Workshop Title: Reflecting on reflection and its place in an evolving educational context.

Why the topic is important:

Teaching, learning and research in higher education and tertiary learning environments are being transformed by technological innovations The use of some of these information technologies, such as content managements systems (eg. Moodle and Blackboard), communication medium (eg. email) or means of accessing information (eg. Google or searchable databases) is predicated on the promise that they will enable a more effective and lower cost delivery of education for the student and the institution. Consequently, the emphasis in education has moved away from 'banking education', that is, education focused on the provision of knowledge, towards promoting independence in learning, interdisciplinarity, the creation of new knowledges and the development of transferable learning capacities. These new foci all hinge on the person's ability to reflect. The effect of this has been that reflection and reflective practices are becoming more widely used in a growing variety of contexts and for an expanding repertoire of purposes. Several authors have critiqued the resultant proliferation of accounts of reflection and suggest that the concept of reflection is in danger of becoming meaningless. These concerns motivate the following questions: **what is reflection, how does reflection occur and how can reflective practice respond to the numerous and occasionally contradictory accounts of reflection?** Addressing these questions is the first motivation for this presentation. Further, in the author's observation, there appears to be a tension between the process of reflection and some of the new technologies being introduced into education. The second purpose for this workshop then, is to investigate this tension so that it may be better defined and addressed.

The research:

This presentation is based on research in which I am concerned to develop a clear definition of reflection and its use in education. In phase one I investigate the nature of reflection and its use within thought and action. Phase two is concerned with identifying the gestures that make up the process of reflective thought as an action. The third phase of the research investigates how the new technologies being introduced into education enable or endanger the use of reflection.

I draw directly on John Dewey's definition of reflection as presented by Dewey in his seminal work *How we think*. Recognised as one of the founders of western education, Dewey's succinct account of the nature of reflective thought as action and the process through which reflection occurs was extended directly by Kelly, Habermas and Mesirow and influenced other authors on reflection including Argyris, Polanyi, Friere, Kolb, Schön, Boud and Brookfield.

Dewey provides reasons why reflective thought is a necessary and central aspect of education, both applied and theoretical. He demonstrates how reflection promotes the empowerment and emancipation of the person through the

development of disciplined forms of thought. Reflection, he argues, also promotes ethics and aesthetics.

Dewey characterises reflective thought as a process that is embodied, personal, contextual and practical. Good quality reflective thought is specific, orderly, trustworthy and has intellectual force. The quality of a person's reflective thought can be seen in the ease, range, and depth to which their thought extends.

Reflective thought can employ logical and/or intellectual methods but is not limited to these. It is motivated by situations or circumstances that create ambiguity with respect to the person's model of the world. As such, reflection is prompted by the need to change and is guided by the need to find a solution. Action motivates thinking and thinking is tested in action. Reflection is both a process of obtaining evidence-based results and of making meaning. Dewey argues that information gathered through the senses and recalled from past experience becomes knowledge when it is comprehended within contextualised experience.

Dewey's work was extended directly by Kelly, Habermas and Mesirow and influenced other seminal authors including Argyris, Polanyi, Friere, Kolb, Schön, Boud and Brookfield. His work continues to be discussed in contemporary debates on reflection.

How the session will be run:

Dewey's account of the process of reflection involves four distinct gestures: a) observation, b) the 5 phases, c) decision and d) action. I will begin the session with a ten minute presentation of Dewey's account of the nature of reflection, the four gestures above and the concerns I have with respect to how information technologies may or may not facilitate the development and use of these gestures by the person.

A further five minutes will be devoted to questions that emerge from this initial presentation.

The following forty minutes will be run in a world-café format, divided approximately evenly into four interactive reflective processes, one for each of the four gestures and their effective use and delivery through technological innovations. I will ask for four members of the audience to volunteer to remain at each of the four 'stations' of the world-café. They will lead each of the four groups through the interactive reflective process at their station and cumulatively record shared insights on the gesture that is the focus of their station.

The final five minutes of the session will be used for reflection on the process and outcomes of the workshop overall. This will include an opportunity for each of the world-café station volunteers to feedback to the group a summary of the insights offered at their 'station'.