Developing platform skills for the workplace: Weaving reflective practice experiments into everyday life

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Generalist skills - organising, innovating, reflecting, negotiating, etc. - make a large contribution to successful professional practice. Learning to experiment with one’s practice is a metaskill that strengthens students’ capacity to develop these platform skills. Helping students learn to approach their practice in an exploratory, experimental way is therefore good preparation for work integrated learning experiences, and for subsequent professional practice. To explore this possibility in practice, students in a postgraduate environmental class chose some platform skills and experimented with their approach to them in actual situations. Schön’s differentiations - exploratory practice, move-testing and/or hypothesis-testing - defined "experiment", and we asked them specifically to heed their evolving ‘feel’ for their practice and situation, as they experimented, as a felt sense of what is occurring is inherently holistic and open, and has been demonstrated to be helpful in problem solving and creative thinking. Student evaluations and qualitative analysis of their practice research reports demonstrate that most students found this approach illuminating. These reflective practice experiments gave students an experience of consciously taking responsibility for and managing the development of their own practice. This built their capacity to engage reflectively and astutely in the work integrated learning experiences that follow in their program.

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