

Becoming a Reflective Educator & Reflective Journal Writing

ARC II 2015



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Defining Reflective Practice: Becoming a Reflective Practitioner

“Reflective teaching, reflective thinking, reflective inquiry, reflection and reflective practice are often used interchangeably, although there are slight distinctions. The term reflective practice is viewed here as the culmination of all other forms of reflection in that it is undertaken not solely to revisit the past but to guide future action. Practice refers to one’s repertoire of knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and skills in specific areas of performance. For teachers, these areas include managing the classroom, designing instruction, establishing assessment strategies and interacting with students, colleagues, and parents.”

Larrivee, Barbara. (2009). *Authentic classroom management. Creating a learning community and building reflective practice*, Third Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, p. 11.

Reflective practice as defined in research/educational literature over the past three decades:

- A dialogue of thinking and doing through which one becomes more skilled (Schon, 1987)
- A process that helps teachers think about what happened, why it happened, and what else could have been done to reach their goals (Cruickshank & Applegate, 1981)
- An inquiry approach that involves a personal commitment to continuous learning and improvement (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, & Montie, 2001)
- The practice of analyzing one’s actions, decisions, or products by focusing on one’s process for achieving them (Killion & Todnem, 1991)
- A critical, questioning orientation and a deep commitment to the discovery and analysis of information concerning the quality of a professional’s designed action (Bright, 1996).
- A willingness to accept responsibility for one’s professional practice (Ross, 1990)
- A systematic and comprehensive data-gathering process enriched by dialogue and collaborative effort (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004)
- The use of higher-level thinking, such as critical inquiry and metacognition, which allow one to move beyond a focus on isolated facts or data to perceive a broader context for understanding behavior and events (Hatton & Smith, 1995)
- The capacity to think creatively, imaginatively and, eventually, self-critically about classroom practice (Lasley, 1992)
- An ongoing process of examining and refining practice variously focused on the personal, pedagogical, curricular, intellectual, societal, and/or ethical contexts associated with professional work (Cole & Knowles, 2000)

- Reflection is what allows us to learn from our experiences. It is an assessment of where we have been and where we want to go next (Rolf, 2001)

Ten Attributes of a Reflective Practitioner (Larrivee, 2009)

1. Reflects on and learns from experience
2. Engages in ongoing inquiry
3. Solicits feedback
4. Remains open to alternative perspectives
5. Assumes responsibility for own learning
6. Takes action to align with new knowledge and understanding
7. Observes self in the process of thinking
8. Is committed to continuous improvement in practice
9. Strives to align behaviors with values and beliefs
10. Seeks to discover what is true

As you prepare for a career in education and become a reflective educator, it is imperative that you accept responsibility and take an active role in your own learning. This is why ARC requires you to keep a Reflective Learning Journal.

Reflective Learning Journal Requirement

You are required to write a reflective learning journal as part of the ARC program. The journal will be required during your Core sessions, methods classes, and during student teaching. All journal entries will be typed, double spaced, using Times New Roman regular 12-point font.

The expected length of journal entries is:

- ✓ Full day, single topic core session: 3 pages maximum
- ✓ Half-day core sessions: 1¹/₂ -2 pages maximum
- ✓ Full day methods: 3 pages maximum
- ✓ Half-day methods: 1¹/₂ -2 pages maximum
- ✓ Student Teaching: During student teaching, you will write a weekly self-reflection based on a protocol which will be assigned to you at that time

Please note it is your responsibility to keep up with your journal entries on a weekly basis. It may not always be possible to write a journal entry on a daily basis. However, it is critical that you record your initial thoughts and observations each day after your session and student teaching to retain your most profound thoughts regarding each instructional experience.

What is a Reflective Learning Journal?

A reflective learning journal is a means of recording ideas, personal thoughts and experiences as well as reflections and insights you have during the ARC program. Reflective journal writing requires you to think more deeply, confront your own values and beliefs, and pose questions.

In your reflective journal, you will be required to critically analyze and synthesize your ARC learning and experiences into your personal thoughts and philosophy, integrate what the learning means to you as a teacher, and identify your future professional development needs. The reflective learning journal also provides faculty with insights regarding your learning so that they may respond to questions and explore topics needing further clarification. Lastly, the journal provides opportunity to develop the habits of a reflective, lifelong educator and take charge of your own learning (adapted from Assessment Resources, HUK, 2012).

Different from other forms of academic writing, reflective journaling incorporates personal experiences and use of “I.” This use of first person (vs. 3rd person) supports reflection. However, journal entries are not meant to be personal diaries nor critiques of the presenters. Students are asked to evaluate each Core presentation separately following each session.

There are various models of how to think (and then write) reflectively, including David Kolb’s Learning Cycle (1984); Schön’s (1991) concept of 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action' and Rolf’s (2001) framework for reflective practice: What, so what, and now what. This framework will engage and support your reflective thinking and writing throughout the program.

Reflective Thinking Reflective Journal Entries

A reflective journal entry is a conversation with yourself (and your ARC faculty). Reflective writing differs from more 'objective' kinds of writing you may have done for college courses as it encourages you to reflect upon your own thoughts, actions, and experiences that relate to the content you are learning in your ARC Program.

You will base your reflective writing on a reflective thinking process. Reflection involves taking a pause to examine your own thoughts, beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions, which form the basis of your understanding. Revisit your prior experiences and knowledge. Consider how you think and why you think the way you do. While there is no right or wrong way to think and write reflectively, the key questions you will address are often “how?” and “why?”

Reflective thinking and writing helps you to recognize the connections between what you already know, have experienced and are in the process of learning. It asks you to consider the connections between the theoretical aspects of your core/methods sessions and practical situations and experience.

Reflective writing seems easy to students at first glance. At the beginning of their ARC experience, students often begin journal writing with a description of the Core/Method session, either recalling activities they did or repeating information in the presenter's power point, handouts, or texts. The reflective journal framework described on p.6-7 supports journal writing that goes beyond "the facts" to reflective analysis.

In terms of journal writing, the event or experience itself is not important.

What is important is your reaction to an experience and how it has shaped your thinking and learning. What we are looking for is how well you can analyze and reflect on core/methods sessions.

Finally, journal writing asks you to reflect upon how learning/experiences in ARC will shape your teaching and learning practices as you prepare to become a lifelong educator.

(Adapted from University of Canberra: *Reflective Writing*)



How to write reflectively: What? So What? Now What?

This is an effective framework to assist you in reflective thinking and writing. Working through all three sections for each entry will support broader insights and keep you from getting stuck on only the facts or just your feelings.

Section 1: What?

Description. Objectively report what happened. Without judgement or interpretation, you briefly describe the core presentation, methods classes, or your observations/work in schools.

“This account is descriptive and contains little reflection. The account of the experience describes what happened, may mention past experiences, but all in the context of the session. They may be emotional reactions, but they are not explored. This writing exclusively is not reflective at all. It certainly is the beginning point of a reflective piece, since a good description is a necessary base as a starting point for the next steps.” (Moon, 2004)

Guiding questions include:

- What happened during that event or experience?
- What issue or topic was presented?
- What did I observe?
- Did anything of significance happen? Any highlights? If so, describe.

Section 2: So What?

Interpretation. What you learned. You analyze the session and discuss your feelings, reactions thoughts related to the session while also considering multiple perspectives

“There is description but it is focused with reflective comments. There may be a sense that the material is being mulled around. It is no longer a straightforward account of an event, but it is definitely reflective. The account may mention emotional reactions...Any influence may be noted, and possibly questioned, and there is recognition of the worth of exploring motives or reasons for behaviour.” (Moon, 2004)

Where relevant, there is willingness to question your own or others’ actions and to recognize the overall effect of the session on your learning. In other words, there is some ‘standing back’ from the event. Recognize any emotional content. Question its role. Attempt to consider its significance in shaping your views. Recognize that things might look different from other perspectives and that views can change with time. The existence of several alternative points of view may be acknowledged.

Guiding questions include:

- What did I learn?
- What were my feelings during that experience? Why did I feel that way?

- What were my thoughts during that experience? Why did I think that way?
- What surprised me? Any affirmations?
- What did I learn from the session that concerns me? With what do I disagree? Why?
- In what ways did this session influence my thinking about a particular topic?
- How was this experience different or consistent with what I expected?
- Was what I learned in the session consistent with my beliefs or prior experiences? Why or why not?
- Have I changed or affirmed my perspective on the topic? Explain.

Section 3: Now What?

Reflection on the impact of this experience and learning. How will you think or act in the future as a result of this experience?

“Description now only serves the process of reflection, covering the issues for reflection and noting their context. There is clear evidence of standing back from an event and there is mulling over and internal dialogue. The account shows deep reflection, and incorporates recognition that the frame of reference with which an event is viewed can change.” (Moon 2004)

Guiding questions include:

- How can I use this information or strategy and apply it to my teaching?
- How might I now approach future work? What actions should I take?
- How did this session contribute to my learning about myself as a learner and as a teacher?
- What did I learn in this session that might be a challenge for me?
- What are my lingering questions?
- If I “stepped back” from this session, how might it look different?
- How do I judge my ability to reflect on this topic? How might I get another perspective?
- About what would I like to learn more as related to this session?
- What follow-up do I need?
- What are areas or needs for my further learning?

Final Thoughts

- The goal of each entry is to provide a brief description of the session, (WHAT), analyze and interpret the session information (SO WHAT), and then decide how you can use the information (NOW WHAT).
- You do not have to answer all of the questions in your journal entry -- impossible in 1-3 pages!
- It is certainly permissible to focus on a few items that really get your attention during the presentation. The questions are provided to jump-start your thinking about the session and write a quality reflection to get to: **NOW WHAT?**

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