



Critical Thinking and Reflection

What's it all about?

Critical thinking and reflection are at the heart of higher education and professional development and are fundamental for whatever subject you are studying. They are seen as 'key skills' which employers expect graduates to bring to the workplace from university. They are both developmental and particular to the individual, at the same time they can be specific to cultural and discipline related factors.

Why critical thinking and reflection are important

By **thinking critically** you will develop as an independent learner who can engage more confidently in debate within your subject area. A well known writer on critical thinking, Jenny Moon, gives the following definition:

Critical thinking is a capacity to work with complex ideas whereby a person can make effective provision of evidence to justify a reasonable judgement. The evidence, and therefore the judgement, will pay appropriate attention to context. (Moon, 2005)

Reflection is a complex set of processes which can empower an individual to recognise their learning opportunities and make the most of them. In its simplest form, reflection is the ability to look back over one's experiences and identify significant aspects, such as reasons for success and failure. The important thing, of course, is to then learn from these reflections, by using them to inform practice and future learning.

"Reflection is a process of recalling an event with a view to analysing and evaluating that experience" (lecturer quote)

In their explanation of reflection, Watton, Collings and Moon (2001) use this wonderful bit from the Harry Potter novel 'The Goblet of Fire' to describe reflection. In the following extract Dumbledore the chief wizard and head teacher is talking to Harry about having excess thoughts!

'Harry stared at the stone basin. The contents had returned to their original, silvery white state, swirling and rippling beneath his gaze.

"What is it?" Harry asked shakily.

"This? It is called a Pensieve," said Dumbledore. "I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind."

"Err," said Harry who couldn't truthfully say that he had ever felt anything of the sort.

"At these times" said Dumbledore, indicating the stone basin, "I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one's mind, pours them into a basin, and examines them at one's leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form." (Rowling 2000)

