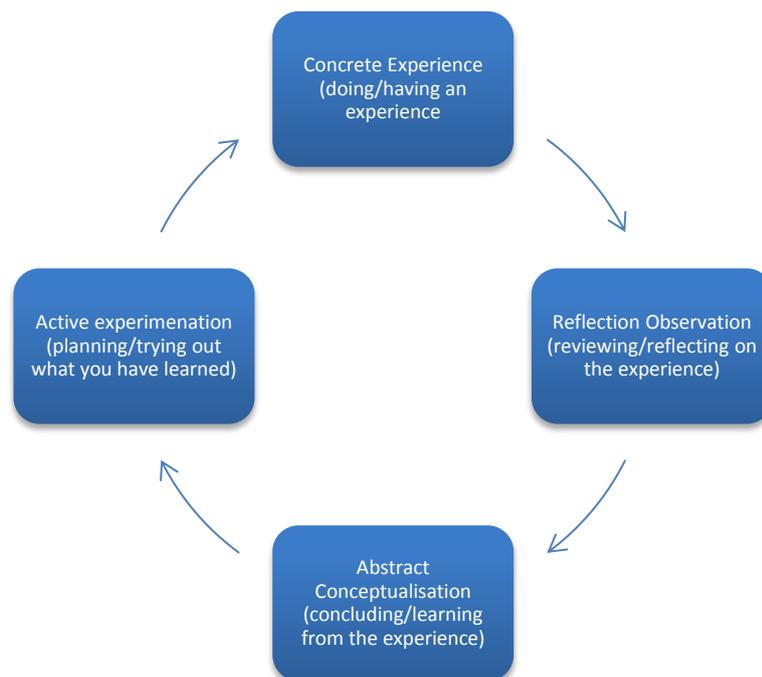


Researching your teaching using reflective practice

Reflective practice is important to the development of lecturers as professionals as it enables us to learn from our experiences of teaching and facilitating student learning. Developing reflective practice means developing ways of reviewing our own teaching so that it becomes a routine and a process by which we might continuously develop. Kolb (1984) developed a theory of experiential learning that can give us a useful model by which to develop our practice. This is called The Kolb Cycle, The Learning Cycle or The Experiential Learning Cycle. The cycle comprises four different stages of learning from experience and can be entered at any point but all stages must be followed in sequence for successful learning to take place. The Learning Cycle suggests that it is not sufficient to have an experience in order to learn. It is necessary to reflect on the experience to make generalisations and formulate concepts which can then be applied to new situations. This learning must then be tested out in new situations. The learner must make the link between the theory and action by planning, acting out, reflecting and relating it back to the theory.



Concrete Experience (doing / having an experience)

In the case of the PGCertHE, the 'Concrete Experience' is the 'doing' component which derives from the content and process of the PGCertHE programme - through attending the workshops or, in the case of the on-line module, your reading of the on-line learning materials - together with your actual experience of teaching in the

classroom plus your other teaching duties and practices. It may also derive from your own experience of being a student.

Reflective Observation (reviewing / reflecting on the experience)

The 'Reflective Observation' element stems from your analysis and judgements of events and the discussion about the learning and teaching that you engage in with your mentor, colleagues and fellow PGCertHE participants. People naturally reflect on their experiences of teaching, particularly when they are new to it and less confident in their abilities or when an experience has been painful. We've all come out of lectures saying to ourselves 'that went well or badly', in an intuitive sense. This might be termed 'common-sense reflection'. But how do we know it was good or bad and what was good or bad about it? We need to articulate our reflections in some systematic way so that we remember what we thought and build on that experience for next time. For example this might be through your own self-reflections or evaluations after the event through keeping a log or journal. It may also include student feedback, peer observation of teaching (e.g. comments made by your mentor or colleague), moderation of assessments, external examiner comments, discussions with your mentor or a fellow participant on the PGCertHE. All of these can be brought together to give an overall reflection on your practice. Reflection in itself, though, is insufficient to promote learning and professional development. Twenty years' experience may consist of twenty years teaching the same content in the same way! Unless we act on our reflections of ourselves and on the opinions of others then no development takes place.

Abstract Conceptualisation (concluding / learning from the experience)

In order to plan what we would do differently next time, we need - in addition to our reflections on our experience - to be informed by educational theory e.g. through readings of relevant literature on teaching and learning or by attending staff development or other activities. Reflection is therefore a middle ground that brings together theories and the analysis of past action. It allows us to come to conclusions about our practice - 'Abstract Conceptualism'.

Active Experimentation (planning / trying out what you have learned)

The conclusions we formed from our 'Abstract Conceptualisation' stage then form the basis by which we can plan changes - 'Active Experimentation'. 'Active Experimentation' then starts the cycle again when we implement those changes in our teaching practice to generate another concrete experience which is then followed by reflection and review to form conclusions about the effectiveness of those changes...

References

Kolb D.A. (1984) *Experiential Learning Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall