Reflecting on Your Experiences

**What is Reflection?**

Much has been written about what ‘reflection’ is. According to Hansen (2012: 3), ‘reflection is a broad concept used as a tool for learning in many different disciplines and it is a difficult notion to pin down.’

Gillie Bolton (2014) summarises some key terms found in the literature as follows:

* Reflection – In-depth focused attention.
* Reflective practice – The development of insight and practice through critical attention to practical values, theories, principles, assumptions, and the relationship between theory and practice which inform everyday actions.
* Reflexivity – Focused in-depth reflection upon one’s own perspective, values and assumptions

*(Bolton, 2014: xxiii)*

Jennifer Moon gives a simple definition of reflection as follows:

*Reflection is a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess*

(Moon, 2001: 2)

A useful working definition could be this: reflection is ‘learning through experience toward new insights or changed perceptions of self and practice’ (McIntosh, 2010: 26).

**Benefits of Reflection**

Reflecting on our activities can have many benefits. Reflection is a skill valued by employers and can be usefully applied to most things we choose to do and want to learn from. According to the Open University, reflection is ‘widely considered to be an important activity for professional development’ and has several benefits, e.g. it results in learning through changing ideas and your understanding of a situation; it leads to the development of new ideas which contribute to your learning and development; and it encourages you to look at issues from different perspectives, which helps you to understand the issue and scrutinise your own values, assumptions and perspective (Open University, 1999).

Learning to develop your reflective skills as part of your **My 5YP** can help you not only to recall various aspects of an activity at a later date, but to show how you learned from that activity and how it helped you to move forward with your development. Having a portfolio of activities and reflections, will also put you in a good position for when applying for jobs.

**Getting started**

This is a quick and easy way to think about an activity you have undertaken and start reflecting on it.

1. In the EXPERIENCE box, briefly describe an activity you want to reflect on.
2. Then, in the REFLECTION box, answer these questions: How did I feel during the activity? What went well? What could I have done better? What did I learn? You can write about the event as piece of autobiographical text, e.g. ‘What I hoped to achieve was…’
3. In the LEARNING box, explain what you will do with the learning. Are there any long-term implications? How does it relate to your development?

**References:**

Bolton, G. (2014) *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development*. London: Sage.

Hansen, A. ed. (2012) *Reflective Learning and Teaching in Primary Schools*. London: Sage

McIntosh, P. (2010) *Action Research and Reflective Practice: Creative and Visual Methods to Facilitate Reflection and Learning*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Moon, J. (2001) *Reflection in Higher Education Learning.* PDP Working Paper 4. [Online] [Accessed on 18th May 2021] <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.503.5288>

Open University (1999) *Learning to teach: becoming a reflective practitioner* online course, Section 4, Features of Reflection. [Online] [Accessed on 25th May 2021] <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/learning-teach-becoming-reflective-practitioner/content-section-4>