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## Self-reflection in the Course Evaluation

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### Abstract

Self-reflection is a good way for students to learn about their experience, learning preferences and think critically about what they have learned. It is also a valuable source for teachers, too, since they can see whether their teaching was successful or not and on the basis of students' reflection they can reconsider their teaching methods, strategies or activities. Therefore, this paper explores and discusses a concept of self-reflection and in particular a self-reflection essay, which was used as a form of evaluation in the Course of Academic Writing in the summer semester of 2013 among the students of the Faculty of Informatics and Management in Hradec Králové, Czech Republic. In addition, this article lists and explores benefits and drawbacks of the act of self-reflection. In conclusion, the author provides an example of guided questions for the development of a self-reflective essay.

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### 1. Introduction

The course evaluation is considered to be one of the very valuable tools of teaching and learning since it can provide useful feedback both for teachers and their institution about the quality of education. Moreover, it can reveal its impact on student's learning and teacher's practices. There are two main approaches to the course evaluation: informal/personal and formal/institutional.

The private one is done by the course teacher who reflects on his/her teaching practices in order to eliminate student's insufficiencies and difficulties in the process of learning, reflect on one's own teaching methods, approaches and strategies so that s/he could consequently improve his/her teaching performance. It can be done

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during the course (formative evaluation) or just at the end of the course (summative evaluation). The institutional one is usually done by the faculty administrators for different reasons. They make a (summative) evaluation in order to decide about the teacher's prolongation or termination of his/her contract, promotion or a salary increase. In addition, they can make a (formative) evaluation in order to discover in which areas the teacher needs to improve. These evaluations can be combined with supervisor's evaluations and results of student's test scores to create an overall picture of teaching performance.

The evaluation can have different forms. Students can be given questionnaires (nowadays, it is usually done anonymously online) and/or focus interviews can be held. Sometimes, the evaluation can be done in form of student's written reflection on the course in which student expresses an overall impression on the course, including his/her motivation for attending this particular course and realizing what s/he has learned.

Thus, an objective evaluation of the course should consist of:

Student results;

Self-reflection;

Teacher and/or peer review;

Institutional questionnaires and/or focus interviews.

### 1. Self-reflective Essay

The self-reflection as a form of the course evaluation is used in the Course of Academic Writing at the Faculty of Informatics and Management of the University of Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic. The goal of a reflective essay is not only to discuss what one has learned but also to convey personal experiences and findings that have resulted (cf. Rogers, 2001; Spinello, 2013). Moreover, reflection can also be a bridge between experiencing and understanding or learning. As Race (2002) says:

Reflection deepens learning. The act of reflecting is one which causes us to make sense of what we've learned, why we learned it, and how that particular increment of learning took place. Moreover, reflection is about linking one increment of learning to the wider perspective of learning – heading towards seeing the bigger picture. Reflection is equally useful when our learning has been unsuccessful – in such cases indeed reflection can often give us insights into what may have gone wrong with our learning, and how on a future occasion we might avoid now-known pitfalls. Most of all, however, it is increasingly recognised that reflection is an important transferable skill, and is much valued by all around us, in employment, as well as in life in general.

The reflective essay does not have any fixed format but it usually follows the structure of any other essay, mostly the formal one. That means the text of such an essay should consist of an introductory paragraph informing the reader about the topic. Then there are 2-3 paragraphs where the author expresses his/her own opinions and stanza. And finally, there is a conclusion which summarizes the key points of the whole essay. Sometimes, to increase a higher credibility the author can include references to some reliable sources. In addition, when introducing this form of evaluation, teachers should provide their students with some guidance or scaffolding before they let their students write. Appendix A lists some of the guiding questions for writing such a reflective essay. The questions were adapted according to Race (2002).

As far as the style is concerned, the reflective essay in comparison with other academic papers is written in the first person singular since it is based on personal experience of the writer himself/herself. But as it has been stated above, the tone of the essay should be formal.

In the Course of Academic Writing, students' reflective essays are not included in the final mark. Students are just asked to reflect on what they have learned and experienced in the course in order to help to improve the course, including the teacher's performance in the course (see Appendix B for an example).

However, as some research proves (cf. McAlpine and Weston, 2000, as cited in Harvey and et al., 2010), *reflection is a mechanism for the construction of knowledge from experience although this knowledge does not necessarily lead to behaviour (better teaching) or link to student learning.*

Nevertheless, the reflection can play an important role in the final assessment of student's work. Philips (2006) lists the following advantages of a direct assessment approach:

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