Why self-assess?

‘A journal is a crucible for processing the raw material of experience in order to integrate it with existing knowledge and create new meaning’.

Kerka (2002 p.3)

When we embark upon the reflective practice journey, it is useful to have a means of assessing or enriching the reflective level of our writing, especially if we are not sharing entries with others on a regular basis. By taking time out and creating distance from our writing we allow it to become ‘an instrument for growth’ rather than a static tool for ‘self-justification’ (Progoff 1975 p.25).

Progoff (1975) was well aware of the limitations of personal journal work and developed within his Intensive Journal method different opportunities to overcome the tendencies that personal or professional reflections can have to ‘turn in upon their own subjectivity…and move in circular patterns’ (p.25). According to Progoff (1975), looking back and reflecting on our reflections or even reading them aloud can prevent them from becoming ‘more deeply entrenched in these ruts than they had before’ (p.28).

Throughout your course here in the School of Education, you will be encouraged to explore different ways to assess and deepen your reflections. There are many different models you could use for this purpose and even though they might be slightly different, each framework is designed to help you extend your meta-cognitive skills which you can then apply to other areas of critical thinking and writing.

It is important to remember when you are applying any self-assessment or meta-reflection model, to keep focussed on the process and level of reflective writing rather than the content of the entry. The idea is to be as objective as you can and look for evidence in your entries of the ‘deeper’ levels of reflection through the use of analytical language, critical questioning and deepening engagement with the context of your experiences (eg text, lesson, interaction).

It is also important to be guided by the aims of journal reflection which according to Kerka (2002) are to:

- challenge our habitual ways of thinking and acting
- expand our awareness of implicit knowledge
- assist our professional and personal growth
- find solutions to our concerns

The following readings will assist you in this process by explaining the value of moving from ‘report’ type descriptions to deeper levels of analysis and synthesis and possibly new action as a result of the reflective thinking cycle. You are encouraged to read these models and then analyse your own work against a model that suits your purpose and style of reflection.

Although levels of reflection are often presented in a linear fashion in the literature, the complex, cyclical aspect of reflective writing means that you may start or finish at any point and that a longish entry may include components of each of these levels.
References


Suggested readings


Francis, M (2006) See Resources/Models of reflective writing/Self assessment model