



Using Reflection for Assessment

Wondering what to do with that pile of reflection papers?

Reflection can promote deep, lasting learning (Suskie, 2009), and it can also be used to assess whether your program or course helped students learn what you intended. Using reflection to help you assess whether a program met its outcomes can be useful, but it can be difficult to know how to take individual student reflections and summarize them to look at overall gains. This briefing provides some helpful tips in using individual reflections to teach students as well as to assess your program.

Reflection for feedback versus reflection for overall assessment.

Often, we use reflection as a method for students to make meaning of what they are learning – and a way for us to give them feedback on that meaning making. This is a great practice, and that feedback loop is high-impact for students. They learn from hearing back from us. Using these individual reflections as assessment information only requires a couple of extra steps and can yield really useful information about what students are learning and how that connects to our overall program goals.

Connect the reflection to student learning or program outcomes.

The first step in assessing reflection is to determine what types of learning you are looking for. What did you want to know by having students reflect? Why are you having them reflect? For example, you might be looking for a deeper concept of leadership or for them to think about cross cultural differences. What will that look like? What signs (words, phrases, examples) will you see in their reflections that help you know they are getting it?

Choose a Rubric

Rubrics will be the easiest way to gather aggregate information (more than the “n of 1”) from your reflection papers, journals, etc. Choosing a rubric may involve determining if you want to see a specific outcome (e.g., critical thinking) in the reflections or if you are just looking for deeper understanding or more sophisticated thinking over time. Here are a few rubrics and an example that may help you.

An Example

By the end of your program, one of your learning outcomes is that students will think critically, at a proficient level, about a particular issue, according to the rubric below. After you have read reflections and made your usual comments on them (this is still important!), you will assign each a rating, using a rubric (we give you three examples here). You may decide that it is helpful to share this rubric with the students ahead of time, so they know what you are looking for in reflections. After rating all the papers, you determine that 90% of students were in the “proficient” level, so your outcome has been achieved. If you found that the bulk of reflections were at lower levels, you would be able to give students more specific feedback about what they need to improve. This is not only helpful for individual students, but also for you in achieving your program outcomes. You can look at overall summaries or the percentage of students who advance at least one stage, for instance, between their first and final reflections. Here is an example of using reflection papers to determine if students met a general outcome.

Sample Outcome: At the end of this program students will be able to **think critically** at the proficient level.

| Novice | Apprentice | Proficient | Distinguished |
|--|--|---|--|
| Student accepts things at face value, as if all opinions are stated without analysis or support. | Student asks questions and shows awareness of multiple perspectives. Opinions are stated with some analysis and support. | Student assess and evaluates perspectives, knowledge and opinions gained from course concepts and experience. | Student assesses and evaluates perspectives, knowledge, and opinions gained from course concepts and experience. Student links these assessment to own perspectives and opinions on the issue. |

Here is an example of using journaling to determine the sophistication or depth of student reflection.

Sample Outcome: At the end of this program students will be able to reflect at the empathic level.

| Level of Reflection | Description | Sample Journal Entry |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Level 1: Descriptive | Students demonstrate acquisition of new content from significant learning experiences. Journal entry provides evidence of gaining knowledge, making sense of new experiences, or making linkages between old and new information. | "I didn't know that many of the traditions I believed were based in Anglo-American roots. I thought that all cultures viewed traditions similarly." |
| Level 2: Empathic | Students demonstrate thoughts about or challenges to beliefs, values, and attitudes of self and others. Journal entry provides examples of self-projection into the experiences of other, sensitivity towards the values and beliefs of others, and/or tolerance for differences. | "I felt badly when I heard the derogatory terms used so freely when I visited the South." |
| Level 3: Analytic | Students demonstrate the application of learning to a broader context of personal and professional life. Journal entry provides evidence of student's use of readings, observations, and discussions to examine, appraise, compare, contrast, plan for new actions or response, or propose remedies to use in and outside structured learning experiences. | "I was able to observe nursing staff interact with a patient whose first language was Tagalog and was diagnosed with altered mental status. The nurses employed many of the strategies that we have read about and discussed in class." |
| Level 4: Metacognitive | Students demonstrate examination of the learning process, showing what learning occurred, how learning occurred, and how newly acquired knowledge or learning altered existing knowledge. Journal entry provides examples of evaluation or revision of real and fictitious interactions. | "I found myself forming impressions about a child's language abilities and made myself stop until got additional information as suggested in class discussions." |

Developed from: Chabon, S. & Lee-Wilkerson, D. (2006). Use of journal writing in the assessment of CSD students' learning about diversity: A method worthy of reflection. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 27(3), 146-158.

The rubric below rates reflection on a variety of criteria. It is still focused on progression to deeper/more sophisticated reflection over time.

Sample Outcome: Over the course of the semester, the majority of students advance at least one stage in reflection.

Assessment Rubric for Student Reflections

| Levels | Criteria |
|-------------------------|---|
| Reflective practitioner | <p>Clarity: The language is clear and expressive. The reader can create a mental picture of the situation being described. Abstract concepts are explained accurately. Explanation of concepts makes sense to an uninformed reader.</p> <p>Relevance: The learning experience being reflected upon is relevant and meaningful to student and course learning goals.</p> <p>Analysis: The reflection moves beyond simple description of the experience to an analysis of how the experience contributed to student understanding of self, others, and/or course concepts.</p> <p>Interconnections: The reflection demonstrates connections between the experience and material from other courses; past experience; and/or personal goals.</p> <p>Self-criticism: The reflection demonstrates ability of the student to question their own biases, stereotypes, preconceptions, and/or assumptions and define new modes of thinking as a result.</p> |
| Aware practitioner | <p>Clarity: Minor, infrequent lapses in clarity and accuracy.</p> <p>Relevance: The learning experience being reflected upon is relevant and meaningful to student and course learning goals.</p> <p>Analysis: The reflection demonstrates student attempts to analyze the experience but analysis lacks depth.</p> <p>Interconnections: The reflection demonstrates connections between the experience and material from other courses; past experience; and/or personal goals.</p> <p>Self-criticism: The reflection demonstrates ability of the student to question their own biases, stereotypes, preconceptions.</p> |
| Reflection novice | <p>Clarity: There are frequent lapses in clarity and accuracy.</p> <p>Relevance: Student makes attempts to demonstrate relevance, but the relevance is unclear to the reader.</p> <p>Analysis: Student makes attempts at applying the learning experience to understanding of self, others, and/or course concepts but fails to demonstrate depth of analysis.</p> <p>Interconnections: There is little to no attempt to demonstrate connections between the learning experience and previous other personal and/or learning experiences.</p> <p>Self-criticism: There is some attempt at self-criticism, but the self-reflection fails to demonstrate a new awareness of personal biases, etc.</p> |
| Unacceptable | <p>Clarity: Language is unclear and confusing throughout. Concepts are either not discussed or are presented inaccurately.</p> <p>Relevance: Most of the reflection is irrelevant to student and/or course learning goals.</p> <p>Analysis: Reflection does not move beyond description of the learning experience(s).</p> <p>Interconnection: No attempt to demonstrate connections to previous learning or experience.</p> <p>Self-criticism: Not attempt at self-criticism.</p> |

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