Supporting reflective practice.

Over some years working with students within the Information School I have developed a model of reflective practice, and materials for teaching and supporting reflection.

This arose from the problem I encountered with students being asked to “reflect” but not understanding what reflection is, how to do it to achieve deeper learning, or being explained what the value or benefits might be for them. The problem seemed to be compounded by teaching staff themselves not understanding the theories behind reflective practice and therefore not knowing how to help the students.

I designed a reflective assignment within a year long module. The assessment requires students to reflect on their learning throughout the module and post entries to a reflective journal integrated into MOLE. Continuous feedback is given to students so that they know how well they are doing from the start, to encourage their input, and to support their critical reflection.

Students are given a great deal of support starting with their engagement in a reflective writing workshop, that –

- explains the theories behind reflective practice, explaining the difference between descriptive, or surface level reflection, and deep critical reflection,
- explains the benefits that engaging in deep reflection can bring in relation to learning and their continuing professional development,
- gives the students the opportunity to practice reflective writing.

I have subsequently been able to analyse the reflections that the students have written and have produced two academic papers as a result of the work I have done with them (Sen & Ford, 2009; Sen, 2010). This research has enabled me to develop a new model of reflective practice: The SEA-change model of reflection (Figure 1). This model is used in teaching with the students, and at professional workshops.
### SEA-change model of reflection - Sen & Ford (2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEA-change model of reflection</th>
<th>Deep reflection process</th>
<th>Low level reflection some elements of the process will be missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>S-SITUATION</strong></td>
<td>Catalyst</td>
<td>Catalyst</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>Contextual consideration</td>
<td>Context – not always fully considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical reflection of multiple perspectives</strong></td>
<td>Often focus only on self – not multiple perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-EVIDENCE</strong></td>
<td>Assimilation of the evidence</td>
<td>Not fully assimilated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning process based on evidence, new knowledge acquired</strong></td>
<td>Learning at a basic level Reflective process often stops here</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A-ACTION</strong></td>
<td>Need for action identified based on above</td>
<td>Often overlooked OR Reflective process stops here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What action or change is needed?</strong></td>
<td>Often overlooked OR Reflective process stops here</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action or Behaviour change</strong></td>
<td>Often overlooked OR reflective process stops here</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHANGE (behaviour, needs, learning, situation)**

**Figure 1.** The SEA-change Model of Reflection

**Figure 2.** The SEA-Change Model of Reflection in the pedagogical context.
Advice:

- Reflection is not easy to teach. It requires enthusiasm from the tutor in order to “sell” the benefits to the student.
- Don’t overdo it! Don’t ask students to reflect for the sake of it. Use it more sparingly when it really fits with the learning outcomes, and when an appropriate and meaningful assignment can be built around it.
- It is a subject that is best taught face to face, in workshops, allowing the students to engage practical exercises, and engage in discussion. Online materials somehow don’t get the message across.
- It requires trust between the lecturer and the student – the written content that students produce is very subjective, and can be sensitive.
- It can be difficult to mark. I use a marking scheme based on Jenny Moon’s (2007) four levels of reflection, and I explain that to the students’ in the workshop so that they know what is expected of them.

The reflections from the students show that it does work.

- “The process of reflection has heightened my awareness.”
- “I enjoyed the idea of using web 2.0 techniques, which would create a more dynamic and participative form of reflection.”
- “In my future employment I believe it will be vital to maintain records of my achievements …this process will allow me to reflect on my achievements and also identify areas for training or improvement.”
- “I feel I have learnt a great deal about myself which I hope to reflect on throughout my professional career.”
- “The process of reflection has heightened my awareness of the skills I am currently obtaining from the MA program, and has highlighted ways in which these can be transferred to future employment.”
- “On reflection, all of this will be of immeasurable benefit to my management development.”
- “I expect that some of the insights from this year will evolve and expand, as the situations which emerge in my future workplace continue the process of reflective learning began here.”

I am willing to share the content of the teaching materials with people who are interested. Barbara Sen, Lecturer, Information School. b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk

References:

