

Teaching Through the Use of Reflection in a Public Health Practicum Course

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Background – Challenges in the education of health professionals

- Multiple skills and competencies
- Diverse learners
- Challenge of measurement and assessment
- Accountability to the public

Time Learner-centered Consistency

Validity Flexibility

Background – Challenges in Public Health Education

- Very diverse students
- Very broad curriculum and skills
- Diverse, decentralized practice placements
- “New” competencies
 - Professionalism
 - Team work
 - Leadership
 - Communication skills
 - Ethics
 - Cultural competency

Background – Challenges in teaching a practicum

- Disrupted schedule of classroom time
 - Teacher-student bonds weak
 - Student-student bonds weak
- Group work – who's doing what?
- Problems always come up
- Inconsistent supervision (site, faculty mentor)
- Practicum experiences are rich, exciting, complex – need to be processed

Practicum Class in Family and Community Health

- 1 year MPH (professional program)
- “Culminating experience”
- January-May
 - 10-12 hours/week on-site work
 - 2 hours classroom 10/16 weeks
- Groups encouraged
- Dual mentoring – site, faculty

Challenges addressed by reflections

- Disrupted schedule of classroom time
Continuity of contact with instructor. Inside knowledge of challenges & issues.
- Group work – who's doing what?
Individual reports. Opportunity to assess distribution of responsibility.
- Problems always come up
Ongoing information – opportunity to trouble shoot, be a sounding board
- Inconsistent supervision (site, faculty mentor)
Ongoing mentoring from instructor
- Practicum experiences are rich, exciting, complex – need to be processed
Opportunity for students to reflect, instructor to reflect back, draw out lessons

Background – Reflection as a tool for teaching and learning

Student

- Learner-centered learning
- Experience-based
- Communication skills
- Assimilate complex lessons
- Self-knowledge/self-assessment
- Opportunity for individualized feedback

Background – Reflection as a tool for teaching and learning

Teacher

- On-going, individualized communication
- Feedback
- Monitor progress
- Assist with problem solving
- Early intervention/remediation
- Lessons brought back to the classroom
- Opportunity to interact, mutually explore
 - Values
 - Ethical issues
 - Deeper lessons

The Reflection “experiment”

- All students
 - Same introductory session
 - Same overall instructions for “email reports” in syllabus
 - Same timetable
 - Response to reflection
 - Informed that I was testing 2 strategies for reflection
- Two sets of instructions random assignment
 - 12 students – minimally structured guide for reflections
 - 12 students – structured guide for reflections

Reflection requirement

Journals and e-mail reports bgottlieb@partners.org

Practica are both exciting and challenging educational experiences. Educational scholarship on this type of experience has found that self-assessment and critical reflection are important strategies for personal growth and for enhancing learning in a practice setting. I would strongly urge each of you to keep a journal of your practicum experiences, though this is not a required assignment. I would, however, like to receive periodic updates and reflections via email. You may send these as often as you'd like, but at a minimum once each in February, March, April and May.

In addition to reflection, these updates will help me keep tabs on your project. Are you keeping to your timetable? Please highlight any successes, problems or potential problems, or follow-up on problems that have been identified in previous communications.

Student Checklist

Project Statement	February 9th
Project Agreement	February 16th
Email # 1	February 27th
Project Proposal	March 2nd
Email # 2	March 31st
Email # 3	April 30th
Evaluation form to site preceptor	May 7th (or last day at site)
Project Presentation	May 11th or 18 th
Final Report	May 18th
Email # 4	May 21st
Course evaluation	

Minimally structured guide

Guide for reflections

Before you go to the site

Describe your expectations, goals and objectives for this practicum experience

First visit

Describe and reflect on your first impressions

Periodic entries

Describe some of your experiences at the site, successes, challenges, questions

Final reflections

What are your most important lessons from this experience?

Structured guide

Structured reflections

Before you go to the site

What do you imagine your site/placement will be like?
(the people, the physical space, the location, any other attributes that you imagine)

What are your personal goals and objectives for this practicum experience?

What experiences have you had that might contribute to your success in this practicum?

What fears and or concerns do you have as you anticipate this experience?

Structured guide

Structured reflections

First visit

Describe and reflect on your first impressions

Periodic entries

Describe some of your experiences at the site

Successes...

Challenges...and possible solutions or approaches

Some things that I learned...

Questions that I have...and how I might answer them

Structured guide

Final reflections

Please look back over your first two entries - what you imagined, and your first impressions. Comment/reflect on these anticipatory and first feelings and how your impressions have changed (or not) over the past few months.

What was the most surprising or unexpected observation from your practicum experience?

What are your most important lessons from this experience?

Structured guide

What questions do you bring with you based on this experience?

Did the practicum experience change you? How or why not?

Did the practicum experience affect how you think about your next steps, or your career as a whole? If so, in what way?

Results - Process

	Minimally structured	Structured
Completed all reflections	9/12	12/12
Timely submission (within 1 week of deadline)	8/12	12/12
Average length Initial Periodic Final	½ page ½ page 1 page	1 page 1 page 3 pages

Results - Content

FIRST VISIT	Minimally structured	Structured
Describe goals & objectives, expectations	11/12 9/12	12/12 12/12
Describe 1 st impressions Reflect on impressions	10/12 6/12	12/12 12/12
(Additional information)	1/12	12/12

Results - Content

PERIODIC ENTRIES	Minimally structured	Structured
Describe experiences	9/12	12/12
challenges	8/12	12/12
questions	8/12	12/12
Personal reflection	7/12	12/12
(Additional information)	3/12	12/12

Results - Content

FINAL ENTRY	Minimally structured	Structured
Lessons learned	11/12	12/12
Personal reflection	11/12	12/12
(Additional information)	9/12	12/12

Examples

Expectations

Descriptions

Questions

“Teachable moments”

Personal reflections

Conclusions

- Reflection serves diverse educational purposes
- Students turn in these assignments
- Structure and specific guidelines yield longer, more complex responses

Limitations

- Small numbers, 1 class
- Did not choose to correlate with other outcomes
- No systematic assessment of student satisfaction

Next Steps

- Continue structured format
- Explicit self-assessment regarding competencies
- Obtain student feedback
- Consider web-based journal/portfolio format

***Thanks to the students in the class and
the generous site supervisors and preceptors***