

USING REFLECTIVE ASSIGNMENTS AS EVALUATIVE TOOLS

Dr. Megan O'Neill

Virginia Tech

How Do You Use Reflection?

Questions

- How do you assign it?
- How often?
- Who reads it?

- What kind of responses do you get?

Theorizing Reflection

Assumption: Reflective writing is the byproduct of reflective thinking. By teaching a behavior we can create successful writing.

- Dewey
- Vygotsky
- Pianko “Reflection: A Critical Component of the Composition Process” (1979)

Types of Reflection



Descriptive/ Critical

Reflection-in-Action/ Reflection-in-Presentation

Learning/Assessment

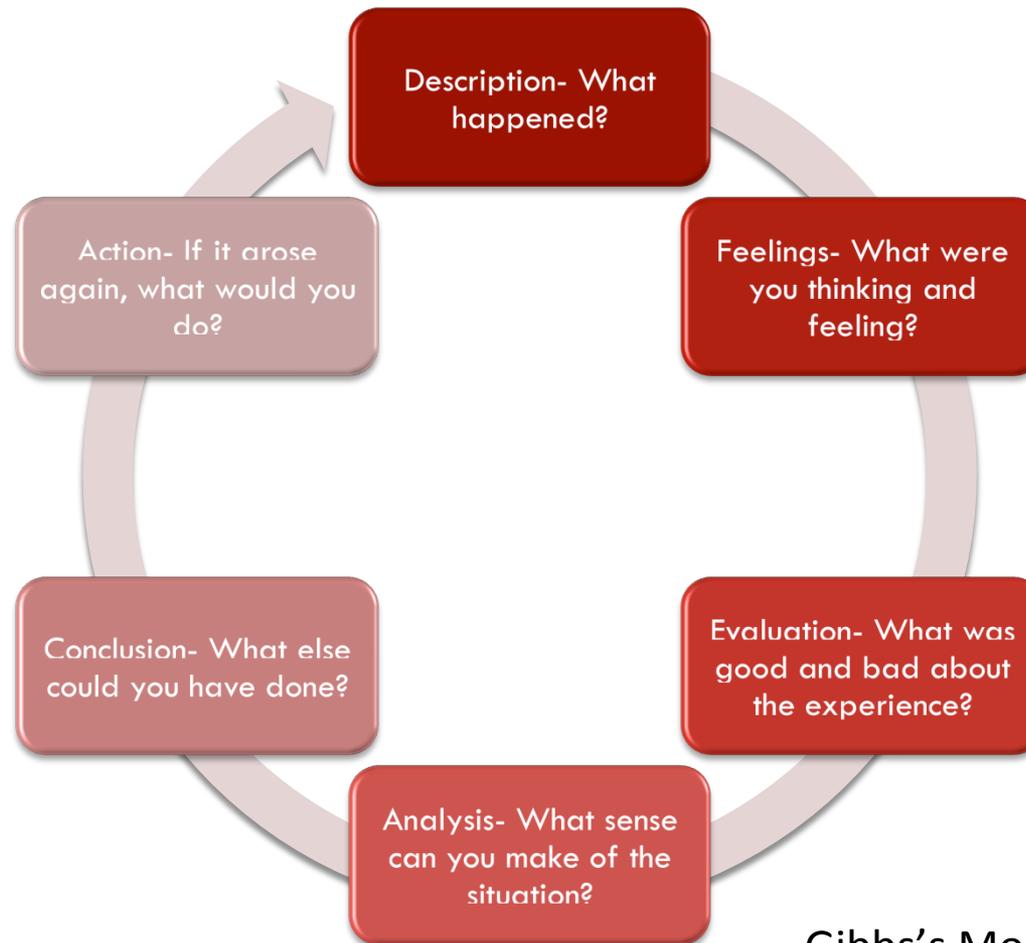
Why isn't it working?

Reflection needs to be:

- Structured
- Practiced
- Dialogic

*Reflection needs to be treated like any other course outcome- taught

What is Reflective Thinking?



Gibbs's Model of Reflective Thinking (1988)

Steps for Reflective Transfer



- 1) Observe and examine our own practice
- 2) Make hypothesis about successes and failures there, as well as the reasons for each
- 3) Shape the next iteration of similar experiences according to what we have learned, when we have learned
- 4) Begin the cycle again

Reflection: Using Writing to Learn



Reflections allows students to gain confidence in their ideas, practice their writing, and create a community of practice.

Structured, Practiced, Dialogic

Tips for assigning reflection

- Provide a clear rationale for reflecting
- Allow for time to learn structure
- Provide time in class to reflect
- Create a formal structure for responses- **description, interpretation, outcome**
- Don't shy away from the affective
- Make it a regular activity- practice
- Respond to student work yourself

Structuring Reflection: Description

Focus on an experience or event

Describe the experience

- What was outstanding or meaningful, negative or positive?
- Brainstorm ideas for five minutes
- Then consider each idea for follow up
- Other ideas may emerge, so consider them too. Talk about the experience to stimulate a range of perspectives
- Consider the sequence, outcomes, feelings
- Create a draft that is filled with your thoughts; that explores some ideas more than others

Structuring Reflection: Interpretation

Conduct a critical analysis or evaluation

- Why did the event(s) occur in that particular way?
- What factors contributed to the outcome?
- Did you achieve your goals? Did your goals change? Did other people achieve the set goals?
- How did your actions influence the situation? How did other people impact on the situation? How did the situation affect you?
- Could you have reacted differently? If you had, what might have happened?
- Why did you react in that way?

Structuring Reflection: Outcomes

Discover key points or issues of significance

Answer “Now What?”

- How might this experience affect you in the future?
- Have you formed any new attitudes or values? Why or why not?
- Did you learn anything about yourself that was unexpected?
- What changes do you expect to make in yourself or your work?

So How Do We Assess It?

We need to begin thinking of writing evaluation not so much as to judge accurately a piece of writing or a particular writer, but as the ability to describe the promise and limitations of a writer working within a rhetorical and linguistic context.

The ability to assess is the ability to determine and control what is valuable.

Brian Huot, *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*, 2002

So How Do We Assess It?

- Decide our assignment outcomes: Are we looking for ***demonstration of achievement*** or for ***discovering and improving?***
- Structures we provide shape reflection. Where the structure provides scaffolding and stimulates connection, it invites meaning making.

Example 1

Directions:

This letter, addressed to the writing program teachers, introduces you and your portfolio. It may describe the process used in creating any one portfolio piece, discuss important pieces in creating your portfolio, explain the place of writing in your life, chronicle your development as a writer, assess the strength and weaknesses of your writing, or combine these approaches, your letter should provide readers with a clearer understanding of who you are as a writer and person.

Alignment Grid

DESIRED LEARNING OUTCOMES	TYPE OF ACTIVITY OR ASSIGNMENT	FORM OF ASSESSMENT
What are the individual knowledge, skills, and or attitudes that students should develop though this assignment?	What actual activity or experience will students do to learn/develop the desired outcome?	What will we measure to determine if students have met our learning outcomes? How will we measure it?

Revised Example 1

Outcomes: 750 words, Make comparative judgments about texts, Identify and use the language of revision, is task-specific, not task-general.

Directions:

- 1) Of the texts in your portfolio, which is best and why?
- 2) Of the texts in your portfolio, which is weakest, and why?
- 3) What might you do to improve either or both of them?

Example 2

Try to show me that you have read the texts critically and thought deeply about what you have read. A good starting point is to briefly identify how the work impacted you, then move on to a critical approach, theme, or analysis of basic elements. Develop the heck out of one interesting idea. The best essays are those that strive to discover something significant that the casual reader would not have noticed, and then support and explore effectively with quotes from the text. Essays will be graded on a ten point scale. I consider “8” to be the grade for doing a good job and **fulfilling assignment expectations**. In order to earn a grade higher than an “8” you must exceed assignment expectations. A grade lower than an “8” means your reflection essay didn’t fulfill assignment expectations, or it was late.

Alignment Grid

DESIRED LEARNING OUTCOMES	TYPE OF ACTIVITY OR ASSIGNMENT	FORM OF ASSESSMENT
What are the individual knowledge, skills, and or attitudes that students should develop though this assignment?	What actual activity or experience will students do to learn/develop the desired outcome?	What will we measure to determine if students have met our learning outcomes? How will we measure it?

Revised Example 2



Outcomes:

Directions:

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What is the function of this reflection? What do we hope it will accomplish?
- Are we assessing the writing performance, the reflective performance, or both?
- What does a good reflection “look like?”
- Who is this reflection for?

Thank You

**“Reflection is both a practice and an art.”
~ Kathleen Blake Yancey**

Dr. Megan O’Neill
Associate Director of First Year Experiences
Virginia Tech
oneill@vt.edu