Reflection
Developing and Supporting Meta-Cognition

Introduction

Reflection is one of the most academically rigorous components of any learning experience. Students who take the time to reflect on learning experiences will get more from those experiences. Here’s why... simply stated it’s all about developing a student’s metacognitive ability and relating that back to what they do in other learning opportunities and settings. Kolb A.Y., Kolb D.A. (2012), describes this as the process by which individuals understand the ways they learn from experiences, how they learn about themselves as learners, and how they use that understanding to improve their learning effectiveness.

The purpose of this document is

- to provide a framework to situate and develop reflective activities associated with experiential learning opportunities;
- to provide ideas of sample formats, activities and questions that can be used or adapted to promote reflection.

The Framework
Below is a graphical representation of the reflection process, also referred to as the Experiential Learning Cycle.
As students participate in an experiential learning activity, we could think about developing prompts or activities that will help them develop their metacognitive ability. Conceptually this involves asking them to consider the following three questions:

- **What?**
- **So What?**
- **Now What?**

The reflection process begins with a defining and sharing of the "What" of the student's experience, and follows a continuous cycle towards "So What?" and "Now What?"

- **So What? / Analyze** - Analyze the experience.
- **Now What? / Evaluate** - Consider the future impact of the experience on you and what else you might do (differently, in the future, in a different context, identical situation etc.)

**Examples of Reflection Questions based on the Experiential Learning Cycle**

**What?**
— What happened?
— What did you observe?
— What issue is being addressed or population is being served?

**So What?**
— Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest?
— Did you hear, smell, or feel anything that surprised you?
— How is your experience different from what you expected?
— What impacts the way you view the situation/experience?
— What did you like/dislike about the experience?

**Now What?**
— What seems to be the root causes of the issue addressed?
— What other work is currently happening to address the issue?
— What learning occurred for you in this experience?
— How can you apply this learning?
— What would you like to learn more about, related to this project or issue?
— What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties you experienced?
— What information can you share with your peers or the community?
— If you could do the project again, what would you do differently?
Situating the Activities that you Design

Consider the Four Cs of Reflection
Effective strategies for fostering reflection are based on four core elements of reflection known as the Four Cs. These elements are described below:

Continuous reflection: Reflection should be an ongoing component in the learner's education, happening before, during, and after an experience when possible.

Connected reflection: Without structured reflection, students may fail to bridge the gap between the concrete experience and the abstract issues discussed in the profession, or disciplinary working area.

Challenging reflection: Instructors should be prepared to pose questions and ideas that are unfamiliar or even uncomfortable for consideration by the learner in a respectful atmosphere.

Contextualized reflection: Ensures that the reflection activities or topics are appropriate and meaningful in relation to the experiences of the students.

Ideas for Reflection
There are a wide range of meaningful reflective practices and strategies that can be incorporated into experiences, including some of the frequently used approaches listed below.

- Journals: Writing in journals is widely used by service-learning programs to promote reflection. They’re most meaningful when supervisors pose key questions for analysis. (See bottom of page for sample reflection questions.)
- Multimedia Class Presentations: Students create a video or photo documentary on the community experience.
- Theory Application Papers: Students select a major theory covered in the experience and analyze its application to the experience.
- Presentations to Community Organizations: Students present work to partner/community organization staff, board members, and participants.
- Group Discussion: Through guided discussion questions, have students critically think about their experiences.
- Videos: View a video or documentary to elicit discussion about critical issues that relate to their experiences.
- Letters-to-the Editor: Students write a letter-to-the-editor or to government officials that address issues relevant to the experience.
- Creative Projects: Students make a collage or write a poem or song to express an experience.
- Blog: Create a course blog or website where students can post comments on their experiences.
- Reflective Reading: Find articles, poems, stories or songs that relate to the experiences students are having and then create discussion questions.
Additional Examples of Reflection Questions

What?
- What specific skills have you used during your job?
- Why does the organization you are working for exist?
- What is your role in your current job?

So what?
- Describe a person you've encountered during your work experience who made a strong impression on you, positive or negative.
- Do you see benefits of doing this type of work? Why or why not?
- How has the environment and social conditions affected the people at your job?
- What institutional structures are in place at your job? How do they affect the people you work with?
- Has the experience affected your worldview? How?
- What did you do that seemed to be effective or ineffective in your job?
- What are the most difficult or satisfying parts of your work? Why?
- How are your values expressed through your work?
- What about your involvement or work has been an eye-opening experience?

Now what?
- What were your initial expectations? Have these expectations changed? How? Why?
- How do you motivate yourself to get your job done site when you don't feel like it?
- Has your view of the population/clients / customers with whom you have been working changed? How?
- Have your career options been expanded by your experience?
- Did anything about your working involvement surprise you? If so, what?
- How does your understanding of this type of job/profession change as a result of your participation in this work-term project?
- How can you educate others or raise awareness about this type of work?
- Talk about any disappointments or successes of your project. What did you learn from it?
- During your work experience, have you dealt with being an "outsider" at your site? How does being an "outsider" differ from being an "insider"?
- What sorts of things make you feel uncomfortable when you are working in your job? Why?
- Complete this sentence: Because of my (course) job opportunity, I am....
References:


uoguelph.ca/experientiallearning