

Reflection on my higher studies- Masters of Business Administration

Amanda Boyd

I have developed during the short time being a student on the Masters of Business Administration (MBA) programme, although I feel that consciously reflecting upon the experience and how it is developing me as a teacher remains one of the most valuable actions. Reflection can be defined 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 conclusions to which it tends to constitute reflective thoughts, (Ghaye ,2005:178). Thus, reflection within the context of teaching and attainment of knowledge is a developmental aid that if utilised correctly can enhance my studies along with both teaching and student learning.

Another reflective model that is has been developmental in my educations and teaching practice is that of David Kolb's. This was devised in the 1980's but acknowledges the early work on experiential learning from the 1900's. The model emphasises the idea of experimental learning and is based around the conversion of information into knowledge. According to Kolb (cited in Avis et al 2009) this conversion occurs after the situation has occurred and requires a practitioner reflecting on the experience, gaining a general understanding of the concepts encountered during the experience and then testing these general understandings on a fresh situation. Thus, the knowledge that is gained from a situation is continuously applied and reapplied building on a practitioner's prior experiences and knowledge (Kolb et al, 2005).

Although I am just at the beginning of my studies, with only one module completed, I feel this 'increased knowledge' has developed my professionalism as a Higher Education practitioner. Brand (2007: 9) examined three constituent ideas which he believes underpin professionalism; these are identified as knowledge, autonomy and responsibility. The argument suggests that the need for a specialist body of knowledge is essential to deal with intricate and changeable situations and that autonomy is essential in order to make decisions or evaluations, and it is these decisions which render the need to act responsibly.

These constituent ideas, which can be believed to underpin professionalism, have always been apparent within the context of my own seven years of teaching and has principally become greater in appearance since gaining my post graduate qualification and once again returning to further higher study on the MBA . The first constituent idea, knowledge, is not something that many new teachers initially have

in abundance, however, this is something which is built over time. It is evident that I have built my knowledge base up significantly since I first began my teaching career, through reflective practice, and aided further with my study and attainment of post graduate qualifications. This can be illustrated in my ability to competently answer any appropriate questions which may be raised within my classes in reference to the area in which has been studied or even the wider context. It is evident that this explicit knowledge base increases the confidence of tutor from the perspective of the student. It is this confidence from my students that allows me to exercise autonomy effectively, the second constituent idea, thus, allowing me to make essential decisions or evaluations. Finally, it is these necessary decisions which render the need to act responsibly. The application of these three constituent ideas which underpin the concept of professionalism enhance the teaching and ultimately learning within my classes. This is weighted further by Forsyth (2016), who believes that teachers should be up to date in their field to be proficient in their roles.

Furthermore, for learning within my specialism of marketing it is of vital importance that students are able to see issues in a full and complete context, taking in to consideration all actual and possible factors. At the beginning of every new academic year many students come to my session with very set ideas and therefore very rigid perspectives. In this sense an individual's perspective can be interpreted as their concept of reality. Thus, the many differing perspectives equates to differing realities. This can cause problems when adopting a teaching model that fits all. With this in mind Dr. Jack Mezirow (1981), who is widely acknowledged as the founder of the concept of transformative learning, saw the teacher's role as one which supports growth and reconstruction of the learner's perspectives. This is achieved by encouraging the learners to develop criteria for assessment of experiences – because experiences will alter or strengthen perspectives (Mezirow,1981).

With this in mind and reflecting upon my own personal need to develop my critical discussions within my study, my aim is to broaden the student's perception in order for them to recognise that almost all issues are in fact multi-faceted. For example, when discussing a topic area, I pose questions to students to generate debates to gain alternative perspectives around said topic to illustrate that we cannot make a reliable judgement based on issues which are pure speculative in nature. We need to be aware a variety of views before we make a judgement. Thus rendering and authenticating the need for an increase in peer reviewed journal articles being utilised in my teaching practice.

Broadening the student's perception has a tremendous impact on the student's ability to learn effectively. In Higher Education it is essential in that a student can look beyond the basics of any issue with some ease (Reece and Walker 2009). I have found this technique instrumental in the enhancement of HE student learning particularly within the context of marketing which can be notoriously multi-faceted as there is often no true answer , it is always debatable.

Conversely, and with my critical reflection it does not come without exertions. Achieving the right level of analysis is not without its difficulties for any student (Humphreys and Hyland 2002). I feel the best way to overcome this issue is by forming a practical framework to operationalise and de-mystify critical thinking within any intricate topical area of Business. In practice this is a simple notion and can include concept mapping as an aid to criticality, a technique I have found useful myself to assist in my own understanding whilst studying.

Carroll, (2002) agrees that lightening the cognitive load can aid critical thinking. Strategies such as using simple language, allowing time for the student to think about what has been said, where possible to use diagrams and pictures to re-enforce the message, and to give the students a plan of the discussion in a diagram or simply reinforcing on the white board to help them see how ideas will be developed. I aim to continue and expand utilise a variety of techniques in order to lighten the cognitive load and aid effective learning. I will give the students more time to prepare and ensure that I outline main points of the journal articles. Also, by making direct and obvious links to other topics which have been covered or are to be covered in the future will ensure that the cognitive load has been lightened.

The concept of professionalism within the realms of teaching represents a dynamic, vast and yet interchangeable system of ideas which are capable of and have been very much contested depending on the individual context present. This reflection has justified my further attainment of professionalism , and the further use of reflection throughout my postgraduate studies and teaching career will be fundamental to my future teaching success.

Reference List

Avis, J, Fisher, R and Thompson, R (2009) *Teaching in lifelong Learning : A guide to theory and Practice*. Maidenhead: open University Press

Brand, A (2007) The long and winding road: professional development in further and higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher education*, Vol 31 (1) p7-16

Caroll, J. (2002) 'Suggestions for Teaching International Students More Effectively' [online] Oxford: Oxford Brookes University. Available at <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/>. [Accessed 12th June 2017]

Forsyth, D,R. (2016) *In: College **teaching**: Practical insights from the science of **teaching** and learning*, 2nd ed. USA: American Psychological Association

Ghaye, A (2005) Reflection as a catalyst for change. *Reflective Practice*. Vol6 (2) p177-187

Humphreys ,M and Hyland, T (2002) Theory, Practice and Performance in Teaching: professionalism intuition, and Jazz. *Educational Studies*, Vol 28 (1),p5-15

Kolb, M, Alice Y.; Kolb, D,A. (2005). "Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education". *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 4 (2): 193–212.

Mezirow, J. (1981) A Critical Theory of Adult education and Learning. *Adult Education* 32. pp3-24

Reece, I and Walker, S. (2009). *Teaching, Training and learning: a practical guide*. 6th ed. Tyne and Wear: business education publishers limited.