

TASK 2c.

Reflective Theory.

When considering reflective theory and critical thinking and how it relates to my professional practice it is first necessary to understand the main theories and perspective that exist in these areas.

The starting point for reflective theory must begin with reflective thought, we must think about experiences in the right way to gain insight from them and go on to learn something new. John Dewey describes reflective thought as,

“active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933)

Dewey was interested in experience, and believed that the quality of an experience we have is directly related to the amount we learn from it, and that it is necessary for us to fully engage with any experience to get the most from it.

Learning from experience is a natural process; it is something that we all do all of the time. When we begin an activity we search out minds for last time we did it or for similar experiences and apply this knowledge. Just to be able to cope and deal with our day to day activities, the way we decide what action to take at any given moment, we do this from what we have learned previously and move from this.

By using reflective thought we can look back and identify the most important and meaningful experiences, by looking back and identifying the value, and then going on as Dewey suggest to “carefully consider” what has happened, how this challenges or supports our current actions and beliefs, or brings to light gaps in our knowledge, we may be able to learn more from our experiences than we had previously realised. This Dewey describes as,

“continual reorganisation, reconstruction and transformation of experience”
(Dewey, 1916)

David Kolb was interested and informed by the work of Dewey and developed the Kolb Learning cycle (appendix A)

Consisting of four stages Kolb’s learning cycle also includes like Dewey’s theories the importance of learning from experience. Using Kolb’s tool allows the user to reflect and look at the way they learn in order to identify their learning style by the point at which they enter the cycle.

Some learn by being involved in or doing an activity through “Concrete Experience”. By watching others or looking back at an experience some learn through “Reflective Observation”. Many of us need time to think about something and work it out in our heads before we learn something new, this is “Abstract Conceptualisation”. Or finally there are some who throw themselves into something and experiment, plan and learn as the go along, “Active Experimentation”.

Using Kolb's Learning cycle we can look and reflect upon how and when we begin to learn something new. It is valuable for us to be able to reflect on at which point we enter the cycle so that we are able to understand what it is we need to do to support our own learning, where we may need to start with a new project or learning experience and how to move forward with this.

I for example like to see what it is I am trying to achieve before I start to learn something new, so I enter the cycle at "Reflective Observation". I then go on to work it all out in my head, plan my next steps and have a go at doing it, until I get the point where I am having a "concrete experience" or performing the task at hand. I'm then able to go back and reflect on my own actions, improvements and successes and enter the cycle again to build upon the experience.

While Kolb identifies the different points in an experience we may begin to learn something new and so identify our learning style. Donald Schon introduces the different points within an experience where we may begin to meaningfully reflect on what is happening. He identifies that reflection may happen while you are in the middle of an experience as well as being a process that is outside of it.

"Reflection in action" the response to what is happening as it happens, and "reflection on action" the response and looking back on what has happened once the experience is over. The distinction between the two will be entirely dependent on the work and situation that we are engaging in at the time.

Robert Kottcamp also identifies this difference in the time of reflection and refers to them as "on-line" or "off-line" reflections. He states that on-line reflection is more difficult to achieve but also the more powerful of the two,

"more powerful for the improvement of practice because it results in "online" experiments to adjust and improve one's professional actions. It is more difficult to achieve because the actor must simultaneously attend to the performing of the action and observe and analyse his or her action, as if from an external perspective."

(Kottcamp 1990)

This also links back to Kolb's point on the cycle "active experimentation". Reflecting during an experience, amending your work and then experimenting to make improvement could lead to more powerful learning.

But Kottcamp also states that,

"Reflection-on-action is accomplished "off-line" at a time when full attention can be given to analysis and planning for the future without the imperative for immediate action..." (Kottcamp 1990)

To me "full attention" implies that more meaningful analysis can occur when reflecting off-line. So perhaps reflection both on-line and off-line can both be processes used together to further education.

Howard Gardner looked at the idea of "multiple intelligences", the idea that we are intelligent in a number of different ways and that we should not necessarily be limited by identifying ourselves as one particular type of learner. He identifies eight types of intelligence. (Appendix B)

Unlike Kolb or Kottcamp, Gardner's theory doesn't require us to define a particular

time or way that we reflect or learn, but suggests that there may be multiple ways for us to interpret and reflect upon our experiences, and that we can use this as a tool to understand how we learn.

The idea of “multiple lenses” (Gardner 2005) multiple ways the look at things
“give value to the different ways we can engage with real world experience”

(Reader WBS3730 *The reflective practitioner* 2011/12)

Within the arts there is often knowledge that we possess or methods of reflection that we use that don't involve linguistics, for example some people may dance or draw or play music as a process of reflection or working through their ideas. This kind of knowledge, which cannot be expressed with words is known as tacit.

Jennifer Moon (1999) and others have talked about the importance of trying to find ways of communicating this knowledge as it may have important meaning and understanding that we need to access as part of reflection.

Moon has written much about the process and importance of writing journals,

“It reflects back to me things that I can learn about my world and myself.”

(Moon 1999)

It is an important way of keeping a record of our reflective process so that we are able to use this knowledge to move us on to further work or ideas. It doesn't matter how we reflect or work through these ideas but it is important that there is evidence for ourselves of what we have experienced.

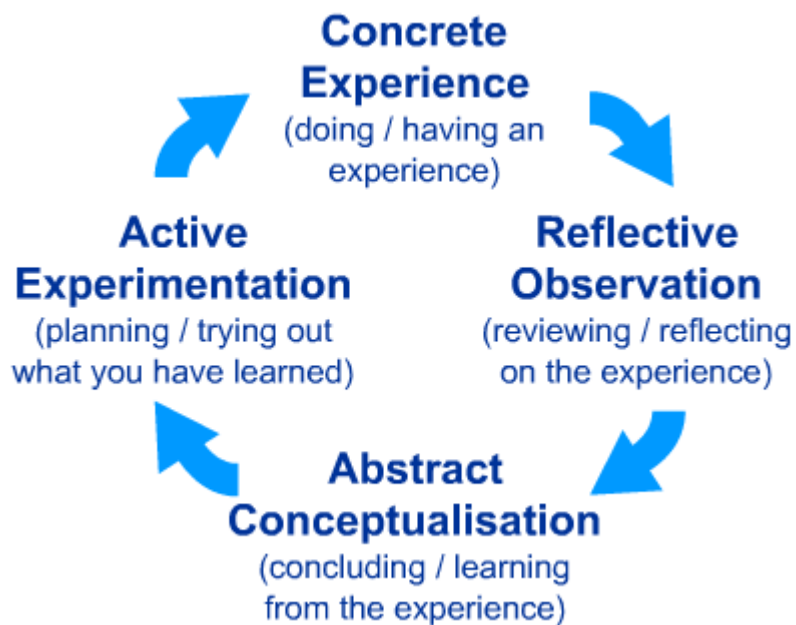
“The journal is not the process itself but becomes the outcome of the reflective practice you engage in”

(Reader WBS3730 *The reflective practitioner* 2011/12)

All of the theories I have presented are based around reflection. Whether reflection as a process in Dewey's case, as a way of improving oneself and engaging with experience or reflection as a learning tool as used in Kolb's learning cycle. Schon and Kottcamp look at how and when during an experience we reflect and the impact this then has on our practice. Gardner looks at the ways in which we are intelligent and how we can use these many “lenses” in our understanding of ourselves and our work. And finally the work of Moon says that it doesn't matter what process we use to reflect but we need to actively try and record the knowledge and thoughts that we generate.

Appendices.

(A) Kolb's Learning Cycle.



(B) Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

- **Linguistic intelligence** ("word smart")
- **Logical-mathematical intelligence** ("number/reasoning smart")
- **Spatial intelligence** ("picture smart")
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence** ("body smart")
- **Musical intelligence** ("music smart")
- **Interpersonal intelligence** ("people smart")
- **Intrapersonal intelligence** ("self smart")
- **Naturalist intelligence** ("nature smart")

References.

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