

How To Guide:

Reflective Exercise



TU Dublin

Author: Sarah O'Dwyer

Context

Description:

A reflective exercise is one in which a student or learner engages in a structured reflective process which is typically iterative or cyclical in order to allow learners to develop competencies and actively construct their own knowledge. Educators provide the time, space and structure for reflection to occur and facilitate the learning processes which are being reflected upon.

All Active, Applied and Experiential learning techniques and methods will typically have reflective learning integrated as part of the process.

[ARCH4change Teaching Toolkit Glossary Reference: Active Learning, Experiential Learning, Applied Learning](#)

Relevance of method to climate change design teaching integration

Drawing on the context for the ARCH4CHANGE project in general, in particular the contextual [Literature Review](#) and [Survey](#) findings, it is evident that allowing time and space for reflection in learning – and facilitating its use in teaching and learning activities is linked with successful integration of climate change curriculum and sustainability integration.

Practical Considerations

Class Size:

This method is applicable to a range of class sizes, as reflection exercises can be quick or more involved, with shorter exercises more suitable to larger class groups. This will also depend on whether the reflective exercise is to be formatively or summatively assessed, with shorter format/group format reflective exercises more suitable to larger groups in terms of workload where educators will have to assess the exercise

Learning Stage (Year Group):

Applicable to all learning stages, but particularly relevant to Advanced Learning stages in which reflection can form part of [transformative learning](#) and students are more skilled at synthesising complex information and concepts.

Available teaching space & resources (tech etc)

A reflective learning exercise can be successfully undertaken whether students are in the classroom, online or both.

Dependent on the type of exercise the range of resources can range in complexity from no resources to digital resources, paper, pens etc.

Teaching & Learning Considerations

Themes:

This approach can be used alongside any of the ARCH4CHANGE curriculum themes.

Learning Outcomes/Objectives

- Students are helped to 'construct' their own knowledge.
- Encourages students take ownership of their own learning, allowing them time and space by giving to reflect, synthesise and make associations between knowledge domains.
- Making students take time to reflect results in better performance over time
- Assists students to identify what they are learning and if there are gaps in their learning and understanding
- Sharing of personal perspectives and insights enables students to connect to each other and improve team building skills
- Reflective processes enable students to think about their own learning, their learning needs and how these needs can be supported.
- Supports improved student communication skills.
- Allows students to consider and critically evaluate their own values, beliefs and assumption

Course Context (alignment with other subjects/modules)

Reflective Exercises can be used in any subject or learning area and as a process are very useful to draw in other subjects, relate content and synthesise content, promoting transformative learning.

Timeframe (length of learning activity):

Reflective exercises may be conducted as once off exercises within learning

sessions, or built up over time over the duration of a module or course. For reflection exercises completed within learning sessions, 15-30 minutes is sufficient for students to complete the task either individually or in groups. Where other methods such as blogging, reflective journals, reflective essays, portfolios, videos are incorporated etc, these will need dedicated support time each week for the duration of the module/course, including time spent introducing the tools and the reflective method to be employed

Method:

Introducing reflective exercises to teaching activities follows same basic approach as introducing any other student exercise, whether it is a short one off exercise or part of a larger exercise that stretches the course of the module/course:

- Step 1: Introducing the task and set groups
- Step 2: provide time/resources for students to complete task
- Step 3: provide time/resources for discussion of task output

Reflective activities should follow a structured reflective cycle such as Gibbs reflective cycle:

1. Description: what was done
2. Feeling: what you felt about the experience
3. Evaluation: evaluate the pros and cons
4. Analysis: make sense of the situation
5. Conclusion: conclude what you have learnt
6. Action plan: make a plan for what you would do differently or the same in the future; this cycle can be used at different depths depending on the length of the reflective exercise.

Reflective breaks should be built in throughout the learning activity (studio project, lecture, seminar or workshop for example) rather than left to the end of the activity only.

Examples of Reflective Exercises

Short individual or group reflective exercises:

- Write for one minute on key takeaway of session
- Create a sketch or doodle on key theme of session
- Use sticky notes which are gathered at end to record answers to prompt reflective questions.
- A misconception quiz
- Storyboard or concept maps
- What/so what/now what

- Compass points: Next steps/ Stance/Excited about/ /Worrisome about
- I used to think...now I think
- Sketch and reflect

Longer term individual or group reflective exercises:

- Create a reflective portfolio, with examples of student work/learning alongside reflections
- Create a reflective journal or blog, similar to above but taking in more than student work.
- Create a reflective video, post on shared platform or present in class
- Role play- take on someone else's role and reflect on their understanding, perspective and experience
- Structured reflective conversations with a 'critical friend'

Deliverables

From educator perspective: Resources to facilitate the reflective exercise.

From students perspective: Participation in reflective exercise. Possible participation in group discussion of outcomes. Participation in activity which may have specific deliverable or be linked to formative or summative assessment

Feedback

Depending on nature of reflective activity, instantaneous formative feedback should be given by educator to students in relation to the process, discussion, session deliverables. Where this is tied to summative assessment this can be followed by more formal feedback after the session.

Assessment:

Short in session reflective exercises should not be assessed summatively. However longer format exercises can be both formatively and summatively assessed. Where these exercises are summatively assessed, clear communication to students should be provided which explains how and what will be assessed, and includes an assessment rubric. Elements which may be assessed includes:

- communication (grammar, spelling errors)
- connection to experience
- accuracy
- clarity
- relevance
- depth
- breadth
- significance

Recommendations

Student Reflection

Space and time for student reflection needs to be built into the timeframe for the teaching activity.

Potential Pitfalls/challenges

- ease into reflection, don't bombard so it is not seen as additional work
- incorporate it into teaching session rather than a standalone activity
- it can be time-consuming. There's often not enough time, but don't rush it to move on to the next task.
- Don't stay in descriptive mode – reflection needs analysis
- Teachers/trainers may think it's unnecessary. They believe they know what they're doing and may have concerns that if they engage in reflection it shows insecurity and uncertainty.
- It's still a skill that needs to be demonstrated and taught, and needs to be sufficiently scaffolded amongst both educators and students
- Where it is assessed, it can become just another box to tick. If there is stress on students to complete or submit, it is likely the reflection will not be meaningful.
- Be specific and provide tools and ideas to students on what is to be done and how to do it.
- When done individually it can be overwhelming, encourage use of collaborative reflection, particularly in early stages of use of reflection
- Use a variety of reflective tasks over time rather than a singular approach

References

- <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching-guides/feedback-grading/Pages/assessing-reflection.aspx>
- <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience/gibbs-reflective-cycle>



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA



ARKITEKTSKOLEN AARHUS

ARCH4CHANGE