoring. Each chapter outlines as appropriate the origins, models, use for student learning and staff development (and potential for misuse), roles, conditions and expectations and examples of implementation. Underlying this is the transition from dependence to independence in learning as well as the development of inter-dependence and collaboration in learning.

The Conclusion references recent developments in learning in HE. A challenge for postgraduate programmes is in developing reflective process in the approaches of (new) staff suggesting that this should be explicitly declared in programme outcomes. The authors’ personal conviction is explicit that a HE system “*promoting reflective learning through reflective dialogue has the potential to develop the autonomy and interdependence of students, preparing them for the rapidly changing and challenging world they will face in the 21st century.*”

The appendices outline approaches to aspects of reflective learning and dialogue including the development of reflective journals.

Summary

This is a book that will support both new and experienced staff who either choose or are directed to look at reflective learning. However, some signposting for its use, particularly for staff new to educational theory (in practice), would be useful in managing the depth and breadth of content and concepts found here. The excellent reference base and bibliography in each section and individual chapters leads the reader to further research and reading, thus supporting deeper understanding of pedagogy and personal development. It challenges the reader to think about their approaches from curriculum development to delivery and assessment and how that process can support the facilitation of reflective learning.