LEARNING COMES FROM REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES

Once you have identified the new experiences or challenges from a learning opportunity, the next step is to reflect on the ways you have approached that new experience or dealt with any difficulties that you faced.

In the words of American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer John Dewey, “We do not learn from experience … we learn from reflecting on experience.”

THE KEY MESSAGE IS: IT'S NOT WHAT YOU DO, IT'S WHAT YOU LEARN FROM IT!

Experience alone is not enough - you need to know what you have learned from a situation. To do this, you need to reflect on it. Since the reflection is about what you did in certain situations, it is self-reflection. The main purpose is to consider your reactions and responses to situations and how you use them to determine your actions (and reactions) in the future to affect a positive outcome or to achieve set goals.

Here is where you consider the transformation that has taken place as part of your experiences and what you are able to do now (or just more effectively perhaps) as a result. This is about self-efficacy and an understanding of yourself and the way you approach situations.

This is also important for the recruitment process. You can gather examples of how you meet selection criteria or how you can address behavioural interview questions through reflecting on your experiences and understanding what you have learned from them.

“THE LIFE WITHOUT EXAMINATION IS NO LIFE.” PLATO

Self-reflection is the “capacity to analyse every event/situation in which you have been involved, evaluate how you acted in it, then decide what you have learned about yourself that you can take forward to be more effective in the future (and this may involve having to develop new technical or ‘person’ skills, or new ways of analysing situations)” (McCulloch & Reid 2015, p. 186).

You will apply the knowledge, skills and attributes that you have learned and developed while at university in many ways after you graduate, but one of the key ways is through employment. This is not just about your career development; it is also about your contribution to the organisations in which you work which in turn benefits the community and the economy.

It is also important that you learn to self-reflect for your professional development once you enter the workforce. Learning is ongoing and your development as a professional depends on your capacity to learn from your workplace experiences as well as the situations you face in your personal life.

If you think about reflection as going over something in your mind, you are “observing, remembering and re-running your own actions after something has occurred” (McCulloch & Reid 2015, p. 130).
The point of reflection is to analyse what happened as a form of self-improvement and use it to help you decide how you might do things in the future (usually differently, because you have had some form of development from the learning experience).