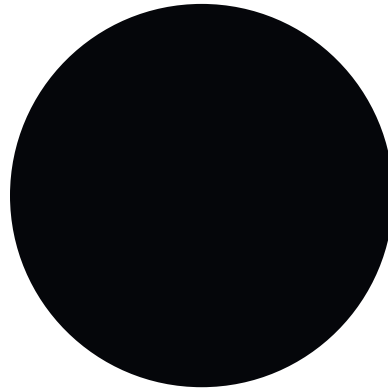


Reflective Writing



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Reflecting on practice makes you aware of the decisions you make and why. The hope is that it improves your decision making in the future. In a design sense, practice is about deliberate decision making... and being able to think about some things and do other things 'without' thinking.

Reflective Writing

Introduction

As designers we use reflective thinking in order to understand:

01 / The connections between creativity, criticality and reflection

02 / The importance of curiosity, experimentation and risk taking in design education

03 / Life at University and their responsibilities towards undergraduate learning, including self-regulation, motivation and management

04 / Experiential Learning, including active participation, research, and critical reflection on your own learning.

Why reflect on practice?

In collaborations, it is essential to be able to articulate as much as you can about this process, about how you practice, so that you can work with others productively... and reflect collectively.

In addition, reflection on practice

- Anchors theory in meaningful, concrete experience, helping to bring it alive;
- Gives recognition to learning gained in non-academic contexts;
- Provides a bridge between practical experience and academic study;
- Helps develop understanding of difficult work situations, improving professional practice. (adapted from S. Cottrell 2011b p. 225)

What is reflective writing?

First, read and think about the following examples:

Question: Discuss at least two things you learnt or discovered – for example about design, or working in groups or the physical world – through participating in the Impromptu Design activities.

Firstly, the most obvious thing that I discovered was the advantage of working as part of a group [1]. I learned that good teamwork is the key to success in design activities when time and resources are limited. As everyone had their own point of view, many different ideas could be produced and I found the energy of group participation made me feel more energetic about contributing something [2].

Secondly I discovered that even the simplest things on earth could be turned into something amazing if we put enough creativity and effort into working on them [1]. With the Impromptu Design activities [3] we used some simple materials such as straws, string, and balloons, but were still able to create some 'cool stuff' [4]. I learned that every design has its weaknesses and strengths and working with a group can help discover what they are. We challenged each other's preconceptions about what would and would not work. We could also see the reality of the way changing a design actually affected its performance [5].

1. Addresses the assignment question
2. Reflects on direct experiences
3. Direct reference to the course activity.
4. The style is relatively informal, yet still uses full sentences.
6. Relating what was learnt.

(from 'Reflective Writing', The Learning Centre, UNSW www.lc.unsw.edu.au)

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Why do reflective writing?

According to philosopher and educator John Dewey (1933), we begin to reflect on a complex situation when we face that situation and ask ourselves what needs to be done.

Reflective Practice is an approach that emerged from Donald Schön's work in education and action research (Schön 1983). Jasper (2005) suggests that reflective writing intends to be transformative particularly 'in terms of knowledge generation from the exploration of practice, the development of analytical and critical thinking and the potential for creativity and connecting disparate ideas'. (RMIT Study and Learning Centre 2012)

Research shows that the more we write about what we are doing and thinking, the clearer our ideas become. Repeated writing on a theme allows for the development of abstract ideas and complex relationships. Furthermore, when we return to earlier entries in our journals, we may discover we are able to answer a question, or we may suddenly understand the importance of a certain thought to the development of our work.' (RMIT Study and Learning Centre 2012).

A model of reflection

Reflective models share three basic assumptions. There are that we can

- Think back over our experiences;
- Understand them at a deeper level;
- Use that understanding to do things differently in the future – that is effect change through learning.' (S. Cottrell 2011b p. 221)

'Design projects must ultimately pass through three spaces.... We label these "inspiration," for the circumstances (be they a problem, an opportunity, or both) that motivate the search for solutions; "ideation," for the process of generating, developing, and testing ideas that may lead to solutions; and "implementation," for the charting of a path to market. Projects will loop back through these spaces – particularly the first two – more than once as ideas are refined and new directions taken.' (Tim Brown)

Method of Reflection: The DIEP strategy

The four steps in this approach (adapted from Boud, D. 1985, Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning) are to describe, interpret, evaluate and plan.

D – Describe objectively what happened

- Answer the question: 'What did I do, read, see, hear, etc?'

I – Interpret the events

- Consider why events happened in the way they did. Explain:
 - What you saw and heard
 - Your new insights
 - Your connections with other learning
 - Your feelings
 - Your hypotheses and/or conclusions
- Answer the question: 'what might this mean?'

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E – Evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the experience

- Make judgments that are clearly connected to observations you have made.
- Answer the questions:
 - What is my opinion about this experience?
 - What is the value of this experience?
 - Why do I think this?

P – Plan how this information will be useful to you

- Consider: In what ways might this learning experience serve me in my:
 - Course program
 - Future career
 - Life generally
- Answer the question:
 - ‘How will I transfer or apply my new knowledge and insights in the future?’

(from RMIT Learning Centre, www.rmit.edu.au/studyandlearningcentre)

Some questions to answer in reflective summary

- What broad lessons did you learn?
- What was the most fulfilling part of your experience? And the least fulfilling part of it? What does this suggest to you about your values?
- What happened that contradicted your prior beliefs?
- How did your thinking develop and what were the effects of this on your project?
- How have your assumptions about design practice changed?
- What were the consequences of unexpected or difficult feelings?

Integrating knowledge of design and design practice

- What design practices informed your thinking?
- What design literature supports your new insights into design practice?

Suggesting creative solutions and change strategies

- How as the experience changed the way you see design?
- What reasons can you give to change your practice?
- How will you put into practice the new knowledge you have gained?

Examples of reflective writing

Examples adapted from student reflections.

Describing tasks and working experience

The Wk 4 homework task required us to actively observe and record our responses to the current UTS Gallery exhibition “The Bakers Dozen”.

The group comprised of students with a wide range of design interests... I hadn’t expected to become preoccupied with my own anxiety.

Reflection/ critical thinking on a ‘critical incident’

My colleague realised he didn’t know how to use Final Cut Pro X. This situation made me stressed because he just wasted my time using a workstation that is meant to be shared with other students, but I didn’t say anything to embarrass him.

Reflective Writing Examples

Depth of analysis (including ideas from readings)

With my other video I decided to do all by myself after reading Bill Viola's interview (Bellour 1985), that he prefers to film himself which ended up making it a lot simpler...

The process of examination through sketching and research has given me a dialogue with the island [Cockatoo Island] that previously did no exist. I began having "reflective conversations" (K. Dorst, 2011) with my sketches and research. It has taken away some of the apprehension I was feeling about 'going into the unknown'. It has allowed me to focus on potential problems we would face on the island and consider which of my newly acquired 'designerly tools' I might use in resolving them.

Revising and suggestion of a 'new' method or approach

My colleague's most significant contribution was to switch the order of the story breaking it going back and forth. Still using the same start and end but breaking the middle into a few parts and mixing them. He has shown me a new way to tell a story. I've seen it in the movies, I've done it in conversations and in art but I have never tried that technique in my previous animations. Clarity and linearity do not necessarily make the best and most interesting story.

What I have learned and what I need to learn

I think being honest with yourself is not just a relief but it also helps focus your skills. I can keep a dialogue going with any person, but I don't often come up with a big story to tell or making a big story of something very small. It is a skill I push myself to practice more, but the reality is I construct a much better story by putting it together over time with planning and editing. Coming to this conclusion has inspired me to try to make short documentaries.

The most important skill I need to develop is to communicate my ideas in a team situation. I realise that I do not readily put my ideas forward in a group and that this will be very important in my future work as a professional designer. I therefore need to develop the confidence to do this more effectively.

Donna is able to construct high quality and often challenging garments. She uses her research to apply materials creatively and transforms existing expectations of fashion and textile design. In the same way we must take advantage of the limited resources that Cockatoo Island might present.

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Language to use in reflective writing

Interpretation

For me, the	significant important relevant useful	aspect(s) element(s) experience(s) issue(s)	was were
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Previously At the time, At first Initially Subsequently Later	I	thought felt knew noticed questioned realised
--	---	--

This	could be is probably	because of due to explained by related to
------	-------------------------	--

This	reveals demonstrates is different from is similar to
------	---

Outcome

Having	read experienced applied analysed compared	[something] I now	feel think realise wonder know
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I have significantly developed/improved my	skills in knowledge of ability to
--	---

Source: <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/upgrade/pdf/reflectiveJournal.pdf>

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Assessing Reflection

(adapted from K. Burton & J. McNamara 2009, 'Assessing reflection skills in law using criterion-referenced assessment.' *Legal Education Review*, Vol. 19, Nos. 1-2 pp. 171-188)

My reflection skills as evident in my assignment.

Unsatisfactory Merely sets out what happened

Satisfactory Sets out what happened and why it happened.
Approaches the experience and its rationale from a personal perspective.
Follows practices because of habit.
Identifies strengths in previous understanding.

Good – Very Good Makes logical connections between new and previous knowledge.
Adapts or applies previous knowledge to real world experience.
Considers alternative options or solutions.
Identifies strengths and weaknesses in previous understanding.

Excellent Questions assumptions and values underpinning previous knowledge. Solves inconsistencies between expectations from previous knowledge and the experiences in practice.
Shows an awareness of contextual considerations (historical, social, cultural, political).
Uses literature and previous knowledge to support alternative options or solutions.
Identifies strengths and weaknesses in previous understanding and suggests a way forward to dealing with weaknesses.

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References

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Boud, D. 1985, Reflection: *Turning Experience into Learning*

Burton K. & J. McNamara 2009, 'Assessing reflection skills in law using criterion-referenced assessment.' *Legal Education Review*, Vol. 19, no. 1-2, pp. 171-188.

Cottrell, S. 2011, *Critical Thinking Skills*, 2nd edn, Palgrave, London.

RMIT Study and Learning Centre 2012, 'The Reflective Journal', viewed 4 November 2013, (<http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/sites/emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/files/Approaches-The%20reflective%20journal.pdf>)

Schön, Donald 1983, *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*, Ashgate, London (see Preface).

Videos

www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1aYWbLjOU8

www.youtube.com/watch?v=0plCU9oyZIM

www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRF8whWLjqc