

# Learning Through Reflectivity And Self-Assessment

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## Introduction

Reflection and self-assessment are ideas common to the teacher education programs in the nation. Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) perceived reflectivity as an active process of exploration and discovery. Reflectivity is an assessment strategy that is clearly learner-centered, teacher-directed and grounded on ideal pedagogical practices (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Kennedy (1990) concluded that reflection and self-assessment is an on-going process that enables teachers to continually learn from their own experiences thus, enabling them to scrutinize their decision-making processes. Dewey (1933) championed reflective teaching perceiving it as a process of systematic inquiry to determine a preferable course of action in teaching and learning. In addition, any course of action taken must be subjected to continued review and revision. According to Lieberman (1995), such a practice is ideal in creating a wide array of learning opportunities that engage students in meaningful learning.

Addressing the importance of self-assessment, Wong and Wong (1998) felt that it enables teachers to be efficient experts as they reflect on, or think through the instructional decisions they make. The ability to think about instructional decisions made will most definitely lead teachers to conscious teaching designs that will encourage learners to engage high order thinking skills (H.O.T.S.). Wong and Wong perceived teachers who make instructional decisions based on reflection and self-assessment as educators who are likely to affect positively the lives of learners. Thus, it is paramount to acculturate both practicing and pre-service teachers with the habits of reflective thinking and self-assessment. Participants in this study were pre-service teachers.

## Participants

A total of 16 pre-service teachers enrolled in Educational Studies- Teacher as Decision Maker course at a university in the Rocky Mountain region participated. This is a six credit hour course that follows the Education Foundation (EDFD 2020 and 2040) courses both taken at the community college level. Participants engaged in a semester long self-assessment activities that served two purposes: 1) to examine pre-service teachers' reflectivity and self-assessment abilities and 2) to provide data about course content from students' perspective.

## Research questions

Participants responded in writing (five minutes per questions) to three sets of questions in addition to "one minute" or index card papers provided any time in the semester. The one-minute questions included the following three items:

- 1) Describe one thing you learned today.
- 2) Describe one thing you want to learn.
- 3) Describe one thing you think would help you learn.

The study was however, anchored on the items provided below.

At the beginning of semester, students responded to the following questions:

- a) What do you expect to learn from this course?
- b) Why do you think this is what you'll learn?

- c) How do you think the learning in this course will connect to what you've learned in previous education course?

At the middle of the semester, students responded in writing (five minutes per question) to the following items:

- a) In this course, what have you learned?
- b) Is this what you expected to learn? or explain the consistencies and inconsistencies between what you learned and what you expected to learn?
- c) At this point, what do you need to learn?
- d) What will you do to undertake this necessary learning?

Finally, at the end of the semester, participants responded in writing (five minutes per item) to the following questions:

- a) What essential learning will you take from this course?
- b) What does your learning in this course mean to you now?
- c) What comes next? What issues capture your attention now and what do you need to do to further investigate these issues?
- d) Which concepts were: 1) the most interesting to you? 2) the most challenging for you? and 3) the easiest for you to understand?
- e) Which methods were most helpful to you as a learner? Why?
- f) Which methods do you think you will use as a teacher? Why?

## **Results**

In the Teacher as Decision Maker, students enrolled expecting to really learn how to teach. This is not surprising because students enrolling in this course have already taken foundational courses. Although participants expressed their expectations in a variety of ways, the following excerpts are effective thematic representation of the responses provided.

*"I want to learn more about how to effectively present materials to students and manage all the information I have to give the children in the shortest amount of time..."*

*"My expectation of this course is to expand on the basic foundation of education that I have received to this point. As far as career in education is concerned, it is all theory and very little practice so far. I consider this course to be the professional phase of the program"*

*"I expect to learn how to be an effective teacher."*

When participants were asked the second question about why they think this is what they would learn, majority keyed on the course title. They expected to learn how to teach and make instructional decisions because the title told them that they would.

One of the key ideas the researcher talks about a lot in class is "effective" teaching. By midterm, students began to use "my" language in their written self-assessments. The researcher was in a way hearing from them exactly what he had taught them in class. He was "contaminating" them with his own perspectives about teaching. Nevertheless, students began to identify specific literature-based actions they will engage in as effective teachers as the following excerpts will show:

*"I have learned about direct instruction, cooperative learning and the differences between teams and groups in a learning environment..."*

*"At this point of the course I have learned a variety of instructional strategies, and that classroom management is an important aspects of being an effective teacher..."*

*"I have learned that there is more than one way a lesson can be taught..."*

Students also reported the importance of connecting with previous courses. They felt as if they were learning more details and they fully expected their teacher education courses to build on one another; to provide greater depth and application, and to expand on prior knowledge as they progressed.

At the mid-term, the majority of students reported that they were actually learning more than they had expected, in greater depth, with more details, and emotions. Consequently, several reported how they now "owned" the information they were learning as the following statements indicate.

*"The thing I did not expect was the depth of everything I have learned. The discussions and emotions have caused such a great sense of ownership with my learning..."*

*"In this course, I have learned a lot. We spent time on classroom management, we learned what it is, why it is important, and the different ways of managing a classroom..."*

*"I have learned more than I expected. I expected to merely touch on a few techniques but instead I received in depth view of each topic..."*

When reflecting on how they would go about learning what they still needed to learn, the students had a variety of responses. Four students explained that they would need to do additional research to answer their questions, four reported that they would "depend on the teacher" to teach them what they needed to know, two explained that they needed to "change their attitudes", and three expected that their classroom and school field experiences would fill in the gaps.

When asked what essential learning they will take from course experience, nearly all the participants indicated that they would take "everything" and apply it in their own classrooms as the following excerpts will show.

*"All of it! I learned so much in the areas of classroom management, instructional strategies, & school/community relationships. I think all of the information..."*

*"I feel that I will take a lot of essential learning from this course. We were able to collect a lot of information to help in the future."*

*"The information I will take from this course is lesson planning, teaching strategies and classroom management strategies..."*

*"My learning in this course has increased my awareness in the three themes..(the three themes in the course are school community relations, instructional strategies and classroom management) This is a tool I can use to be an effective teacher"*

Concerning the issues that captured their attention, students responded in a variety of ways. Some students wanted to challenge money, safety and political issues in education. Others were interested in the availability of quality education for all children and restoring respect for the teaching profession. Students expressed a desire to have more experience with instructional strategies. Only one student identified multicultural issues as an area of interest and growth.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the data collected from students' reflection and self-assessment, the following conclusions were reached:

- a) Course titles tend to shape students' expectations and perceptions about course content. Thus, teachers and curriculum planners need to be clear and careful about the choices they make when adding new courses or revising existing ones.
- c) Students expect consistency between course titles and the actual course content. Thus, if a course title goes beyond its expected territory, educators must spend time decoding the title with students as they frame course expectations with them.
- d) Educators need to spend enough time early in the course exploring and discussing student's expectations.
- e) There is a need for greater articulation dialogue between the main campuses and subsidiary institutions in case these institutions were teaching transferable courses. Part of the dialogue should focus on ways to provide authentic learning experiences to allow a smoother transfer of students to main campuses.

## **Reference**

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