REFLECTIVE JOURNALS

Learning can be augmented and can be more profound when students are encouraged to reflect on the learning event and exercise their judgment about the content and the processes of learning. The benefits of this "consciousness raising" are that students learn to chart their development, identify barriers, patterns and strategies, challenge their own beliefs and avoid repeating the same mistakes. Reflection can also lead toward greater confidence and assertiveness or to a change in attitude, perspective or priorities. Furthermore, writing reflective journals can reinforce reflection-in-action because it allows students to reach a higher level of correlation between theory and practice. Therefore, the main purpose of using reflective journals in education is to encourage students to be more aware of what they do, how they do it, why they do it, and for them to be able to identify useful problem solving strategies, as well as recognize their own strengths and weaknesses with regard to their understanding of content knowledge, procedures and practical skill development and application. Indeed, the first step in becoming a reflective practitioner needs to incorporate self-awareness or metacognition. In addition, the aim of reflection is to develop an orientation toward open-mindedness and a willingness to accept responsibility for self-directed learning as well as foster a keen sense of observation, critical thinking and reasoned analysis (Brookfield, 1995; Clift, Houston & Pugach, 1990; Sparks-Langer, Simmons, Pasch, Colton & Starko, 1990).

Reflection also allows students to acknowledge emotions and feelings that otherwise may form barriers to learning. However, we need to acknowledge the fact that reflection does not just happen. Reflection is an active and effortful activity. It is a skill that needs to be developed, nurtured and refined. Although some students will eventually, through trial and error, develop insights on their own without the use of a reflective journal, the learning process can be aided and time to learn decreased through the use of reflective journals. This is due, in part, to the skills and mental processes involved in writing that force students to contemplate and anchor relationships between perceptions as they occur.

Encourage students to use the journal to describe their thoughts, feelings, and to also include the "fun" or exceptional moments that they experience.

There is no set formula or format to write reflective journals. When reviewing a fieldwork/service-learning experience, students could be encouraged to answer questions such as:

- What happened?
- What should I have done differently?
- What did I do?
- What do I need to do next time?
- How did I do it?
- What specific areas do I need to improve or extend?
- Why did I do it?
- Which aspects were successful?
- How did I feel? Why?
- What do I want to investigate further? And
- What did I learn?
- How does this relate to previous knowledge and experience?
- What does it mean?

Dr. Judy Judd, F'03