

Adoption of Self-Reflection as a Paradigm for a Culture Transformation

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Dear Guests, l'Institut Français du Liban, AUF, Organizing Committee, and Balamandian Colleagues;

I am honored for having been asked to speak at ADMEE- Liban under the theme “Reflective Practices and Self-Evaluation”. I have chosen the title of my talk to be: “Adoption of Self-Reflection as a Paradigm for a Culture Transformation”. To impress you that I am well read on the topic, I will begin with a few excerpts from the literature:

Richard McGrath (2010):

“The use of reflection in and on practice, seeks to improve the practice of teachers by understanding themselves as teachers, the purpose of which is to ultimately assist in improving the education.”

Virve Pekkarinen & Laura Hirsto (2016):

“It is widely accepted among researchers that self-regulation and reflection can be considered the prerequisites and key processes for developing as an expert (e.g., Schön, 1983) and also as a teacher (e.g., Biggs & Tang, 2007; Brookfield, 1995; Hatton & Smith, 1995; McAlpine, Weston, Beauchamp, Wiseman, & Beauchamp, 1999; Tynjälä, 2010).”

“Schön (1983) considered reflection as the means by which experts, such as teachers, can relate theory to practice, develop their own personal theoretical understanding, and guide their future actions. Some researchers see it as a more complex phenomenon, however, with emotional (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985) and social (Connell, 2014; Fleck & Fitzpatrick, 2009; Mälkki, 2011) aspects.”

“Reflection does not, however, automatically create changes in teachers’ actions (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Mälkki & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012). There can be obstacles that prevent teachers’ reflections from turning into actions; for example, if teachers do not have a clear understanding of what reflection is or how to be reflective (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Mälkki & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012). Also, a lack of time or the nature of the knowledge in one’s discipline may restrict a teacher from applying certain teaching methods (Ginns, Kitay, & Prosser, 2010; Mälkki & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012).”

Ameneh Sammaknejad and Amir Marzban (2016):

“The originator of thinking about reflection, John Dewey (1938) said, “We don’t learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.””

“The individuals involved in an ongoing cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand their own actions and the reactions they operate in themselves and in learners. This reflection could be on whole aspects of classroom context and teacher itself, like teacher self-reflection (Brookfield and Thiel (1999)).”

Samuel Knapp, Michael C. Gottlieb, and Mitchell M. Handelsman (2017):

“The Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB, USA) has identified professionalism as an essential competency for practice as a psychologist and has defined it as involving both awareness of one’s limitations and engaging in self-reflection. This focus on self-reflection builds upon a tradition within psychology that emphasizes the importance of self-reflection (e.g., Johnson, Barnett, Elman, Forrest, & Kaslow, 2012; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Sheikh, Milne, & MacGregor, 2007) and has been incorporated into the cube model that considers self-reflection a foundational competency required in the training of psychologists (Rodolfa et al., 2005).”

Self- Reflection has a plethora of definitions in the literature. Merriam Webster defines it as “self-examination”. Cambridge Dictionary defines it as “the activity of thinking about your own feelings and behaviour, and the reasons that may lie behind them.” Before I delve more into the adoption of self-reflection as a model for a culture transformation, please allow me first to introduce myself briefly. I don’t claim to be an expert in pedagogy. I like to believe that I am a conscientious responsible educator who was fortunate enough to run through meaningful experiences. I come from a family of eight – five boys and three girls. I grew up next door, in Kelhat, in an environment that values education and working hard. I went through school years admiring my teachers and loving their passion to teach and inspire. Those years were challenging because they were during the Lebanese Civil War. At that time, my interests were few and my goals were simple - staying alive and impressing my parents and teachers. By chance and with very little planning, I found myself in the US. What began as getting a first degree and

returning home ended up being a journey of 22 years – eleven years of studying (culminating in a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from Purdue University) and eleven years of working in academia and in industry. I am the Dean of the Faculty of Business and Management and the Assistant to the President for Academic Advancement at Balamand.

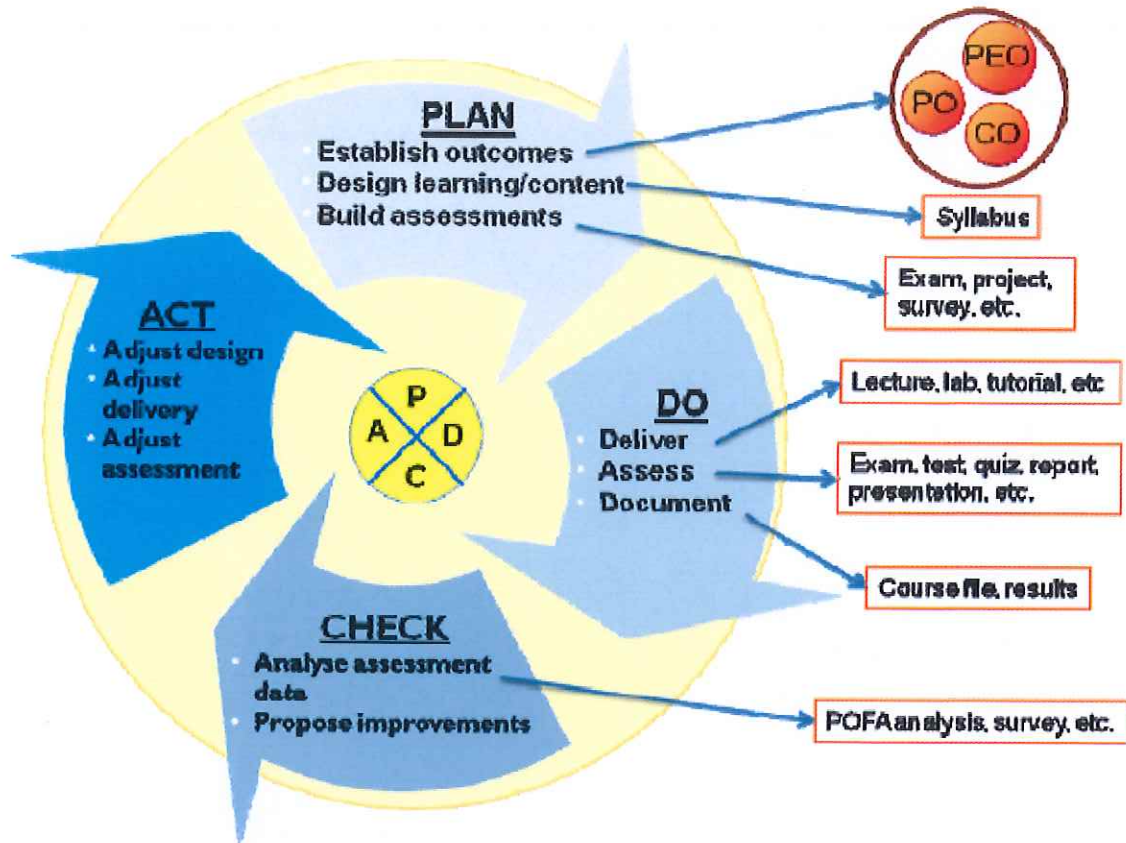
The Importance of Culture and Context: Twenty two years of being immersed in a culture that is founded on systematic planning and most importantly on self-reflection and self-assessment. A culture that is self-centered yet positive, empowering and engaging, a culture that is focused on “results” and on accountability, and is home to the notion of Life-Long Learning. With a constant goal of fitting in within that culture, you notice that those cultural nuances find their way seeping through your mind. You get gradually transformed to think like them, to look at life from different perspectives, to plan like them, and most importantly to self-reflect. Lots of people go through life without taking the time to stop and self-reflect, but the successful ones are those who reflect back on where their time and efforts had gone. Needless to say, a culture that is quite different from the one I was accustomed to. I was accustomed to a culture that goes through life day-by-day, thanking the Lord for making it through that day, and a culture that is reactive to the challenges of the day. A culture with heavy reliance on who knows whom, a culture that lacks planning (forbidden to plan rather) let alone “reflection”. I hope to have highlighted the importance of culture and context in the making of a person’s way of thinking (and doing). In fact this calls for a new paradigm, a model that is founded on professionalism, accountability, sound work ethics, Continuous Improvement, ownership, self-reflection, and self-assessment.

The Need for Transformation – New Paradigm: Changes are needed on a macro-level and a micro-level. Macro-level changes are needed for the system, for its institutions, and for the culture. We need to transform into a society that is humble, a society that seeks to improve continuously, a society that practices and lives Life-Long Learning, a society that holds itself accountable, and a society that has a self-evaluation mindset. Systems and processes need to be put in place to promote self-reflection. Micro-level changes is at the individual-level. Educators need to embrace the notion of self-evaluation and self-assessment. Many disciplines have some form or another of self-reflection. You see it in medicine using tools like the critical incident and the 360 degrees evaluation tool. You see it in psychology. You see it in Quality management using tools like TQM, lean thinking, design thinking, Continuous Process Improvement. You see it in Organizational Change and Management using tools like the Mirror Effect. You see it in Engineering using tools like the PDCA. I take this opportunity today to recommend a pathway for engaging educators into reflective practices. This pathway connects the macro and the micro and allows for systemic changes in how we carry out reflective practices. Building on self-reflection instruments from many disciplines, I thought out the following four-step process of carrying out self-reflection and I have chosen for it the acronym “**KNEW**”. The acronym is inspired by the notion that I, as an educator, “knew” what I was doing and that my actions and even my thoughts are nota arbitrary:

1. **K**now thyself first and foremost
2. **N**etwork and benefit from belonging to a community of self-reflective people
3. **E**xecute and implement actions
4. **W**rite and reflect on the experience.

- 1. K is for Know** thyself first and foremost: We live in a fast-paced world and rarely do we take the time to know ourselves, let alone reflect on our practices. We must know our field of competence, our strengths and weaknesses, and be able to identify what needs to be improved. Socrates once stated “To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom.”, while Adam Smith said: “The first thing you have to know is yourself. A man who knows himself can step outside himself and watch his own reactions like an observer.”
- 2. N is for Network** and belong to a community of self-reflective people: Our world has become globalized, governed by technology, and overloaded with social media platforms. Communication and networking couldn't be any easier. You quickly realize that there are many people across the world who share similar values and even similar practices, who care about what you care about, who believe in continuous improvement, and who believe that our reflective practices are of added value. So, join a network (physical or virtual) and if one is not there, create a network or a community of self-reflective people and plan your actions (supported by instruments and metrics) benefiting from the network's feedback.
- 3. E is for Execute** and implement actions: It is imperative to carry out the tasks within the context they are prepared for. It is the step of careful doing taking into consideration the diverse nature of today's learners. Execution with care has a strong bearing on securing the intended outcomes.
- 4. W is for Write** and reflect on the experience: This step is anchored to documenting, reflecting, and closing the loop on continuous process improvement. It is the step to drive future changes. Deciding on which changes are to be implemented is normally anchored to data and facts and is based on solid metrics for success or KPI's.

The proposed “KNEW” pathway is thought of to emphasize the notions of self-reflection, self-evaluation, and self-assessment. Those of us who are familiar with the “PDCA” (Plan-Do-Check-Act) model for continuous improvement may realize that the similarity of the “KNEW” model with the “PDCA”. The first two steps of “KNEW” – knowing thyself and networking – parallel the first step of “PDCA” – planning. The “Execute and implement actions” parallels the “D” in PDCA, while the “Write and reflect” parallels the two steps of Checking and Acting in PDCA. Although the PDCA was originally conceived by statisticians and quality improvement gurus, many have adopted its use to their contexts. When applied to education, the PDCA Cycle encourages teachers to be methodical in their lesson planning, and to discuss and refine their teaching for subsequent improvement of future lessons. This method requires the teachers to (1) PLAN a lesson, (2) DO or teach the lesson, (3) CHECK or discuss ways to improve the lesson, and (4) ACT or repeat the lesson with the suggested changes.



Source: Researchgate.net

Self-Reflection for Educators:

How many of us perform the exercise of end-of-year self-assessment? What is self-assessment? Self-assessment is a professional development tool used by educators to reflect on the activities carried out by them during the year and allows for setting goals for next year in the three areas of Teaching, Research, and Service. A self-reflection questionnaire allows educators to write down their observations by producing records documenting their reflective practices.

Self-Reflection Questions in the Area of Teaching:

- What have I taught and does that match my area of expertise?
- Have I supervised graduate projects and Theses and how effectively?

- Have I engaged myself in advising students?
- Have I reflected on data and statements made by students on the evaluation forms?
- Have I upgraded my courses and course notes?
- Have I offered any workshops or developed any new materials?
- Have I evaluated my instructional methods and my effectiveness?
- Have I employed any new instructional methods which might enhance the students' learning experience?
- Do I understand assessment practices and can I share evidence that students are learning?
- Am I a recipient of any teaching awards?

Self-Reflection Questions in the Area of Research:

- Is my research in line with the research priorities of my institution? Does the research I do resonate with the mission statement of the institution?
- Am I producing new knowledge? Have I been productive?
- Do I have the skills and competencies to produce sound and credible research output?
- Have I been publishing? What kind of research outlets? Are they internationally recognized? Are they locally recognized? What kind of research do I do? What impact is my research having on the world of practice or on theory?
- Have I secured any grants? In my discipline, are there funding agencies?
- What kind of conferences do I go to? Are they internationally refereed? For what purpose do I attend conferences? What is the impact of my

participation? Am I sharing my research and its findings with the larger community (faculty, students and industry)?

- What kind of resources (support) do I need to help me carry out the type of research I do?
- What kind of researcher am I? Am I a leader with sound research ideas? Am I a wagon-rider? Have I collaborated with others?
- Am I recipient of any research awards?
- Am I contributing to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning? Is that allowing for a better understanding of today's learners?

Self-Reflection Questions in the Area of Service:

- Is service something I am asked to do?
- What is my contribution to the advancement of:
 - My university
 - My Faculty
 - My department
 - My profession
 - My community?
- Am I involved in curriculum reform?
- Am I involved in any educational innovation activity?
- Overall, does the effort reflect the output?

The Cultural Transformation: Educators need to plan their behaviors and understand the implications of their behaviors on the learners. Much research on this reflective mindset has been carried out in the advanced world and much remains a green field in the academic world of ours. Our world suffers from a true understanding of an academician and his or her role. Many in academia still believe

that their role is to “stand-up and deliver” or “sit-down and dictate”. True academicians are owners of their institutions and of their own professional development. **The world of Academia needs educators who are “polyvalent”**. It needs great teachers equipped with a versatile set of instructional methods, who have mastery of their area of expertise, and are well versed with technology. It needs researchers capable of producing knowledge across disciplines, courageous (and professional) to carry out research in Teaching & Learning, and ethical in their research practices. It needs change agents inside and outside the university and who are there to make a difference. **Academia needs all those in one person**. What academia failed to do is to provide the capacity building opportunities for educators to develop into coaches, mentors, and great teachers. It lacks having the infrastructure to carry out world-competitive research pushing the frontiers of knowledge. It lacks providing the rewards and incentives to get involved and make a difference. In fact, Academia violates the very premises it was founded on. Why is that you ask? The answer is rooted in a bug academia suffers from and that is the need to look like others, and in particular institutions abroad. It has to do with not having (and living) their Mission and Vision statements. Activities of an academician in a teaching institution differ quite a bit from those belonging to a research institution. Yet, an academician of any Higher Education Institution of any type needs to have intellectual contributions. Professional development activities differ as well. It is not entirely academia’s fault or the fault of its guardians. We must keep in mind that our academic world experiences pressures related to global practices, standardization and conformity and in particular having to deal with accreditation and quality assurance, university rankings, and world-compatible qualifications’ frameworks.

Conclusion:

I will conclude with the following: Self-reflection is a life-style. Self-reflection is a “constructive accountability” measure. A non-threatening exercise of examining our practices. Institutions need to self-reflect in view of their declared mission and visions statements and their stated goals. This would allow them to be true to their missions. Faculty members need to self-reflect in whatever they do, from lesson planning to delivering, to assessing, and to reflecting on students’ learning experience. This would allow them to be professional. Students need to engage as well in self-reflection through documentation of their learning processes and by providing feedback to their teachers and to themselves. This would allow them to learn more about themselves and their learning preferences. Self-reflection is a humbling experience. I have tried it and lived through it. What are you doing to meet your professional obligations? Do you have the nerve to look in the mirror? Do you have the courage to self-assess?

Have a Great Day!

Website Ad : L’ADMEE Liban, en partenariat avec l’Institut Français du Liban et l’Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), organise à l’Université de Balamand une Université d’été destinée aux étudiants doctorants, aux professionnels, ainsi qu’aux chercheurs qui s’intéressent aux questions de pratiques réflexives et d’auto-évaluation, les 5 et 6 juillet 2018.