

Dear reader,

We have come to a complicated issue which we have been discussing throughout the project. ‘Complicated’ because on the one hand assessments are a valid tool for tracking the learning process of learners, especially in formal education. But at the same time we think assessments can have a negative impact on the quality of reflection, something which is sometimes underestimated. Even just the bare fact that learners know that they are going to be assessed can have a profound impact on the way they explore (or not) that-which-is-at-stake. Therefore, we want to advocate that the educator is at least aware about the possible impact of the classic assessment (including grading) and/or to consider a careful alternative to it.

Reflection assignments are often developed within the existing framework of assessing competences. Therefore, it is usually based on a quantitative, result-oriented logic: assessment is verifying in which way and to which degree the learner meets the pre-existing standards concerning knowledge, skills and attitude. What’s good already? What needs to be better? And what isn’t good enough? In some cases, this is of course a very valid way of assessing. However, when reflection comes down to learners exploring their deeper thoughts, feelings, values and assumptions, this way of assessing doesn’t always do justice to the complex and holistic process of reflection. Firstly, learners are starting to align their answers to what they think is expected because they want a good grade at the end. Secondly, too much emphasis is put on the actual content as the objective, measurable result of reflection. But what about learners who have engaged in an authentic enquiry and are confronted with a moment of sincere not-knowing (and to be clear: this ‘I don’t know’ is in sharp contrast to the all-too-easy ‘I don’t know and I don’t care’)? To put the question sharply: should they get a lower grade for, or possibly even fail, the assessment as they do not produce enough content?

With REFLECT we have started to explore a different path for assessing reflection. Further on in the publication, we will elaborate this path more in its specifics, but at this point it suffices to make a general statement. We’re proposing to **align the assessment with the ideas of process-directivity, owning up and dialogic relationship between educator and learners**. Therefore, we firstly propose a shift from a one-way-directed assessment to a two-ways-directed assessment: it’s not just the educator who takes an objective distance to evaluate the learner, rather educator and learners have a dialogue to explore the learning process together. Doing so, they continue the equal relationship they have built up during the course (instead of falling back to a top-down relationship in the former way of assessing). It’s important to underline at this point, the purpose of this dialogue is not to convince one another about the ‘objective truth’ of what is learned, but rather to develop a kind of intersubjective judgement by allowing to be mutually influenced by each other. This requests an openness from both educator and learner.

Secondly, we also propose that the focus of assessment should first and foremost be put on the reflective process leading to the content instead of the content itself (e.g. as being right or wrong). This implies a shift from what is called summative (result-oriented) to formative (process-oriented) assessment. Arguing how assessment of the result cannot be separated from assessment of the process in arts education, Susan Orr states convincingly in this respect how “it is essential that you know something about who that person is and what they are trying to do, what they think they’re doing in order to measure the quality of what they’ve done.” The same is true for reflection, so we think. Therefore, the educator directs his attention towards the intensity by which learners engage themselves in the reflection; the attention they give to that-which-is-at-stake and the way they personally own the reflected knowledge, skills or attitude. He does so to explore (rather than to objectively measure) the quality and depth of the personal learning processes, more than the content as a measurable result (to put it very black and white).

Sincerely yours,

Your REFLECT correspondent

This letter was informed by the following writings:

Luken, Tom. (2010). Problemen met reflecteren. De risico's van reflectie nader bezien. In Luken, Tom & Reynaert, W. (2010) Puzzelstukjes voor een nieuw paradigma? Aardverschuiving in loopbaandenken. Eindhoven-Tilburg: Lectoraat Career Development Fontys Hogeschool HRM en Psychologie, 9-34.

Orr, Susan. (2012). Art and Design Assessment. A journey from accuracy to zing. Lecture on the conference 'Artistiek Evalueren', to be downloaded on www.luca-arts.be/portfolio/%E2%80%98art-and-design-assessment-%E2%80%9393-journey-accuracy-zing.

Suggested reading related to 'assessing reflection':

Boud, D. (1994, May). Conceptualising learning from experience: Developing a model for facilitation. In *Proceedings of the thirty fifth annual adult education research conference* (pp. 49-54).

Hovelynck, J. (2000). Recognising and exploring action-theories: A reflection-in-action approach to facilitating experiential learning. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 1(1), 7-20.

Smith, E. (2011). Teaching critical reflection. *Teaching in Higher Education*.16(2), 211-22.3

Lucas, U., & Tan, L.P. (2013). Developing a capacity to engage in critical reflection: students' ways of knowing within an undergraduate business and accounting programme. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38, (1), 104–123. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.569706>.

Mortari L. (2012). Learning thoughtful reflection in teacher education. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 18, (5), 525–545.

Hubbs, D.L. & Brand. (2005). The Paper Mirror: Understanding Reflective Journaling. *The Journal of Experiential Education*,28 (1), 60-71.Lim, L.-A.,Y., L.(2011). A comparison of students' reflective thinking across different years in a problem-based learning environment. *Instr Sci* 39, 171–188. DOI 10.1007/s11251-009-9123-8.

Wittich, C.,M. et al.(2013). Validation of a Method for Measuring Medical Students' Critical Reflections on Professionalism in Gross Anatomy. *Anatomical Sciences Education*,6, 232–238.

Wittich,C.,M. et al.(2013). Measuring Faculty reflection on medical Grand Rounds at Mayo Clinic: Association with teaching experience, clinical exposure and presenter effectiveness. *Mayo Clinic Proceeding*, 88(3), 277-284.