

Reflective Teaching

Yale Center for Teaching and Learning

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Through reflective teaching, an instructor habitually examines the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching, with the aim to understand their underlying beliefs about teaching and learning and improve their pedagogy. This critical practice can draw on a variety of sources, including “students’ eyes, colleagues’ perceptions, personal experience, and theory and research” (Brookfield 2017). Successful reflection combines exploratory methodologies with commitment to vigorous, vulnerable habits.

Examples and Recommendations

- **Reflection Journal:** A reflection journal allows instructors to capture details of their teaching directly after class and read an ongoing narrative of their teaching across terms and years. Taking 5 or so minutes after class, the instructor writes thoughts on the day’s lesson (typing or handwriting works, although handwriting often supports better memory and reflection). Instructors might reflect on the following questions: *What went well today? What could I have done differently? How will I modify my instruction in the future?*
- **Teaching Philosophy:** Writing a teaching philosophy can be a challenging, invigorating exercise for instructors. Because their form is first-person, but formal, teaching philosophies ask instructors to effectively articulate their knowledge of teaching and learning with details from the classroom. Philosophies are typically brief, but can speak to teaching habits, best practices, inspirations, and pedagogical goals.
- **Teaching Inventories:** A number of inventories have been developed to help instructors assess their teaching approaches. These often consist of multiple choice questions on a Likert-scale and typically take less than 10 - 15 minutes to complete. Inventories are usually designed to assess the extent to which particular pedagogies are employed (e.g. student- versus teacher-centered practices).
- **Video-Recorded Teaching Practices:** Instructors can video-record their lessons, and then watch them using an observation protocol or teaching inventory. Observing oneself from a distance can be effective for revealing assumptions about one’s teaching.
- **Peer or Departmental Observation and Feedback:** Instructors can ask a trusted colleague or administrator to observe their classroom and give them feedback on their teaching. Colleagues can agree on a protocol and list of behaviors to focus on, or utilize one of many teaching inventories available online.

Additional Recommendations

- **Use multiple data sources:** Considering teaching from at least two different perspectives (student evaluations and personal inventory, or personal inventory and peer observation) can provide a more holistic view of instruction. It is best to compare and review outcome data carefully, and even reflect on it with a colleague before making changes.
- **Don't Rush:** If instructors wish, for instance, to keep a teaching log, they may schedule dedicated time to write their entries, ideally soon after class ends, rather than hoping to find a moment throughout the day. As in any new technique, habit formation is key to continual engagement. Changes and new habits in teaching are often best made slowly - the usual recommendation is one core change per term.
- **Find a friend:** Instructors can consider finding a colleague or two to meet with in order to discuss teaching efforts. This may include a faculty member who teaches the same or similar course, or any trusted colleague or administrator. Most observations are best followed up with an informal coffee meeting to discuss findings in a no-judgment, non-evaluative climate.

References

Brookfield, S. (2017). *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.