

Teaching Excellence Through Mindful Reflection

February 21, 2024

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Reflective teaching is examining one's beliefs about teaching and learning and determining the alignment of those beliefs with what happens within your courses (Reflective Teaching, 2021). The goal is to think critically about one's teaching to find evidence of effective teaching as well as identifying potential areas for improvement (Palmer, 2017). The tool described here is based on the Framework for Assessing Teaching Effectiveness (FATE) and is intended to help teachers develop self-reflection around teaching and objectively describe their strengths and weaknesses in a manner consistent with the evidence of their teaching practices (Simonson, Earl, and Frary, 2021; Simonson, Frary, and Earl, 2023).

Piaget is credited with developing the constructivist model of learning, but it is John Dewey who developed the focus on constructivism as a learning theory and the role of reflection in learning (Von Glaserfeld, 1982; Kolb, 1993). In 1993, Kolb brought reflection to the forefront in his description of its role in experiential learning (Kolb, 1993). Dewey and Kolb suggest that reflection is critical for learning to occur; however, it is not just students who benefit from reflection,

those who teach can also benefit from reflecting about their teaching (Brookfield, 1998).

There are many reflective tools and frameworks available. The purpose of this one is to help teachers develop self-reflection around teaching and objectively describe their strengths and weaknesses in a manner consistent with the evidence of their teaching practices. It is comprehensive, formal, and guided as it addresses the myriad aspects of teaching as identified in the Framework for Assessing Teaching Effectiveness (FATE) (Simonson, Earl, and Frary, 2021; Simonson, Frary, and Earl, 2023). When completing the series of reflective exercises, the teacher should be able to:

- define reflective teaching,
- develop strategies for self-observation,
- begin developing and/or refine tools for thinking about their teaching and their teaching effectiveness, and
- begin or continue to develop a habit of continuous quality improvement, (i.e., professional development).

Reflective teaching defined

Reflection has many definitions. Here, we are going to use two from the Merriam-Webster dictionary (Merriam-Webster, 2018):

6: a thought, idea, or opinion formed, or a remark made as a result of meditation.

7: consideration of some subject matter, idea, or purpose.

Thus, reflective teaching is considering one's teaching to form an opinion of teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes. It is based on and necessitates analyzing one's theories of teaching and learning, the alignment of these theories with the class experience, and critically assessing the student, teacher, and class experience along with successes and failures (Brookfield, 1998). Being a reflective teacher means collecting evidence about teaching and learning, thinking critically about that evidence, and drawing conclusions about teaching and learning.

Collecting, recording, and analyzing what happens in the preparation and delivery of a course helps the teacher move from just sharing information to understanding and shaping their teaching and the student learning experience. From this, areas of success and improvement can be identified and learning outcomes improved.

By aligning this reflection with FATE, the intention is to orient the conclusions drawn with the components of effective teaching and actual classroom practices before, during, and after a course is taught.

To become a reflective teacher, one needs to become aware of their own thinking processes and consider sources beyond themselves—this is enhanced when made transparent to others. Doing so enables the assessment of the “why” and “how” of

student learning and determines what needs to be done as a result. Brookfield (Brookfield, 1998) identifies four lenses through which to examine our teaching (figure 1 in Appendix). Our autobiography as learners significantly shapes us as teachers because our past has created an intuitive and emotional long-lasting influence that determines how we teach. This can be difficult to change, even in the face of evidence-based practices. Our own experiences play a role in the pedagogies and behaviors that appeal to and repel us, and it is useful to explore and become aware of these learned preferences to identify how they shape our teaching (Brookfield, 1998). However, because we are using our own “interpretive filters” to view ourselves, this is inherently biased and external input is necessary. The lens of our learners can help us see how the intended audience receives and perceives our teaching which allows us to teach responsively. (Anonymity is critical for learners if we want their honest appraisal.)

Understanding the learner experience allows the teacher to make informed, appropriate, and helpful pedagogical, relational, and teaching choices (Brookfield, 1998). Our colleagues’ perceptions can also prove useful as they can provide content and/or teaching-specific feedback that students may not be able to and that our own autobiographical lens may interpret differently. In addition, learning how our peers handle similar situations can broaden our perspective and expose us to new strategies. There is also an emotional benefit to knowing that others have similar experiences and commiserating that can change power dynamics (Brookfield, 1998). Lastly, the theoretical, philosophical, and research literature can prove useful in making sense of our experience and observations. It names our experiences and provides an evidence-based alternative perspective to our autobiographical lens (Brookfield, 1998).

In his 1993 experiential learning discussion, Kolb describes how reflection impacts learning and behavior and the cyclical nature of it (Kolb, 1993). This applies to the growth of teachers as well. According to Kolb, learning is the modification of ideas or concepts based on experience and occurs when the incongruity between observations and expectations is considered and resolved. This process is cyclical in nature in that we experience an event, we interpret that event based on our past experiences and expectations, and we identify how that event met or did not meet our expectations. We then think about and modify our expectations and our behaviors for the next time that event occurs, and we repeat the cycle (figure 2) (Kolb, 1993). For example, a teacher leads an in-class discussion in which the majority of students are hesitant to participate. Based on prior experience and this teacher’s own autobiography as a learner, they may interpret this as students being unprepared. They then reflect and explore options for increasing student preparation and institute a pre-class readiness quiz. They then lead the class in another discussion and observe the level of participation and reflect on the level of success.

Just like with our students, a growth mindset enhances reflection, and there are attitudes and behaviors that engender this mindset. The reflective educator should have self-acceptance with a desire to improve, patience with themselves and their students, the organizational and time-management skills to incorporate reflection, and the ability to self-analyze and identify their strengths, weaknesses, goals, and challenges (Leon-Henri, 2020). From here, a framework on which to build reflection skills is useful. The reflection tool provided in the Appendix is based on a reflection tool developed by the Danielson group and aligned with the FATE definition of effective teaching (Danielson, 2021; Simonson, Earl, and Frary, 2021; Simonson, Frary, and Earl, 2023). The intent is to help the instructor think critically about their teaching and look for evidence of effective teaching. Beyond completing the prompts provided in this framework, there are additional tools that will aid reflection including, but not limited to, journaling, various modes of student feedback, peer feedback, student work analysis, recording teaching, and others. In addition, teaching reflection can be supported and enhanced through collaboration and dialogue with peers because, while no one has the same experience, there are enough similarities and parallels with others to make sharing more likely to result in the discovery of common threads that can lead to critical insights and actions (Brookfield, 1998).

Use of the FATE-aligned tool

The FATE reflection tool (Appendix) consists of seven writing exercises and four plans for improvement. It is not intended that it all be completed in one sitting. Distributing it across time may actually prove more useful. An instructor might start with the first two writing exercises to explore what they think they do well and need to improve upon. The next four writing exercises include personal assessments of the various aspects of teaching, reflections about those assessments from both the student and personal impacts, and then an improvement plan for those aspects of teaching. The final writing exercise is an overall summary and plan for continuing the journey as a reflective teacher. In other words, the first six writing exercises focus on teaching and the last on reflection.

Over the past two years, this framework has been used at six workshops. Because this has been a reflective process and participants may have been uncomfortable sharing their responses, limited data was collected from participants. They did indicate that they gained new knowledge and/or skills they can use. Participants also indicated that they enjoyed the reflection process and found it valuable to pause and think about their teaching and student learning. Also appreciated were the perspectives and guidance on ways to reflect and improve teaching. Participants indicated that completing the four tables helped them realize that there were many aspects of teaching they had not previously considered. In

addition, this helped participants learn about best practices and begin to think about how to teach and communicate differently.

Summary

Reflective teaching is examining one's beliefs about teaching and learning and determining the alignment of those beliefs with course planning, classroom implementation, and post-teaching course modification. The goal is to think critically about one's teaching to find evidence of effective teaching as well as identifying potential areas for improvement. Effective and reflective educators systematically gather, document, and assess all occurrences during a lesson, transitioning from mere experience to comprehension. This process aids in recognizing and pinpointing areas for improvement, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes. Thus, to move forward and develop as a reflective teacher, you can:

- Get into the habit of reflecting on your work
- Think about when you readily reflect and when you avoid reflection
- Identify what you are good at and what you can improve upon
- Collect evidence that supports this
- Familiarize yourself with the evaluative criteria
- Structure your process across the evaluation period
- Make the most of professional development
- Target opportunities that will best meet your needs
- Show what you have learned
- Keep your portfolio up to date

[Download the Appendix: The FATE Reflection Tool](#)

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MINDFUL REFLECTION TEACHING AND LEARNING REFLECTION

APPENDIX

Teaching Excellence Through Mindful Reflection

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From the Framework for Assessing Teaching Effectiveness (FATE)(Simonson, Earl, and Frary 2021). Adapted from The Danielson Group's [FFT: Intellectual Engagement Self-Assessment and Reflection Tool](#)(Danielson 2021)

Reflective Teaching

Reflective Teaching is examining one's beliefs about teaching and learning and determining the alignment of those beliefs with what happens within their courses. ("Reflective Teaching" 2021) The goal is to think critically about one's teaching to find evidence of effective teaching as well as identifying potential areas for improvement.(Palmer 2017) This reflection tool is based on the Framework for Assessing Teaching Effectiveness (FATE) and is intended to help teachers develop self-reflection around teaching and objectively describe their strengths and weaknesses in a manner consistent with the evidence of their teaching practices.(Simonson, Earl, and Frary 2021; Simonson, Frary, and Earl 2023)

Writing Exercise 1: As a Teacher . . .

1. What are you good at?
 - a. Why are you good at those aspects of your teaching?

Writing Exercise 2: As a Teacher . . .

1. What do you need to improve?
 - a. Why do you need to improve those aspects of your teaching?

Reflective Activity 1: Course Design:

Designs course materials in alignment with course learning outcomes

Exemplary teachers will design their courses around appropriate course learning outcomes, design a variety of summative and formative assessments, which effectively measure student achievement of those outcomes, and create course activities which support students in reaching the course learning outcomes.

Instructions: Read each statement in the left column and indicate in one of the three columns to the right where you currently are in your teaching practice. Some Criteria may apply or not apply to your teaching situation. **Yes** indicates that you consistently meet the criteria. **Developing** indicates that you meet the criteria in some cases and have room for improvement. **Absent** indicates that you have not yet done the work to meet this criterion and may not know what it means.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Absent</i>
1.1. Course learning outcomes guide course design process			
○ course learning outcomes are present for all courses			
○ course learning outcomes all meet the CALMS criteria (C lear, A ttainable, L earning- focused, M easurable/ observable, and S pecific)			
○ course learning outcomes encourage discipline-specific ways of thinking			
○ narrative explains how course learning outcomes are intentionally integrated into course design			
1.2. Alignment of summative assessments with course learning outcomes			
○ multiple examples of summative assessments which align well with course learning outcomes are included			
○ the alignment between summative assessments and course learning outcomes is explicitly made for students			
1.3 Alignment of learning activities with course learning outcomes			
○ examples of learning activities are included			
○ learning activities are aligned with course and/or class learning outcomes and the connection is explicitly communicated to students			

○ learning activities are aligned with summative assessments (i.e., appear to support students in being prepared to complete these assessments)			
○ intentionally scaffolds student learning			

Writing Exercise 3: Course Design

Accomplishment Analysis

1. In which criteria of Course Design have you accomplished the most?
2. What were the results for students as people and/or as learners?
3. What were the results for you as a person, teacher, and/or learner?
4. Why has this been effective?

Improvement Plan

1. Which criteria within Course Design will you focus on next?
2. What will success look like for your students?
3. What will success look like for you?
4. What is your plan for learning more and developing in this area?

Reflective Activity 2: Scholarly Teaching:

Implements evidence-based practices.

Exemplary teachers will implement a variety of evidence-based instructional practices (EBIPs) in their daily teaching and assessments to best support student learning and students' development as learners. **Note:** Instructor does not need to cite the literature regarding EBIPs, but can refer to EBIPs **from this list**; use of additional EBIPs is also encouraged.

Instructions: Read each statement in the left column and indicate in one of the three columns to the right where you currently are in your teaching practice. Some Criteria may apply or not apply to your teaching situation. **Yes** indicates that you consistently meet the criteria. **Developing** indicates that you meet the criteria in some cases and have room for improvement. **Absent** indicates that you have not yet done the work to meet this criterion and may not know what it means.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Absent</i>
2.1 Situational factors guide course design			
○ All situational factors have been considered across multiple courses			
Demonstrates multiple ways in which situational factors are considered in:			
○ course materials			
○ assessments			
○ learning activities			
2.2 Use of evidence-based instructional practices (EBIPs)			
○ regularly uses EBIPs in course delivery and learning activities every semester and in multiple courses			
○ uses a variety of EBIPs strategically chosen for a given course context			
○ provides a sound rationale for their use of particular EBIPs			
2.3 Summative assessments follow good practices			
Multiple examples of summative assessments from different courses are included and examples collectively demonstrate the following:			

○ are authentic / forward-looking			
○ integrate principles of UDL (e.g., in varied formats, offer students choices)			
○ follow the transparent assignment framework (define purpose, task, criteria)			
2.4 Formative assessment is used to guide instruction			
○ formative assessment is carried out regularly in all courses			
○ a variety of formative assessments are used to monitor student learning (e.g., going beyond minute paper & muddiest point)			
○ formative assessments support students in monitoring their own learning			
○ formative assessments guide instruction			

Writing Exercise 4: Scholarly Teaching

Accomplishment Analysis

1. In which criteria of Scholarly Teaching have you accomplished the most?
2. What were the results for students as people and/or as learners?
3. What were the results for you as a person, teacher, and/or learner?
4. Why has this been effective?

Improvement Plan

1. Which criteria within Scholarly Teaching will you focus on next?
5. What will success look like for your students?

6. What will success look like for you?

7. What is your plan for learning more and developing in this area?

Reflective Activity 3: Learner-Centered:

Uses an inclusive, learner-centered approach.

Exemplary teachers will design courses and course materials that focus on learning and the learner, rather than the instructor, and implement inclusive teaching practices which reach all learners and provide students opportunities for success.

Instructions: Read each statement in the left column and indicate in one of the three columns to the right where you currently are in your teaching practice. Some Criteria may apply or not apply to your teaching situation. **Yes** indicates that you consistently meet the criteria. **Developing** indicates that you meet the criteria in some cases and have room for improvement. **Absent** indicates that you have not yet done the work to meet this criterion and may not know what it means.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Absent</i>
3.1 Student engagement in learning activities			
○ students engage with content through active learning for more than 50% of a class period on average			
○ students engage with one another consistently (daily/weekly depending on course meeting frequency) throughout a course			
○ learning activities are varied throughout class sessions and over the semester to engage students in different ways			
○ learning activities encourage discipline- specific ways of thinking			
3.2 Learning climate established by instructor <i>in the classroom (face-to-face or online)</i>			
○ Intentionally creates a class climate which promotes a sense of belonging			
○ Intentionally creates a class climate which values diverse contributions & respects individual differences			
○ Builds a positive rapport with students			
3.3 Learning climate established by instructor <i>outside of the classroom</i>			
○ Designs course to intentionally enhance student motivation			

○ Chooses course materials (texts, readings, images) which are inclusive			
○ Communicates effectively			
○ Provides timely feedback			
○ Provides learning support for students outside of the classroom			
3.4 Students achieve learning outcomes			
○ routinely monitors the degree to which students achieve course learning outcomes over multiple courses			
○ >90% of students are achieving course learning outcomes (passing grade or better on aligned summative assessments)			

Writing Exercise 5: Learner-Centered

Accomplishment Analysis

5. In which criteria of Learner-Centered have you accomplished the most?

6. What were the results for students as people and/or as learners?

7. What were the results for you as a person, teacher, and/or learner?

8. Why has this been effective?

Improvement Plan

8. Which criteria within Learner-Centered will you focus on next?

9. What will success look like for your students?

10. What will success look like for you?

11. What is your plan for learning more and developing in this area?

Reflective Activity 4: Reflective Teaching

Practices reflective teaching to drive continuous improvement of teaching.

Exemplary teachers will be reflective practitioners who use feedback from a variety of sources (students, peers, CTL, department, self) to seek a variety of approaches to continuously improve as teachers.

Instructions: Read each statement in the left column and indicate in one of the three columns to the right where you currently are in your teaching practice. Some Criteria may apply or not apply to your teaching situation. **Yes** indicates that you consistently meet the criteria. **Developing** indicates that you meet the criteria in some cases and have room for improvement. **Absent** indicates that you have not yet done the work to meet this criterion and may not know what it means.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Absent</i>
4.1. Professional development			
○ Engages in professional development opportunities related to teaching and learning more than 4x per year (on average)			
○ Engages in more “intensive” professional development opportunities (e.g., book circle, faculty learning community, community of practice, etc.)			
4.2 Reflection and continuous improvement			
○ uses multiple sources of feedback about one’s teaching			
○ reflects on the evidence and feedback objectively, considering strengths and weaknesses			
○ makes intentional changes to one’s teaching based on the feedback and reflection			

Writing Exercise 6: Reflective Teaching

Accomplishment Analysis

9. In which criteria of Reflective Teaching have you accomplished the most?

10. What were the results for students as people and/or as learners?

11. What were the results for you as a person, teacher, and/or learner?

12. Why has this been effective?

Improvement Plan

12. Which criteria within Reflective Teaching will you focus on next?

13. What will success look like for your students?

14. What will success look like for you?

15. What is your plan for learning more and developing in this area?

Writing Exercise 7: Next Steps

1. What is your next step for becoming a reflective teacher? What you are going to do next to move yourself along in your journey as a reflective teacher
 - a. What are the benchmarks that indicate progress in becoming a reflective teaching? What will success look like for you?
 - b. By what date will you accomplish “the next step?”

Figure 1. Brookfield's four reflective lenses.(Brookfield 1998)

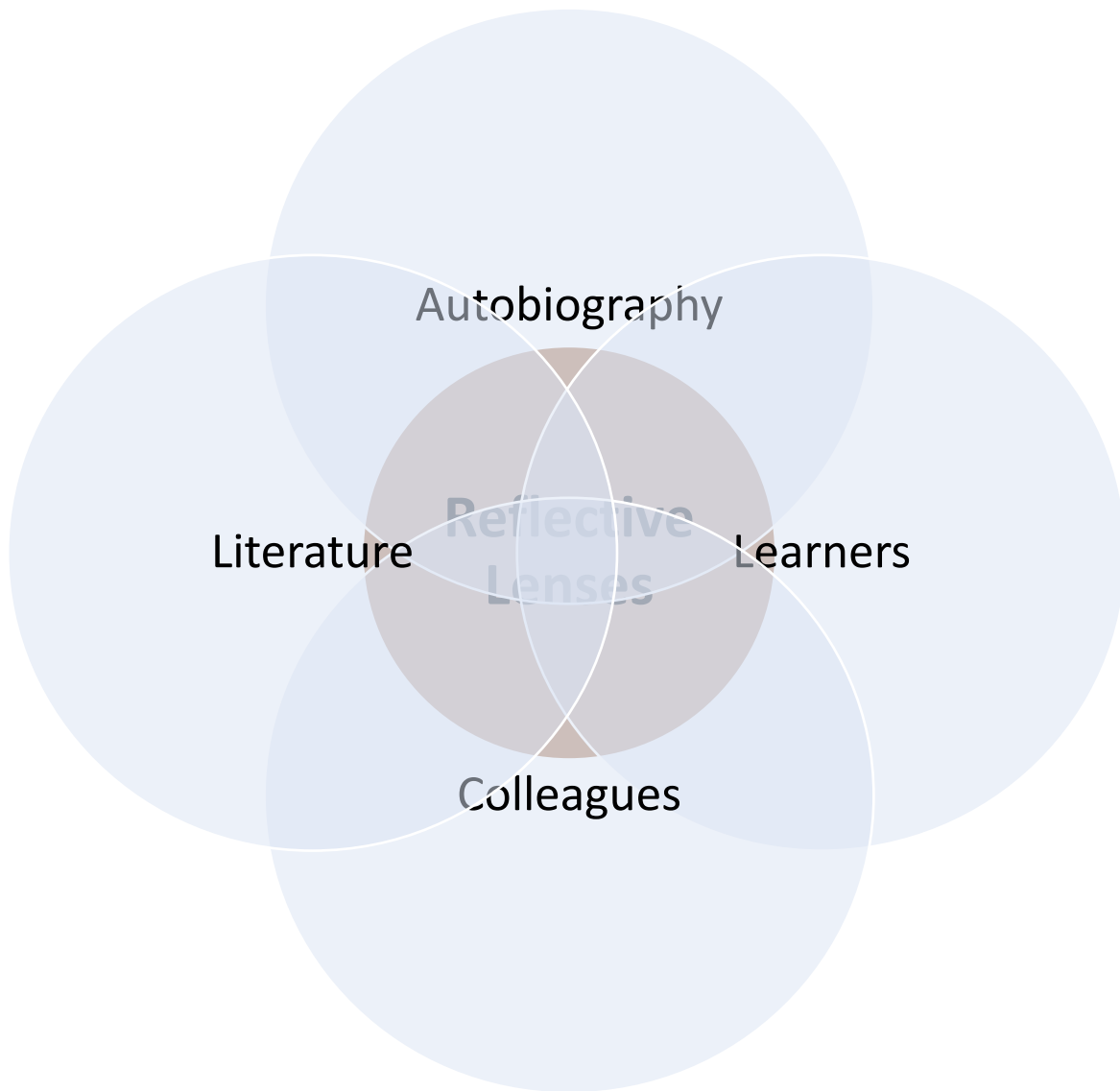


Figure 2. Reflective Cycle

