

# What the What? Strategies for Critical Self-Reflection and Assessment

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# Intended Learning Outcomes

*After participation in this workshop, you will be able to...*

- Define “critical self-reflection.”
- Identify one (or more) course learning outcome(s) that can be connected to a self-reflective activity.
- Begin to construct a critical self-reflection activity that aligns with your identified learning outcome(s).

*What brings you to this session?*

*What experiences do you have with embedding critical reflection strategies in your courses?*

# What is Critical Self-Reflection (CSR)?

- A process of analyzing and making judgments about one's experiences (a “conscious exploration”)
- Involves observation, asking questions, and putting facts, ideas, and experiences together to derive new meaning
- A vehicle for critical analysis, problem-solving, synthesis of opposing ideas, evaluation, identifying patterns, and creating meaning - a critical thinking skill
  - Students analyze, reconsider, and question their experiences, values, beliefs, and decisions within a broad context of issues and content knowledge; adds depth and breadth to student learning

Sources: S.M. Rayhunul Islam 2015; Jacoby in Bart 2010; [www.criticalthinking.org](http://www.criticalthinking.org)

# Critical Self-Reflection: Theorists

- Dewey (1933): critical reflection is the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge, in light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” - a form of problem-solving in a “moment of doubt”
- Habermas (1971): “reflective knowing” as “valid” thinking that can occur beyond established and accepted social processes, e.g., reflecting on established professional practices and ways of being
- Freire (1973): reflection results in “critical consciousness” – learners become actors, not observers, and authors of their own decisions – the way to “praxis” (actions informed by reflection)
- Schon (1983): distinguished between “reflection-in-action” (when we think about doing something while we are doing it (“parallel processing”), and “reflection-on-action” (looking back on a past action, attempting to analyze and summarize that past experience, and to extract generalizations which might be of future use)
- Kolb (1984): reflection as part of a cycle of learning which includes planning, action, and evaluation
- Mezirow (1990): “transformative reflection” – looking at what is known with a view towards understanding how it can become better; may lead to a change in personal understanding and behavior

# Critical thinking, critical self-reflection, and academic performance

- Both promote higher-order thinking and cognitive development:
  - Aids in the development of judgment, evaluation, and problem-solving abilities;
  - Helps to make connections across disciplines;
  - Facilitates students becoming more independent, self-directed learners;
  - Develops the ability to separate facts from opinions, being able to examine an issue from multiple perspectives, the ability to make rational inferences, and the ability to withhold personal judgment;
  - Helps to develop self-awareness so as to know the difference between a rational thought based on careful consideration, and an emotional response based on personal bias.
- Both critical thinking and critical self-reflection are processes that students must learn and implement through ***practice***.

# Integrating Critical Self-Reflection: Four Steps

- Identify desired learning outcomes
- Design reflection activities to best achieve learning outcomes
- Engage students in reflection activities
- Assess the learning

# Step One

- Identifying desired learning outcomes
  - According to Jacoby (2010), CSR best suited for learning outcomes around complex dimensions of reasoning, developing enhanced understanding, questioning knowledge, theories, and assumptions.

*Think about learning goals for one of your courses – what do you expect students to gain?*

*Complete a (relevant) learning outcome stem with the desired knowledge, skill, or behavior:*

*“After successfully completing this course, students will be able to...:”*

*Define....*

*Identify...*

*Compare...*

*Apply...*

*Compute...*

*Evaluate...*

# Step Two

- Design reflection activities to achieve learning outcomes; intentional and structured
  - Consider when, where, and how often the reflection will occur (“continuously” is best).
  - Choose the mode: writing, speaking, activities, or media.
  - Create a *clear link* between the (activity, service, content, etc.), and the reflection activity; that is, contextualize it.
  - Define the criteria for assessing the activity – make it challenging.



# Step Three

- Engage students in reflection
  - As you provide prompts, guide students to higher levels of complexity of thinking, analyzing, and reasoning.
  - Jacoby suggests providing “...a balance of challenge and support” during the actual engagement portion.

# Critical Self-Reflection Strategies

- **Open-ended questioning techniques** encourage broader and deeper understandings; encourages active participation and evaluation of one's own work; CATS (*Classroom Assessment Techniques* – Angelo and Cross 1993)
  - “What did you learn?”
  - “So, what does this mean for you?”
  - “How is what you learned relevant to information in other classes or to life outside of higher ed?”
  - “What is one question related to this lesson that remains uppermost in your mind?”
  - “How has your knowledge of this topic changed?”
  - “What will you do about (or with) what you've learned/experienced?”

# Critical Self-Reflection Strategies

- **Reflective writing activities**, individually or with one or more students
  - Essays, notes, private journals, logs or diaries, personal goal statement, letters to self or others, reading responses, written persuasive arguments, discussion/bulletin board entries, critical incident reports, self-assessments, CATS
  - Portfolios – showcase best or most representative work; venue for both reflection and involvement in the assessment process (students can help select appropriate evidence of their learning)

# Critical Self-Reflection Strategies

- **In-class discussion or other speaking activities**
  - Peer or large group
  - Collaborative learning assignment, e.g., Think-Pair-Share, Taking Sides
  - Problem-Based Learning group (e.g., with real-world cases)
  - Service-Learning stakeholder interview
  - Reflective interview
  - Presentations
  - Poetry slam
  - Story telling
  - Teaching
  - Role-playing

# Critical Self-Reflection Strategies

- **Diagrammatic Activities**
  - Concept maps
  - Mind maps
  - Conceptual diagrams

# Critical Self-Reflection Strategies

- **Media/Performance activities**
  - Photos, images, video- and filmmaking
  - Music compositions
  - Drawings, paintings
  - Murals
  - Digital stories
  - Tableau vivant

Source for all modes: Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede 1996.

# Critical Self-Reflection Strategies

- Open-ended/writing activities
- Discussion/other speaking activities
- Diagrammatic activities
- Art/media/performance

*Take another look at your learning outcome...what kind of reflection strategy do you think would be a “good fit” for your learning goal? Which one intrigues you (even if you’re not sure it’s a “good fit”)?*

# Step Four

- Assess learning
  - What kind of assessment activity will work?
  - What “products” will demonstrate learning?
  - Which criteria will be used for evaluation?



# Assessing Learning

- Design self-reflection activities to achieve learning outcomes; intentional and structured: A clear link between the (activity, service, content, etc.), and the reflection activity must exist.
- A rubric outlining the criteria for evaluation and levels of performance for each criterion can be useful for grading and providing feedback.

Source: B. Jacoby 2010

# Assessing Learning

- Reflection opportunities can be both formative and summative.
- **Formative (assessing prior to or during class):** traditional m/c, t/f, essays; pre-tests; scavenger hunts; think-pair-share; guided reflections (*A ha!* moments); one-minute papers; clickers
- **Summative (assessing at the end of unit or class):** traditional m/c, t/f, essays; post-tests; letters to a friend/to successors; guided reflections/debriefing; portfolios; end-of-course evaluations

# Assessing Learning – types of information

- **Reflective writing activities (including projects, e.g., portfolios)** – written ability, pre/post comparison, feedback, personal connections, social skills, personal experience, goal setting, background knowledge, resolving, reasoning, visualizing, systematic organization, comprehension, following directions, writing skills, complex reasoning, research skills, listening, vocabulary, expression, evaluating, application, planning, research skills, demonstration of evidence, organization, time-management, process-analysis, cumulative information, investigation, deeper understanding

# Assessing Learning – types of information

- **Discussion and other speaking activities** – immediate evaluation and feedback of learning, synthesizing, appraising, interpretation, articulation and pronunciation, social skills and behaviors, teamwork, interactions, collaboration, networking, knowledge of content, levels of understand, attitudes, speaking and listening skills, leadership skills, tolerance, respectfulness, counseling abilities, debating, acquiring of new languages and mannerisms

Source: Chandler-Gilbert CC

# Assessing Learning – types of information

- **Media/Performance/Diagrammatic activities** – creativity, understanding, end product, public speaking and performing, group or team-building skills, application of knowledge and skills, application of new skills, complex-reasoning skills, critical analysis, real-life knowledge and application, processing of information, cooperation, conferencing, sharing, experiential knowledge, comprehension, systematic organization, designing, hands-on experience, questioning, perceiving

# Critical Self-Reflection is not...

- According to Jacoby, critical reflection is NOT...
  - A didactic retelling of what happened.
  - Solely an emotional outlet.
  - A time for soap-boxing.
  - A neat and tidy exercise that brings closure.

Source: Barbara Jacoby 2010

# Forms and Domains of Critical Reflection

- **Personal:** self-awareness/reflexivity – goal is to address concerns about the influence of subjectivity; surface personal thoughts and actions.
- **Interpersonal:** paying attention to the relationships that are central to the history and undertaking of a particular activity – goal is to address concerns about the influence of group interaction; acknowledge disciplinary traditions and ways of working.
- **Contextual:** examining how established concepts, theories and methods inform and influence (practice/activity) – goal is to address concerns about the influence of established concepts and ideas; acknowledge/surface their limitations.
- **Critical:** brings issues of political, ethical, and social power into focus – goals is to address concerns about the influence of powerful groups; acknowledge/surface different interests and agendas.

# Assessing Different Critical Reflection Forms and Domains (Smith 2011)

**Domain 1: self-critical** (reflecting on your own thoughts and actions)

**Key considerations could include:**

- Why are you interested in a particular issue or topic?
- What questions seem important to you?
- What informs your views?
- What aspects of your background are you drawing on?
- What personal experience do you have?

**Domain 2: Interpersonal** (reflecting on interactions with others)

**Key considerations could include:**

- What disciplinary-based ideas and frameworks inform your interpretations?
- What aspects of your disciplinary background lead you to dwell on certain aspects of an issue or problem and not others?
- Whose perspective might be missing or overlooked?

**Domain 3: contextual** (reflecting on concepts, theories, or methods used)

**Key considerations could include:**

- What insights were generated, or do you hope to generate, by using a particular approach?
- On what basis do/will these insights contribute to knowledge or practice?
- What different insights may be/have been made if a different approach or perspective had been taken?

**Domain 4: critical** (reflecting on political, ethical, and social context)

**Key considerations could include:**

- What is the political context in this situation, what are the contentious issues?
- Is there a political agenda at stake; what might the outcome be?
- Who might gain because of what has been done or not done; who might lose out?



# Using critical self-assessment strategies for assessment

- “...Self-assessments...are a particularly helpful teaching and learning activity for training students to reflect on the quality of their work...”
- “...engages crucial and otherwise neglected aspects of student learning:
  - First-hand knowledge of the criteria for good learning;
  - If students are actively involved in selecting it, they are more likely to engage with it;
  - Being able to make judgments about whether a performance or product meets the given criteria vital for effective professional action in any field;

...The ability to reflect “transformatively” is an important component of lifelong learning, which includes the ability to work independently, to source information selectively, to monitor the quality of one’s learning, to improve decision making, and to use sensible strategies for tackling unseen problems...”

Source: Biggs and Tang 2007

# Using critical self-assessment strategies for assessment

- “Students can be involved in making the summative judgment. This can be as self-assessment or as peer-assessment and either or both can be used as a teaching and learning activity and as an assessment task...”
- “Students can be involved in discussing with the teacher what the criteria might be (for assessing work), which need not be the same for all students...Students can (also) be involved in ‘selecting the evidence that would be relevant to submit to judgment against those criteria,’ as happens with assessment by portfolio...”

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