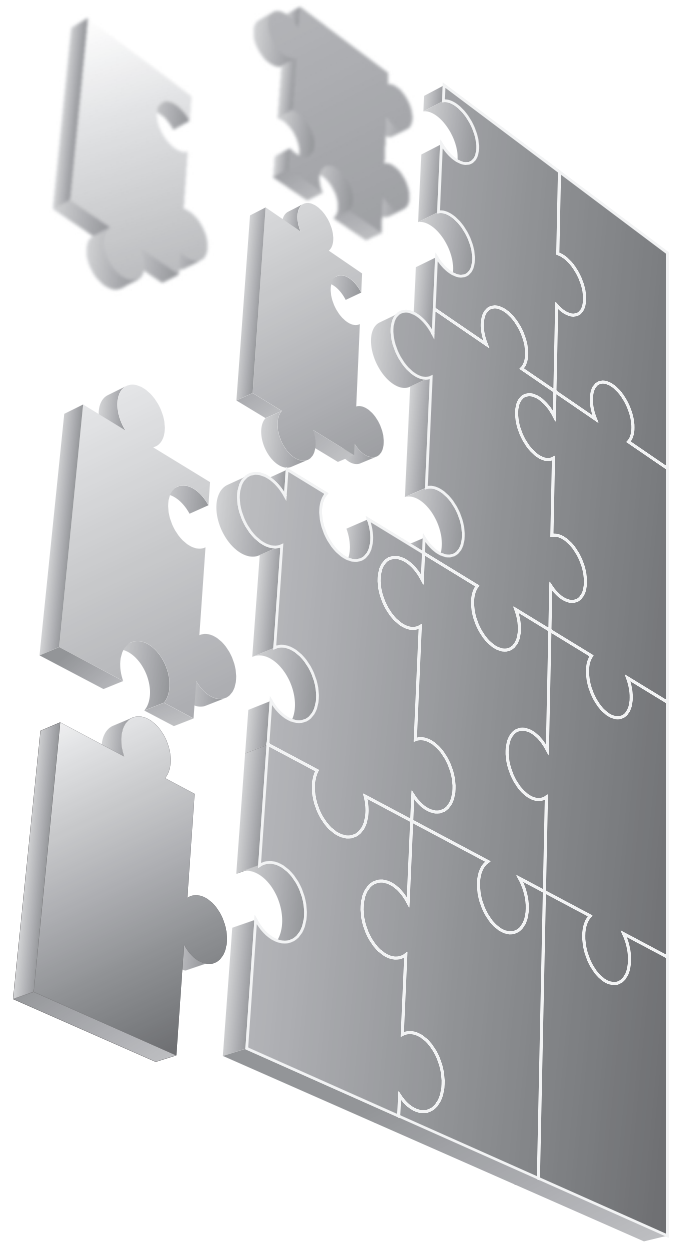# Project Wrap: Using Post-Project Reflection as a Learning Tool

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"We do not learn from experience . . . we learn from reflecting on experience."
- John Dewey

In the early 20th century, John Dewey wrote several books describing his innovative and influential ideas about *reflection*, the practice of systematic thinking about experiences to make meaning from them. Over the years, other philosophers and researchers have clarified his original ideas to guide those in the education field in the task of reflection. In 1985, work by Boud, Keogh, and Walker consolidated Dewey's ideas about reflection into three methods of thinking that encourage reflection.

Methods of Thinking that Encourage Reflection

Thinking Method	Thinking Method in Action
returning to experience	remembering and describing events
attending to and connecting with feelings	identifying helpful feelings, and removing and working through negative feelings
evaluating experience	reviewing an experience afterward and applying new knowledge to existing conceptual frameworks

Effective teachers consistently apply thinking strategies and are continually reflecting on all aspects of learning in the classroom. Naturally, those who design educational materials should be reflective as well. Project managers use reflection as a way to refine processes and systems within the project workflow. After the final delivery of a project, experienced vendors use valuable tools that facilitate reflection, such as: providing contractor feedback, conducting a project wrap call, and sending a client survey. These tools foster reflection in both the client and vendor, and facilitate conversations and actions that lead to continual growth as a company and department on future projects.

Before reflection can occur however, the project must be completed and submitted to the client!

Checking and Rechecking - The Final Delivery Process

Upon project completion, the final deliverable is provided to the client. Detail-oriented vendors make a habit of revisiting project specifications before the deliverable is submitted. After the final version is created, the materials go through a QA, or quality assurance, check. This check compares the project specifications to the final product and ensures that every detail, from passages and graphics to file naming conventions, is carefully considered. After the QA check, the deliverable is submitted in a format and delivery style according to the client's preferences. As a courtesy, some vendors helpfully archive a copy of the final deliverables. This is an additional service that is useful in the future if the client is unable to locate the originals.

The Reflection Process - Identifying Tools that Encourage Reflection

Participate in guided conversations about contractor feedback.

Educators and students are encouraged to keep journals, have discussions with a partner, and answer guided prompts to help complete the reflection process. Within the custom content development industry, the reflection process can also utilize tools such as conversations and guided prompts to encourage thinking as a process. Here is an example of an outline for a reflective conversation between a vendor project manager and content area director after project completion.

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- Discuss general project outcomes, positives, and areas for improvement.

- Identify contractors who did an excellent job and contractors who need improvement; communicate performance feedback to contractors.

- Record notes on contractor performance into a staffing database as a tool to staff future projects more effectively.

- Observe themes across projects and discipline and use them as a guide to plan and provide professional development opportunities to contractors.

Recall project details and relive the experience during the project wrap call.

To maximize learning after a project, go back and recall the experience in detail. This is best done during the project wrap call. Sometimes, members of the team on the call are all on the vendor side; other times, stakeholders on the client side are present as well. During the conversation, recall the steps in the project development process and debrief with stakeholders to identify processes and systems that are working well and analyze areas that need improvement. Include varying perspectives from roles such as the project manager, content area director, chief instructional officer, project director, lead editor, or content lead. This is a conversation to have when the project is still fresh in everyone's mind; it can provide insight to help refine the development process for future projects.

Gather insight from a client survey.

Vendors looking to meet the needs of all customers seek feedback by providing a client survey after the project is completed. Determining if all of the client's needs were met is one step toward creating a lasting partnership. The opportunity for feedback and rating allows the vendor to quantitate data and make plans for internal review and discussions. To a vendor, the information gained from open and honest feedback is invaluable.

By three methods, we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third, by experience, which is the bitterest.
- Confucius

There is a tremendous amount of learning done at the end of a task. Most project managers would agree. The project wrap phase of project development is rich with learning experiences. Though this is a tempting area to skip in the rush to conclude a project, taking careful time to reflect will yield many benefits for future projects. A vendor that takes time to reflect with the client gains the opportunity to build a loyal working relationship for future projects and also uses feedback to improve the project development experience.

Dewey, J. (1933) *How We Think*, New York: D. C. Heath.

Boud, D. et al (1985) *Reflection. Turning experience into learning*, London: Kogan Page.

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