



## REFLECTIVE LEARNING

York University Teaching Commons  
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Professor Del Caro offers a course in which her students volunteer a few hours of their time with a social agency. The course is content-heavy, so there is little opportunity for extended discussions in class. As part of the final assignment, she asks her students to reflect upon their experience and articulate how it has changed their understanding of the social issue in question. Upon reading their reflective writing, she is vastly disappointed by the shallow reflections her students have produced. Why were they not able to **reflect** more deeply as she had expected?

1. **There are many ways of defining reflection** - articulating its purpose and clarifying our intent are key to helping students meet our expectations.
2. **Reflective learning is a skill** – all but the most resilient learners need to be guided through the reflective process to make deeper sense of unfamiliar ideas and experiences.
3. **Reflective learning is not only about looking back, but also articulating beliefs and assumptions BEFORE an experience occurs** – “learning to reflect” activities and reflection “for action” are important in preparing students for the learning experience (see Coulson & Harvey 2013).
4. **Kolb’s reflective learning cycle describes in linear terms a process that isn’t**– learners may need exposure to more than one experience before they are willing to explore new ideas or see a gap between their understanding and new information.
5. **Reflective learning is a process and should be assessed as such (if it is assessed at all)** – exercises such as learning to reflect activities, weekly journal entries, and online discussion forums can be used as the basis for formative feedback through the course to support students in this process.
6. **Critical reflection occurs gradually over time and involves the disruption of one’s belief system** - it is ambitious to expect ALL students to reach this threshold within the 12 weeks of a course.
7. **If you ask your students to reflect, engage in reflection yourself and share your insights with them** – sharing our thought process is a good way to model effective reflection. Reflecting can also help identify stumbling blocks, patterns, and leaps both in our teaching and in their learning.

If you would like to explore this topic further consider these events at the TC:

- <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/for-cds/workshops-and-courses-for-cds/workshops/ee-york-course/>

### Further reading on this topic:

- Coulson, D., & Harvey, M. (2013). Scaffolding student reflection for experience-based learning: A framework. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18(4), 401-413.

### Resources on this topic:

- <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/resources-2/experiential-education/>
- [http://ee\\_guide.info.yorku.ca/first-page/structured-reflection/](http://ee_guide.info.yorku.ca/first-page/structured-reflection/)