Reflexionsförderung in der Hochschule

The need, potential and challenges of fostering reflection in higher education learning environments

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Introduction

The last decade has seen repeated calls for higher education to develop more critical, more reflective students. At the same time, there are many complaints that higher education institutions fail to sufficiently integrate reflection into their curricula as an educational objective (e.g. Cornuel, Hommel & Dyllick, 2015, p. 19; Currie et al., 2010, p. 2; Adler, 2002). Such notions are supported by empirical research on reflection indicating that students do not meet the reflection levels desired and seem to have large misconception about what proper reflection entails (Beveridge et al., 2013; Boud, 1999; Boud & Walker, 1998; Duke & Appleton, 2000; Dyment & O'Connell, 2010; Dyment & O'Connell, 2011; Maloney, Tai, Lo, Molloy, & Ilic, 2013; Platzer, Blake, & Ashford, 2000). Nevertheless has the importance of reflective skills as a means of increasing students' competence development been widely acknowledged (Rogers, 2001). Reflection enhances for instance both self-regulated learning and deep learning (Hilzensauer, 2008), which are targets of higher education innovation (Euler & Feixas, 2013). Also the vision of many universities (e.g. the university of St.Gallen: Vision and General Principles) points to the development of students who act responsibly. Therefore students are required to reflect (Schön, 1992). In this context of personal and professional development, Procee (2006) describes that reflection fosters personal growth, professional proficiency, and increases social justice. The literature also emphasizes the positive influence of reflection on critical thinking, decision making and responsible and crisis leadership (Kruse, 2010; Powley & Taylor, 2014), which are competences students needed for the professional demands and challenges in our pluralistic world (Cornuel, Hommel & Dyllick, 2015).

Research regarding reflection in higher education has increased, and different reflection theories and models have been developed. However, the literature is dispersed across several fields and evidence to support and inform curricular interventions and innovations concerning reflection remains largely theoretical, conceptual and anecdotal (Mann, Gordon & MacLeod, 2007; Peltier, Hay & Dragon, 2005). The available empirical research mainly focused on measuring students' reflection levels and on factors that hinder students to reflect deeply. There is less empirical research, and even less robust evidence, on 'how to teach reflection' and on interventions that foster students' reflection competencies.

The symposium will discuss reflection from three different perspectives, all related to the question how reflection can be fostered in higher education learning environments. At first different models will be discussed and compared with the main question how these models can be used to foster reflection. The other two presentations will be on a methodical level. More precisely, we will have a closer look at the question how reflection can be fostered in two fields, the first being study programs and the second being faculty development programs.

1. A common understanding of reflection?

The first presentation (Dietrich Wagner) will focus on different models and theories of reflection. Apart from different representatives (e.g. Dewey, Schön, Mezirow) who have influenced the understanding of reflection and the development of reflection models, reflection can also have different goals (from technical proficiency to professional growth or to changing society), different number of participants (individuals and communities) and different levels (a technical, problem-solving level, a hermeneutic and interpretative level and a critical level which stresses analysing points of reference) (Procee, 2006). Furthermore, models of reflection either target reflection levels or reflection processes. The former describe differences in the depth of reflection, while the latter explain what happens during a reflection process and which developmental stages can be identified. These theoretical considerations are necessary to understand why and where students or faculty members have problems to reflect on an appropriate level or what determining factors need to be changed for a successful reflection process.

2. Fostering reflection in the higher education learning environment.

Luci Gommers will report first results of a study aiming to foster reflection in higher education. First, factors which support or hinder reflection will be reviewed to find out why students' reflection often does not reach an appropriate level. Second, the first results of the questionnaire

that has been developed to be able to measure the effectiveness of an intervention to foster reflection, will be discussed. The instrument empirically measures students' reflection depth (levels) (Kember, 2000; Peltier, Hay & Dragon, 2005) and the factors which support or hinder reaching this depth, as they were reviewed before (e.g. students' attitudes towards reflection and their perceptions of reflection) (Beveridge et al., 2013). Based on the first findings of measuring the status quo, and connected to the concepts of the first presentation, different approaches to foster reflection will be discussed.

3. Implementing reflection in a faculty development program

The third presentation (Lisa Pindeus) will complement the discourse and focus on implementing reflection in a faculty development program at the University of St.Gallen. As shown in the first and second presentation it is not only important to sensitize students but also lectures of hindering and promoting factors for reflection and also foster reflection capabilities and a positive attitude towards reflection among the faculty. Therefore, we examine the status quo among the faculty by looking into a faculty development program at the University of St.Gallen. There, participants have to submit a thesis, where they reflect on the different learning experiences of the program. We want to examine how (deep) lectures reflect in this thesis and to which degree the provided guiding questions prompt reflection. Therefore, qualitative document and content analysis will be used. The results of this analysis will be reviewed and approaches to deal with hindering factors will be discussed.

Questions

1. How to find a common understanding of reflection within the different reflection theories and models?
2. How can we foster student's reflection competencies in the higher education learning environment?
3. What is the potential of reflection in faculty development?

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