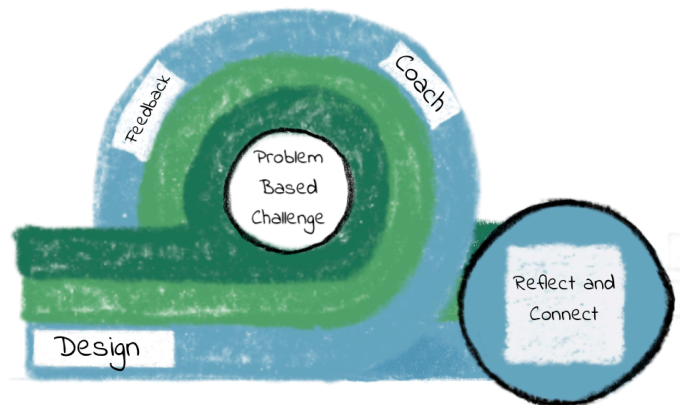


Reflection: A Process for Making Meaning

Laura Thomas and the Critical Skills Leadership Community



When we reflect, we make meaning of what happened to us, the difference our actions made, what we know- academically, emotionally, or socially- that we didn't before. Carefully designed reflection is a powerful method to help students gain meaning and understanding from experience. "Reflection helps students identify their own values, assess personal skills, develop empathy for others, and compare their assumptions to real world experience." (Cairn & Coble, 1993, p. 38)

When we reflect, we make meaning of what we've experienced, we connect new information to existing knowledge and desires- in short, we learn. Without the opportunity to reflect, we may temporarily memorize information, we may even memorize it permanently in a trivial pursuit sort of way, but we don't really learn. Reflective time and techniques, however, are nearly unheard of in classrooms today.

The technique of reflection- also known as debriefing- is based on three simple questions:

- What did I do?
- Did it work well or not so well? Why?
- What would I do differently if I were starting over now?

There are a number of variations on these questions, but all build from the concrete (a careful review of the exact steps used in solving a problem or engaging in an activity) to the evaluative (determining the success or failure of the steps I took and the reasons for those results), and the predictive (What lessons can I take from this to apply to next time?).

The time taken for reflection doesn't have to be great, but it must be intentional. Students must have the chance to reflect at transitional moments in the day. They must be guided in looking back at earlier efforts and then forward in preparation for their next steps. For young children, this could be as simple as a brief conversation around hallway behavior as we wait at the door before heading to music. It can be a longer conversation at the end of a project, during which students talk about their processes, make notes about what they want to do differently next time- notes that they refer to again at the beginning of the next project.

Cairn, Rich with Theresa Coble. Learning by Giving: A K-8 Service-Learning Curriculum Guide. 1993. Order from National Youth Leadership Council, 800-FON-NYLC.

In my public speaking classroom, this often took the form of a self-evaluation due at the end of the class period in which the student spoke. The student was required to reflect on the speech and on the previous self-evaluation, answering the following questions:

- What was my goal for this speech?
- What did I do to make steps towards that goal?
- Did I achieve the goal? How do I know?
- What is my goal for my next speech?

Students were required to hand these in as “exit” slips. The grade for the speech didn’t get recorded unless the self-evaluation was turned in. We also referred to those goals at the beginning of every class period and again at the end of every class period. Students knew that, in the first 5 minutes of class, they were to locate that last self-evaluation and check in on their goals for the upcoming speech. They knew I expected them to have a specific plan for meeting that goal and that I would check- not every day and not on everyone- but I would check. And they knew that the last 5 minutes of class were given over to a quick reflective piece that required them to evaluate their work.

We also planned for spontaneous reflection, examining processes and work as they emerged. All that reflection counted for a grade- we even had a reflection rubric. It was a big part of their grade but, more importantly, it was a big part of our learning community.

When we think of reflection, it’s not unusual to focus on paper and pencil techniques. Journaling comes to mind easily, even the examples given above deal with the written word. It’s important to note, however, that reflection is an internal process. We need an external representation of that process, however, in order to understand the student’s process. The most accurate representation is going to be one that matches the way the way the student thinks. These might include:

- speaking in small or large groups,
- teaching material to other students,
- planning future projects,
- role plays,
- creating photo essays or video presentations,
- keeping a sketchbook,
- diagramming processes, or
- performing skits.

This is one of the times that you most want to play to a student’s strengths, particularly when the reflection is part of a summative assessment or if it occurs at a major transition point in the course (end of the unit, completion of large presentations or projects, etc.). Briefer techniques (exit slips, end-of-day sheets, using “thumbs up/ middle/ or down,” etc.) are sufficient for quick, formative assessment of student understanding or progress. Like every element of the Critical Skills approach, we hope to find you adapting the concept of reflection to your own strengths as an educator.

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Multimedia/Performing Arts

- Photo, slide, or video essay
- Instagram Reel
- TikTok
- Scrap book
- Graphic design
- Painting, drawing, collage, etc
- Dance, music or theater presentation

Activities

- Analysis and problem solving
- Information gathering need to understand challenge
- Planning future challenges
- Allocating time and resources
- Recognition/ celebration events
- Simulations or role playing games
- Surveys or field-based research
- Presentations at workshops or conferences

Writing

- Essay, expert paper, research paper, final paper
- Project report
- Learning log-kept daily or weekly
- Narrative for a video, film, or slideshow
- Guide for future students
- Self evaluation
- Newspaper, magazine, blog, or other published articles or letters

Speaking

- One-on-one conferences with teacher
- class/group discussions
- Small group discussions
- Oral reports to group
- Discussions with community members or experts on an issue
- Public speaking on project
- Teaching material to younger students

Tips for fostering reflection:

- Worthwhile reflection activities require careful planning as well as time.
- Schedule regular time periods for discussion and other reflection activities.
- Try to integrate times for reflective techniques through the experience.
- Allow for spontaneous reflection at the time that issues arrives. These teachable moments often create the most profound learning.
- Offer students options for responding.
- Link reflection with other reading, writing, discussion, projects, etc.
- Allow time for responses. Research shows that few extra seconds helps most people organize what they want to say.
- Keep the same individuals from monopolize the conversation.
- Make sure everyone takes a turn speaking, but try not to put students on the spot. Allow students to “pass” on a round of discussion.

Note: Reflection is a method of learning, not therapy. It is simply not appropriate in the classroom to delve into students’ personal lives. Make sure students know that they are not expected to tell secrets of private feelings or facts about themselves. To avoid confusion, describe daily writing assignments as “learning logs” rather than as “journals.” Journals are sometimes used for levels of personal exploration inappropriate to the classroom. Know in advance the contacts and procedures for referring students for mental health support or other professional help.

What do reflection questions look like:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • What happened when...? | • What would you like to know more about? |
| • How did people respond to you? | • Where is this situation likely to occur in the future? |
| • What did it feel like when...? | • What would you do differently? |
| • What did you learn as a result of...? | • What advice can you pass on to others? |
| • How can you use what you’ve learned? | • What was your biggest challenge? |
| • What academic skills or information did you use? | • How did you solve a problem? |

(Cairn & Coble, 1993, pp.38-39)

Finally, remember: if a student creates it, you have to be able to give them credit for it in the form of a letter grade, a checkmark, or a point total. All the more need for a rubric describing quality reflection, or at the very least, a clearly posted set of quality criteria that you review before setting students to the task of reflection.

In the pages that follow, you’ll find some example rubrics. None are intended to be the definitive Reflection Rubric, but each will provide a starting point as you and your students develop something that will not only allow you to assign an authentic grade but also guide students towards authentic, powerful reflection.

Cairn, Rich with Theresa Coble. Learning by Giving: A K-8 Service-Learning Curriculum Guide. 1993.
Order from National Youth Leadership Council, 800-FON-NYLC.

Analytic Trait Rubric for Reflection

Reflection Rubric

	Response to Content	Personal thoughts and feelings	Examples
1	Student does not state an opinion in the reflection.	Student does not state an opinion in the reflection.	Student includes no examples in the reflection.
2	Student briefly states opinion in the reflection	Student includes few thoughts and feelings in the reflection.	Student includes few examples in the reflection
3	Student briefly states opinion in the reflection.	Student includes some thoughts and feelings in the reflection.	Student includes examples in the reflection.
4	Student gives in-depth explanation of one's opinion in the reflection.	Student includes many thoughts and feelings in the reflection.	Student includes many examples in the reflection.
	Teacher Comments:		

Checklist Rubric for Reflection

Reflection Rubric

Does your reflection include:

- ☐ Name?
- ☐ Date?
- ☐ Prompt?
- ☐ Description of what you did?
- ☐ Evaluation of how it worked?
- ☐ Analysis of why it worked (or didn't)?
- ☐ Plans for what you'll do next time?

Comments:

Group Self-Assessment _____

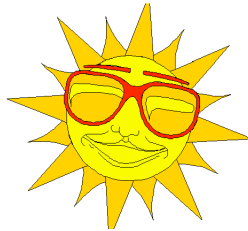
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My Name _____

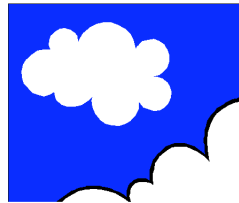
Date _____

Project _____

Group Members _____



SUNNY



CLOUDY



RAINY

Our project was

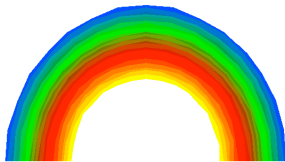
My work was

Our group work was

My job was _____

I did a good job on _____

Our group did a good job on _____



BRIGHT DAYS AHEAD

Next time I will try to improve on _____

Group Self-Assessment

My

name: _____

Date: _____

Project: _____

Group Members: _____

Our project was

My work was

Our group work
was

Sunny ☀️	Cloudy ☁️	Rainy 🌧️

My job was: _____

I did a good job on: _____

Our group did a good job on: _____

Next time I will try to improve on: _____

Individual Feedback

Name: _____

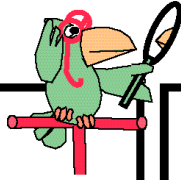
1. Contributions to the process and/ or to the product:

2. Skills, strategies, and/or tools used:

3. Next steps:

4. Comments on the work of the group:

Self-Assessment



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Name:

Date:

Challenge:

1. What were you supposed to do and did you do it?

2. What was your favorite part? Why?

3. What was your least favorite part? Why?

4. How well do you think you understand the key concepts of the challenge?

5. How did you exhibit your understanding?

6. If you could do this task over again, what would you do differently? Why?

7. What rating do you think you deserve? Why?

8. What skills did you work on? How?

9. What goal can you set for yourself for the next challenge?

Self-Assessment

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Name:

My strengths are ...

My weaknesses are ...

Next steps for me are ...

Self-Assessment

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Name:

Challenge:

Team Members:

Date:

Directions: Think about how you contributed to the challenge just completed. Please respond to the statements below. Include some specific examples of your contributions that support your response.

In your own words, describe how your group/team organized to get this problem done.

In your judgment, what kinds of things did your group/team do well?

In your judgment, what kinds of things need to be done differently next time?

In the space below and on the back of this sheet if necessary, list the names of each member of your group and describe *in very specific terms* what you consider to be the contribution of each of them to this challenge.

Reflective Thinking

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

Please list the KEY CONCEPTS of the following topic, issues or question:

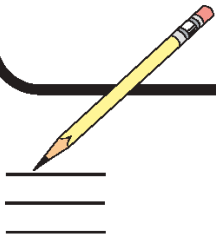
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Reflective Thinking

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Name: _____ **Class:** _____ **Date:** _____

Directions: Please address the following questions/issues in writing:



Reflective Thinking

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

Please address the following questions/ issues in writing:

Learning Log

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Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Please write your thoughts on at least 3 of the following questions:

What I learned was...

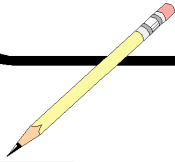
What I found interesting about this work was...

What surprised me was...

I want to know more about...

Right now I'm feeling...

This experience might have been more valuable to me if...



Toolbox 30

Learning Log

Name: _____

Date: _____

Please write your thoughts on at least 3 of the following questions:

What I learned was...

What I found interesting about this work was...

What surprised me was...

I want to know more about...

Right now I'm feeling...

This experience might have been more valuable to me if...

Reflective Thinking

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Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Please list the KEY CONCEPTS of the following topic, issue or question:

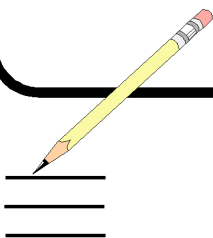


Reflective Thinking

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Name: _____ **Class:** _____ **Date:** _____

Directions: Please address the following questions/issues in writing:



Have a question?
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