



Webinar support material

Learning in small groups

reflect
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Agenda

1. *Introduction: Critical Reflection in Action - Becoming a Reflective Lecturer!*

2. *Proposed sessions* - learning in small groups:

2.1. Learning in small groups

2.2. A Reflect Lab *toolkit*

2.3. Reflections. *Peer questioning time in 4 items*

2.4. Useful Synthesis – learning in small groups



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1. Critical Reflection in Action. Becoming a Reflective Lecturer

Becoming a critical thinker and a reflective lecturer:

What is Critical Thinking?

Life skills, educationally priced high level cognitive skills, a questioning approach

Items for reflection: personal experiences, culture, gender, strategic curricula issues, education

*The triple **A** actions: “Acquaint” (read and understand), “Analyze” (logic, emotion, omission, research, synthesis), “Advance” (Importance and implications)*



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2.1. Learning in small groups

- *Starting points for a critical thinking perspective about Reflect Lab - learning in small groups:*
- Teacher = facilitator for a learning process
- Materials drive instruction / stimulus materials – starting point for IBL
- De-contextualized from practice / open minded and creative participants
- The strengths of learning in small groups – communication, interactions
- Focus: *developing skills* and *content* – the teacher decides which is the more important issue for a concrete small group meeting
- IBL and PBL - learning procedures/techniques (we have some examples on this webinar)



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2.1. Learning in small groups

Small group – a number of persons (6 to 10) communicating directly with one another

Learning small group (LSG) - a number of persons communicating directly with one another and each having something to bring for the purpose of learning together; sharing the same learning intentions.

LSG is made up on a **dynamic structure of four elements**:

- learning activities
- emotions, feelings
- rules – conducting leadership and learning
- interactions (roles) and different aspects of communication



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2.1. Learning in small groups

How to promote IBL in a small group :

- **Working successfully with others** - different challenges from those of individual study (courage in sharing ideas, finding the best way to communicate, accept different perspectives etc.)
- Four areas that contribute to a successful group work: ***goal focus, roles (and feelings*** (Belbin, 2003), ***learning and personal development processes and interactions***.
- The starting points have to be: ***a reflective teacher*** and ***a good stimulus material***.
- „Others can help you to become a successful learner and a more reflective person.”



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2.1. Learning in small groups

Three reflective steps for promoting IBL group activities:

- **Preparation** – before teaching activity / making a good teaching plan
- Why? What? How? When will I know I have achieved my teaching intentionalities?
- **Coordination** – in teaching/in action. Using a critical thinking didactic model: *evocation, common meaning of learning, reflection*. Reflective teaching and learning strategies
- **Reflection** – What do I have to improve after teaching?



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2.1. Learning in small groups

Good general points:

- Collaborative learning and challenges for thinking processes
- Constructs knowledge through inquiry
- Provides opportunity for everyone to build rapport and relationship with lecturers or facilitators
- Focuses on scientific (or professional) ways of thinking and doing a research
- Provides tutorial, or coaching actions

Main Challenge:

- For Individual Assessment: choosing best methods and instruments, even as we are coordinated in a small group learning activity with common learning tasks (Meyer, 2003)



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2.1. Learning in small groups

Strengths of LSG from learning process perspective:

- Builds a learning community among group members;
- Fosters real communication on a learning process (authentic learning with peers);
- Challenges teacher-students pre-existing beliefs;
- Provides opportunity to create distributed knowledge (common sense on knowledge);
- Founded on a socio-linguistic construction of knowledge.



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2.1. Learning in small groups. Strengths

Participants approach:

- Contributing different knowledge and perspectives;
- Allocating tasks according to the skills within the group;
- Working with others can increase motivation for IBL or PBL;
- Learning through the discussion and debate;
- Working with others can be positive and fun experiences;
- Working in a small group is a „real life” skill;
- Group assignments provide an opportunity for socialising and for friendship, helping each other for personal development



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2.1. Learning in small groups. Limits

Participants approach:

- Less personal / individual control;
- Reliance on people/students who may not know / like each other;
- Group members may have different standards, expectations, abilities;
- Danger of under-achieving unless everyone pulls their weight;
- Grading the students work is more difficult;



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2.1. Learning in small groups. Limits

- Not knowing everyone may preclude skill optimisation; There may be personality clashes;
- Consensus decisions may be difficult and time consuming on different phases of IBL to reach;
- Project management can become slow and unwieldy;
- Groups tend to make more „risky” decisions than individuals (sometimes it is a good thing for learning!!);



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2.1. Learning in small groups. Be aware

Sometimes working with others can decrease motivation, so teacher has to become an important coordinator of learning.

(Strengths and Limits revealed by McGuire and Edmondson, 2001,
apud. Tamblin and Ward, p.88)



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2.1. Learning in small groups

Concrete Suggestions for lecturers:

- Provide opportunity to select group membership (if we have to choose some students for Reflect Lab first experiences)
- Provide class time to complete tasks. (It is difficult to find a common time for groups to meet outside of class – what about a Virtual Learning Community?)
- “Well – designed” IBL/PBL plan helps to keep everyone focused on the goal.
- Having ***a learning activity check-list*** is a rational plan of action. Applying a Reflect Lab toolkit.



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

Some of the pedagogical resources already used in your teaching (critical thinking, experiential learning, IBL)

These tools can be found in:

- Classroom structure and resources;
- Instructional methods / learning strategies in small groups which promote IBL and PBL;
- Assessment and accountability specific techniques.



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

Let's think about:

how your tools act to:

- ... help generate knowledge through inquiry;
- ... allow for social, collaborative interactions;
- ... honour multiple perspectives and creative/ divergent thinking;
- ...hold students accountable for participation.



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

**Non-traditional learning strategies in small groups which promote IBL and PBL.
Let's share some examples:**

- *Think – Pair- Share*
- *Let me have the last word!*
- *The 5Ws and 1H*
- *De Bono Thinking Hats*
- *A Knowledge Café*



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

Think – Pair- Share

Goal: to exercise critical thinking and argumentation capability

Phases:

- a. A divergent question or a divergent idea useful as a starting point;
- b. 5 minutes thinking – individual phase of brainwriting about the starting idea;
- c. 5 minutes working in pairs - quickly organize the student groups in pairs (the teacher will determine a criteria for this). Task: a common list of an argument's pros and cons about the initial idea;



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

d. 5-7 minutes for debating in four student groups.

Task: a common list of arguments about the initial idea and a decision about the opinion of the group – IN FAVOR or AGAINST;

e. 2 or 3 min per group

Task: Sharing arguments with the whole class in a kind of reporting step (10-25 min);

f. A Values Line –

Task: Two groups: the PRO group and the CONTRA group which will present their position (each group will have two or three leaders for reporting).



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

Let me have the last word

Goal: to develop the courage to present your own position in front of other people

Phases:

- a. Students are organized in a U form of chairs or a circle
- b. Input a stimulus material for starting an open, creative conversation; this type of communication embraces dialogue rather than debate. Rather than defending a position, strive for mutual understanding through a frank exchange of ideas or views. Remind them that their comments should be addressed to the whole group and not directly to the facilitator (the objective is to hold a “group conversation”)



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

- c. Invite someone to begin the conversation – it may be slow to start, so tolerate silence
- d. Connect diverse perspectives (the facilitator could be the summarizing person of the group)
- e. Keep the wrap up short and simple
- f. Choose one person to present his or her perspective about the group conversation; just share ideas not mainly to have a decision about the discussions. The last word could be even written for the next class or posted on the internet group (of the same students group)



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

The 5Ws and 1H – an IBL technique

Goal: to construct knowledge starting with answering some good questions; if research data are included then we need to assess their validity and reliability – using „5Ws and 1H”

Steps:

- a. Input a stimulus material for starting a research or for understanding a situation/ a case;
- b. Present the six good questions – Why? What? When? Where? Who? and How?



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

- c. Organize the student groups/small groups or the whole group; roles – who will take notes about each questioning phase
- d. Question and answer time; search for good answers
- e. Conclusions about what we learn – facilitator makes some reflections using the best answers list



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

The 5Ws and 1H – an example:

Why? Why was the research undertaken? What were the objectives?

What? What type of research was it? Survey? Interviews? Etc.

Where? In which country (ies)? Urban or rural settings? Laboratory or natural settings?

When? Years? Does the time / day, week, time of the year matter?

Who?

A. Who took part in the research – type of person, what criteria for selection? How many people? It is a representative sample?



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

B. Who decided or commissioned the research? Who designed the research? Who made the report or published the results?

How?

- a. How was data collected? (Attitudinal data? Observational data? Self-reported behavioural data? Knowledge data?)
- b. How was data reported? Does the reporting show any bias? Have appropriate statistical tests been used? Are some percentages or graphs useful?



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

The six thinking hats (De Bono Thinking Hats) is a useful learning and reflection technique for small groups as it helps to ensure that different points of view are represented.

Goal: helps students to explore a topic from different perspectives

Phases:

- a. Input problem / topic, case...
- b. Present each „hat“ perspective to represent a different attitudinal predisposition, or a different way of looking at the topic (each colour means another point of view about the same situation/topic)



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *ToolBox*

c. Small group work - time is important;

White hat – neutral; examine the facts, data and trends without emotion;

Black hat – pessimistic; try to find problems, disadvantages and difficulties;

Yellow hat – optimism; try to find benefits associated with the topic;

Green hat – try to find new ways of approaching the topic; find what looks different or what has not yet been considered;

Red hat – emotional; try to capture instant reactions, hunches, emotions: How do you feel about the topic? What is your intuition telling you....

Blue hat – summarize; you are the chairperson who pulls all the points of view together and evaluates or prioritises them



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

d. Conclusions for a common learning sense – make up a summary of knowledge about the topic; a „whole picture” will help to identify some „loose connections” and gaps that need filling or general trouble spots



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

The knowledge Cafe (Gurteen Model) brings a group of people together to have an open, creative conversation on a topic of mutual interest, to surface their collective knowledge, to share ideas and to gain a deeper understanding of the issues involved. The conversation should lead to action in the form of better decision-making or innovation.

Goal: to exercise open and creative conversation rather than defending a position, strive for mutual understanding through a frank exchange of ideas or views



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

What we need:

- a seminar room (where students can be comfortable and relaxed, with tables and chairs to seat 4 or 5 people per table, preferably with refreshments or coffee- imagine a “pub conversation”)
- a group of people (20 or 25 students works well, but no more than 25, fewer is ok)
- a facilitator (to introduce and oversee the **k**nowledge café – should be a specialist in communication but a **r**eflective teacher and a good listener with chairperson skills)
- **a powerful question or a stimulus material** (to initiate the conversation)
- Time - a seminar time, allow a hour and a half or 2 hours - good conversation can take time to develop.



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

The Knowledge Cafe Steps:

- The facilitator takes 5-15 minutes to introduce the café, making its purpose clear and posing the question
- A guest speaker can be used to introduce the café, but their speaking time must be strictly limited
- Participants form small groups of 4 or 5 to discuss the question for 30-60 minutes
- At the request of the facilitator, participants change groups once, twice, or at most, three times (depending on wider group size)
- After the small group conversations the wider group re-assembles to exchange ideas for 15-30 minutes



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *ToolBox*

The Knowledge Cafe

Why do it?

- suspend assumptions, do not judge
- observe and listen to one another
- welcome differences and explore them
- allow taboo subjects to be raised safely
- listen to your inner voice
- slow the discussion, for the underlying meaning



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

When introducing the wider group conversation

- Bring participants back into a relatively tight group so that they can easily see and hear each other (try a circle)
- Remind them that their comments should be addressed to the whole group and not directly to the facilitator (the objective is to hold a “group conversation”)
- Invite someone to begin the conversation – it may be slow to start, so tolerate silence
- Connect diverse perspectives
- Keep the wrap up short and simple



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

Some reflections/ suggestions for a reflective teacher:

- **Take care:** Participants should not be burdened with recording as they need to be fully engaged in the conversation. It is best to appoint an external note taker if a record is required. Another option is to invite participants to consider one action point within their sphere of influence that they can take away from the conversation.
- Tailor and clarify **the scope of any question** as precisely as possible to keep it within the realistic boundaries and needs of the situation you are working with. Avoid stretching the scope of your question too far.



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

Some reflections/ suggestions for a reflective teacher:

- Good questions – a gateway to insight, to thinking and to action. The powerful question is at the heart of any Reflective Lab tool.
- Think of it as an invitation to creativity and breakthrough thinking. By considering the three dimensions of powerful questions – construction, scope and assumptions - we can increase the power of the questions we ask and, as a result, increase our ability to generate insights that help shape the future (see *The Art of Powerful Question: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation and Action* by Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs, 2003)



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

Some reflections/ suggestions for a reflective teacher:

- Encourage full participation. When introducing the small group conversation don't appoint a leader or chairperson and don't even appoint a note taker but give permission for participants to take their own notes, if they wish (remember that the focus is on the conversation)
- Don't take a lead in the discussions, rather wander around and listen into the groups



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*

Some reflections/ suggestions for a reflective teacher:

- Listen out for problems and remind people gently of the rules of 'dialogue'
- Reflect before teaching and find (from the preparation phase) what could be the limits of any method you want to use and make corrections where you feel it is needed!



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2.2. A Reflect Lab *Tool/Box*. Be aware

Pay attention to your dialogue with students!

Example:

To formulate a powerful question, **be aware of assumptions** within it and use them appropriately. Contrast the question, “What did we do wrong and who is responsible?” with “What can we learn from what has happened and what possibilities do we now see?” The first question assumes error and blame; whoever is responding is likely to feel defensive. The second question encourages reflection and is more likely to stimulate learning and collaboration among those involved.

Could you write down one advantage and one limit for each of these presented IBL methods?



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2.3. Reflections – *Peer Questioning Time in 4 Items*

When you choose to promote a Reflect Lab activity, it is important to find time to think /to reflect about some items, after each experience. We propose *a peer questioning time in 4 items*



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2.3. Reflections – *Peer Questioning Time in 4 Items*

Discuss the proposed activity related to a Reflect Lab experience with one of your colleagues:

- How does this exercise support IBL and critical reflection?
- Were there challenges for me as a teacher/facilitator? (Share a list of at least 2...)
- How could this exercise be modified or improved for a next application?
- What are some other educational activities (*not only teaching activities with my students) I can relate with for supporting the goals of Reflect Lab (inquiry based learning, critical reflection, problem solving learning experiences)?



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2.4. Useful Synthesis – learning in small groups

Like a Check-list!

- a. **Goal focus**: clarify objectives; agree on a management learning plan; agree on roles and responsibilities; agree on review learning process
- b. **Group roles** (ex. Belbin's nine roles on Mixing, Leading, Acting and Thinking, 2003: coordinator, shaper, teamworker, resource-investigator, plant, implementer, monitor-evaluator, finisher, expert/specialist)
- c. **Development of a group** (Tuckman, 1965): forming, storming, norming, performing



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2.4. Useful Synthesis – learning in small groups

- d. **Interactions**: set ground rules, monitor behaviors, raise issues sooner rather later
- e. **Assessments**: self-assessed, peer-assessed, teacher-assessed
- f. **Involving others**: let other help, give help
- g. **Online learning-groups**: new challenges, previous areas still apply



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Some References:

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