Assessing Critical Reflection[[1]](#footnote-1)

Incorporating reflection can help determine whether your course met the intended outcomes, but it can be difficult to know how to summarize and assess individual student reflections to see the overall gains.  Reflection is often used as a method for students to decipher meaning in what they are learning, and subsequently provides us with a measure to give feedback on these meanings they have been making.  This is a high-impact tool for students as they are learning from the feedback that is provided.  Using individual reflections as a tool for assessment can yield useful information about what students are learning and how this connects back to the overall course objectives.

The first step in assessing reflection is to determine the types of learning you are hoping the students will achieve.  For example, what do you want to know by having the students reflect?  Why are you asking them to reflect? Etc.  You may be searching for a deeper concept of leadership or for them to think more closely about cross cultural differences.  It is important to first identify what the goals of the reflection exercise will be and what those will mean to you.  Think about what the reflection will look like, what signs/words/phrases/examples will you see in their reflection pieces that will help you to know that they are achieving these goals.

Rubrics are the easiest way to gather aggregate information from the reflection papers, journals, etc.  Choosing a rubric will involve determining if you want to see a specific outcome (i.e. critical thinking) in the reflections, or if you are just looking for a deeper understanding or heightening thinking.  Below are some examples that may assist in determining a rubric that can be used.

**Example**

At the end of the course, one of the learning outcomes is that students will think critically, at a proficient level, about a particular issue.  After going through the reflection pieces and providing initial comments on them (important step to continue), you will assign each a rating, using a rubric (examples below).

**NOTE**: You may decide that it will be helpful to share the rubric with students ahead of time so they know what you are looking for in their reflections.

After rating the reflection pieces, you determine that 90% of the students were in the “proficient” level, thereby your outcome was achieved.  If you found the bulk of the reflections were lower, you can then provide the students with more specific feedback on what it is they need to improve upon.  This is not only helpful for students, but also for you in achieving the course outcomes.  You can also review the overall summaries or the percentage of students who advance at least one stage, for instance, between their first and final reflections.

**Sample Outcome 1:**

At the end of the course 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 assesses 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 assessments to own perspectives and opinions on the issue. |

**Example of using journaling to determine the sophistication or depth of student reflection**

**Sample Outcome 2:**

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

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| --- | --- | --- |
| 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. | | |

**Example of the progression to deeper/more sophisticated reflection over time - variety of criteria**

**Sample Outcome 3:**

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

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| Assessment Rubric for Student Reflections | | |
| Levels | Criteria | |
| **Reflective**  **practitioner** | **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. |
| **Relevance:** | The learning experience being reflected upon is relevant and meaningful to student and course learning goals. |
| **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. |
| **Interconnections:** | The reflection demonstrates connections between the experience and material from other courses; past experience; and/or personal goals. |
| **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. |
| **Aware**  **practitioner** | **Clarity:** | Minor, infrequent lapses in clarity and accuracy. |
| **Relevance:** | The learning experience being reflected upon is relevant and meaningful to student and course learning goals. |
| **Analysis:** | The reflection demonstrates student attempts to analyze the experience but analysis lacks depth. |
| **Interconnections:** | The reflection demonstrates connections between the experience and material from other courses; past experience; and/or personal goals. |
| **Self-criticism:** | The reflection demonstrates ability of the student to question their own biases, stereotypes, preconceptions. |
| **Reflection**  **novice** | **Clarity:** | There are frequent lapses in clarity and accuracy. |
| **Relevance:** | Student makes attempts to demonstrate relevance, but the relevance is unclear to the reader. |
| **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. |
| **Interconnections:** | There is little to no attempt to demonstrate connections between the learning experience and previous other personal and/or learning experiences. |
| **Self-criticism:** | There is some attempt at self-criticism, but the self-reflection fails to demonstrate a new awareness of personal biases, etc. |
| **Unacceptable** | **Clarity:** | Language is unclear and confusing throughout. Concepts are either not discussed or are presented inaccurately. |
| **Relevance:** | Most of the reflection is irrelevant to student and/or course learning goals. |
| **Analysis:** | Reflection does not move beyond description of the learning experience(s). |
| **Interconnection:** | No attempt to demonstrate connections to previous learning or experience. |
| **Self-criticism:** | No attempt at self-criticism. |

Referenced from: <https://vp.studentlife.uiowa.edu/assets/Using-Reflection-for-Assessment.pdf>

1. Retrieved from: https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/experience/faculty/critical-reflection-and-experiential-learning/assessing-critical-reflection [↑](#footnote-ref-1)