



The Reflective Practitioner and Reflective Journal Writing

ARC II 2014

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September 27, 2014

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The 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: 1½ -2 pages maximum
- ✓ Full day methods: 3 pages maximum
- ✓ Half-day methods: 1½ -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 be possible to always 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 so that you may retain your most profound thoughts regarding each instructional experience.

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.”

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

The following are some ways reflective practice has been described in the literature over the past two decades.

Reflective practice is:

- 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, Ghere, & 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 (Wolf)

As you can see from these definitions, reflection goes much deeper than thinking about how to keep students quiet and on task (Larrivee and Cooper, *An Educator's Guide to Teacher Reflection*, 2006)

As you prepare for a career in education and to become a reflective practitioner, 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.

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

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 encourage you to pose questions.

In your reflective journal, you will be required to critically analyse and synthesize the information you are learning into your personal thoughts and philosophy, integrate what the learning may mean to you as a teacher, and to guide you to 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 that need further clarification. Lastly, the journal provides you take charge of your own learning and to develop the habits of a reflective, lifelong educator (adapted from Assessment Resources, HUK, 2012).

Reflective writing seems easy to students at first glance. Students usually begin journal writing at the beginning of their ARC experience just describing the Core/method session, either recalling activities they did or repeating information in the presenter's power point, handouts, or textbook. Different from other forms of academic writing, reflective journal entries develop a style of writing that uses 'I' and personal experience. 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. We are using Rolf's model as it suits our purpose of writing reflectively as part of our program (see p. 6-8).

Reflective Thinking ➡ Reflective Journal Entries

A reflective journal entry is a conversation with yourself (and your 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.

As such, you will base your reflective writing on a reflective thinking process. The reflective process starts with you. Reflection involves taking a pause to examine your own thoughts, beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions, which form the foundation of your understanding. Revisit your prior experiences and knowledge, and consider how you think and why you think the way you do. There is no absolute right or wrong way of reflective thinking. But the key questions in reflective thinking are often how and why rather than what.

Some overall guiding questions for reflective thinking are:

- What happened during that event or experience? And why did it happen?
- What were my feelings during that experience? And why did I feel that way?
- What were my thoughts during that experience? And why did I think that way?
- How do I interpret what I experienced or observed?
- What might this experience mean in the context of my ARC program?
- What other perspectives, theories or concepts could be applied to interpret the situation?
- How can I learn from this experience?

Reflective thinking/writing helps you to recognize the connections between what you already know and have experienced and what you 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

In terms of journal writing, the event or experience is in 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 analyse 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 a well-used and successful model to assist you in writing reflectively. Although you can derive learning from each question, focussing on all three will provide broader insights and keep you from getting stuck on only the facts or just your feelings.

- 1. Description: What?** (Reporting what happened, objectively). Without judgement or interpretation, you briefly describe the core presentation or methods classes.

“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 issue or topic was presented?
- What did you observe?
- Did anything of significance happen? If so, describe.

- 2. Description with some reflection: So what?** (Interpretation: What did you learn?) You discuss your feelings, ideas, and analyse the session.

“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, or be influenced by emotion. 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 be critical of the action of self or others. There is likely to be some self- questioning and willingness also to recognize the overall effect of the session on self. In other words, there is some ‘standing back’ from the event.

There is recognition of any emotional content, a questioning of its role and influence and an attempt to consider its significance in shaping the views presented.

There may be recognition 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 but not analysed.

Questions include:

- Did you learn a new skill? If so, explain.
- What did you learn from the sessions that concern you or with which you disagree?
- What difference did the session make?
- Was this experience different from what you expected? How so?
- What surprised you in this session?
- Was the information in the session consistent with your beliefs or prior experiences? Why or why not?
- Have you changed your perspective on the topic following the session? ”

3. Reflection Now What? (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 it incorporates recognition that the frame of reference with which an event is viewed can change.” (Moon 2004)

A metacognitive stance is taken (i.e. critical awareness of one’s own processes of mental functioning – including reflection).

The account probably recognizes that events exist in a historical or social context that may be influential on a person’s reaction to them. In other words, multiple perspectives are noted.

Self- questioning is evident (an ‘internal dialogue’ is set up at times) deliberating between different views of personal behavior and that of others. The view and motives of others are taken into account and considered against those of the writer.

There is recognition of the role of emotion in shaping the ideas and recognition of the manner in which different emotional influences can frame the account in different ways.

There is recognition that prior experience, thoughts (own and other’s) interact with the production of current thinking.

There is observation that there is learning to be gained from the experience and points for future learning are noted.

There is recognition that the personal frame of reference can change according to the emotional state in which it is written, the acquisition of new information, the review of ideas and the effect of time passing.

Questions include:

- What learning occurred for you in this experience?
- How can you apply this learning as you think about your teaching?
- What did you learn in this session that might be a challenge for you as a new teacher?
- Are there alternative interpretations in this session for you to consider?
- If you ‘step back’ from this session topic, does it look different?
- What am I learning about myself as a learner and/or prospective teacher s a result of this session and reflection?
- How do you judge your ability to reflect on this topic?
- About what would you like to learn more, related to this session?
- What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties? ”

Final Thoughts:

- The goal of each entry is to provide a brief description of the session, (**WHAT**), analyse 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 -- it would be 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 to write a quality reflection in order for you to get to: **NOW WHAT!**

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