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# Analyzing Reflective Writing

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**Researchers' Names and Department:**

Dr. Ray Wolpow & Jody Bault, Secondary Education

**Title:**

Analyzing Reflective Writing

**Research Question:**

What happens in a Secondary Education undergraduate and graduate course(s) when we use a reflective writing rubric that addresses both cognitive and affective capacities/skills in order to demonstrate the proficiency necessary to meet standards for certification?

**Method:**

After examining relevant literature, we defined reflection to be “a careful examination and evaluation of experience, beliefs, and knowledge.” We found that a careful examination and evaluation of an experience, when compared to one’s beliefs and prior knowledge, was considered by most to be the deepest form of reflection. Using a model based on Bain et al. (1999), we found that the most moving reflections were written in an *integrated* fashion – that is, these reflections combined the cognitive (thinking) and affective (feeling) domains. At this point, we developed our rubric to measure the ability of our teacher candidates to express their integration of theoretical concepts from our class textbook with feelings as they related to a teaching experience in the field. The highest form of reflection, according to our rubric, will measure a teacher candidate’s written reflection as it addresses significant contexts, multiple perspectives, and new questions, all in an *integrated* fashion.

We then designed a final assignment which would serve as the culminating essay for the graduate and undergraduate Content Literacy courses, and we also designed several smaller reflections that would prepare teacher candidates for this bigger writing task. After developing the rubric and the specific assignments, we developed our research question.

Using a total of four classes of both undergraduate and graduate teacher candidates, as well as two different professors, we explained the assignments with class discussion about the rubric. Jody Bault was a student in one of the graduate classes as well as simultaneously fulfilling her role as co-researcher. It was soon evident that the smaller writing projects served not only to give the teacher candidates practice writing reflective essays, but they also gave the professors practice grading to the rubric. After Jody conducted interviews with various teacher candidates midway through the quarter, we learned that students relied heavily on professors’ comments which were supplementary to the filled-out rubric on returned assignments. Peer sharing of these smaller assignments as well as class discussion also contributed to understanding of the rubric. We learned that on its own, the rubric was a bit difficult to understand.

At the end of winter quarter, we revisited our assignments and rubric and made revisions based on input from teacher candidates. We decided to add more detailed class discussion about the rubric before the first writing task, and we found some areas to simplify and clarify in the rubric and in the two writing assignment guidelines.

### **Key Findings:**

We found that our graduate students struggled more with affect component, and thus found supplementary affective vocabulary lists helpful. We found that many teacher candidates, but particularly those from academic backgrounds that discourage writing with voice, were simply not articulate in the affective domain. The vast majority of teacher candidates were able to write to the rubric by the end of the quarter, which we believe will positively impact their future as teachers by their new ability to integrate cognition and affect when reflecting on incidents in the classroom. Our confidence in the importance of the affective domain as a powerful element of written reflection was only strengthened as many teacher candidates were able to produce powerful reflective essays.

### **Implications for Teaching and Learning:**

Washington state standards for teacher certification require teacher candidates to be “reflective practitioners” in order to positively impact student learning, yet these standards do not delineate what is meant by *reflection*. Our task was to create an assignment for Woodring’s Content Literacy course in the Secondary Education department which serves to demonstrate this aspect of the standards. In order to measure a teacher candidate’s ability to reflect, we first had to decide what we mean by reflection as well as describe what makes a reflection *good*.

Many college students complain about the lack of transparency and consistency in professors’ scoring of written reflections – in fact, when teachers assign reflective essays, they are rarely graded due to the highly subjective nature of this genre. The issue lies with those situations where these reflections *are* graded, where the same reflection could earn them an A in one class and a C in another. Further, National Board Certification for teachers will often depend primarily on a teacher’s ability to express their ability to reflect proficiently in the form of a reflective essay. Our singular task was to take something that is traditionally viewed as highly personal and subjective and turn it into a measurable assignment.

**You will find attached a copy of our revised rubric for spring quarter.**

**Please contact Jody Bault ([jodymbault@gmail.com](mailto:jodymbault@gmail.com)) or Dr. Ray Wolpow ([ray.wolpow@wwu.edu](mailto:ray.wolpow@wwu.edu)) for questions or more information about the study.**