Designing Reflection: Intro & Questions

Below is a list of elements to consider when designing reflection activities.  By incorporating these principles into the design of reflection activities, you can help to ensure reflection components encourage critical thinking and support learning objectives. These principles and questions suggest additional content students can explore to enrich their reflection.

**1. Design Connections Between Theory & Practice**

Design course reflection activities that encourage students to make connections between academic learning and professional experience.

Students may experience a tension between theory and practice. This is a good thing because it encourages your students to think critically about both learning spaces (classroom and workplace). As a curriculum developer you can develop exercises that challenge your students to develop new perspectives on coursework informed by their experience in the professional sphere.

**Sample Reflection Questions:**

1. What aspects of the experiential learning (EL) activity relate to classroom instruction?
2. In what ways did your academic studies prepare you for the field?
3. In what ways did classroom theory differ from what you experienced in the professional sphere?
4. In what ways could your knowledge of course material be applied in the workplace to improve processes or other aspects of work?

**2. Draw Connections to Broader Social Issues**

Students tend to be more engaged with learning when it has personal relevance to them (their career, prior experience, interests), and when they see connections with larger social issues (ecology, sustainable development, financial ethics). Reflection activities can encourage your students to draw connections between their experience in the professional sphere and broad social issues.

**Sample Reflection Questions:**

1. What aspects of the EL activity relate to broader social issues which interest you?
2. Have you learned anything during your EL activity that has reshaped your opinion or understanding of a larger social issue?
3. What knowledge or skills that you have learned in the classroom could help you make a positive change in the world?
4. Describe how your EL activity changed the way you would approach a future project in your field (infrastructure project for a civil engineer; development project for a global development studies student, etc.)
5. Has your experience in the professional sphere changed your feelings about what type of company or work you plan to be involved with in the future? If so, explain how.

**3. Encourage Self-Assessment**

Depending on your course learning objectives it may not be enough for students to reflect on 'how they felt' during an experience. This is an important first step in reflection but it may not go far enough towards enhancing the learning experience and achieving learning outcomes. Reflection activities can be designed to encourage your students to examine their role in the EL activity, its impact on how they perceive themselves, their future role in the profession, and their role in the wider world.

**Sample Reflection Questions:**

1. Would you participate in this experience again? Why or why not?
2. If you could change one thing about your role in this experience what would it be?
3. Name one thing you will do differently in your next professional experience?
4. What have you learned about yourself (strengths, interests, career goals) as a result of this experience? How has this informed your future professional, academic or personal goals?

Self-assessment reflection activities are also useful in helping students to question their assumptions about the world, the profession and their place in both. Throughout the experiential learning process, learners can be prompted to pose questions, experiment, solve problems, and construct meaning.

**Sample Reflection Questions:**

1. How did your experience change the way you look at global development?
2. Through the experience did you become aware of any personal assumptions or biases that you previously held? Why did your perception change?
3. Has the experience changed the way you would approach future development efforts? What in particular would you change about your approach?
4. During your EL activity did you utilize perspectives and skills from disciplines other than your own to achieve a goal or complete a project? How might you use interdisciplinary knowledge in the future?
5. Based on your recent experience in the field, what areas of academic specialization would benefit you the most in future professional work? Are there areas of study you need to focus on? If so, how will you accomplish this?

**4. Link Back to Course Learning Objectives**

Learning outcomes are usually provided to Queen's students at the beginning of a course in order to encourage students to take ownership over their learning experience, to help shape the experience, and also to encourage the development of metacognitive skills. Reflection exercises can be utilized to encourage your students to connect the EL activity with course learning objectives.

**Sample Reflection Questions:**

1. Describe the internship in reference to course or program learning objectives. Use specific examples to explain what you learned during your experience. Why is this knowledge important to you?
2. If you were the course designer, what learning objective(s) would you add to the course description? Explain why you think the learning objective(s) should be added and what benefit you believe it would provide to future students.

**5. Encourage the Development of Professional Soft Skills**

If the EL activity is in a workplace, curriculum developers may want to identify the development of professional soft skills as part of the program's learning objectives. For many students this will be the first chance they have to experience a professional environment, and it is an invaluable opportunity for them to learn about professional politesse and other workplace-specific soft skills. Networking, leadership, business communication, and expectations around quality and consistency of work output are all potential areas for learning.

Reflection activities can help students identify, frame, and refine the soft-skills they may be learning in the workplace. What is more, structured reflection activities can help students become more adept at communicating what they have learned - a vital skill for job interviews.

**Sample Reflection Activities:**

1. Would you describe the project you worked on as a collaborative effort with contributions from many parties, or was it accomplished mainly through individual work? Do you think this was the best way to achieve the results? Why?
2. Have you noticed or experienced communication challenges among team members during your current project? Why do you think this is happening? Is there anything you can do to improve the quality of communication on the team?
3. Looking back on your EL activity, was there someone you worked with closely or admired at the company? What do you believe are that person's core qualities or strengths? How do these qualities help this individual succeed in his work?
4. What have you learned about professional communication in the workplace? How would you communicate differently in a similar environment in the future?
5. Did you receive any feedback about communication or other soft skills that changed the way you approached relationships with people in the office? If so, describe how.
6. What networking techniques helped you develop relationships with other employees during the internship? What advice would you give to another student who might consider an internship at the company in the future?

**6. Link to Future Behaviour**

Reflection questions can encourage your students to take action to improve their workplace experience and then apply it to future professional contexts. Both of the reflection questions below are copied from guideline number five above. These examples include a question that prompts the student to apply what they have learned to future professional behaviour.

**Sample Reflection Questions:**

1. What have you learned about professional communication in the workplace? How would you communicate differently in a similar environment in the future?
2. What networking techniques helped you develop relationships with other employees during the internship? What advice would you give to another student who might consider an internship at the same company in the future?