

Neon Notecards: Periodically Checking in with Students

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Context: In-class; Global Studies; World drama (with a focus on Irish culture)

Keywords: misconceptions, educator feedback

Student Activity Time: 5-10 minutes in-class

Periodically throughout a 10-week course, students reflected on their specific learning in the course.

Introducing the Reflection Activity

In a world drama class, focused on Irish culture, first-year through last-year students read play scripts, acted the plays out, and watched films. As a way to periodically check-in with students, the educator used neon notecards with reflective prompts to ask students to reflect on a specific part of their learning in the class. The purpose of this reflection activity was for students to step back from their learning, think deeply about what they were learning, and connect it to their broader knowledge base. It was also an opportunity for the educator to understand students' learning and potentially correct any disconnects or misconceptions.

Throughout the course, students engaged in a variety of activities related to the course. Periodically throughout the 10-week quarter, the educator passed out neon notecards and asked the students to reflect in response to a specific question. For example, after students watched a film in class, the educator asked them to think about questions like: What did you think of the film? How does the film relate to other topics in the class? Did you enjoy the film?

The purpose of using neon notecards was to visually cue students that they were engaging in a different type of activity—a reflection activity. The reflections were not formally graded; rather students received class participation points if they engaged in the reflection activity. After students wrote their reflections, the educator collected the reflections and reviewed them after class. In the next class session, the educator discussed the reflections with the students as a way to close the loop on that reflection activity. This process was an opportunity for the educator to detect and correct any disconnects or misconceptions the students were having. On some occasions, the educator had students switch their cards with each other, so they could see what other students were thinking about the question. This process provided a safe space for students who were confused about something to see that there probably was someone else in the class who was confused or needed clarification as well.

In terms of outcomes, there was potential for students to better understand their learning and integrate their knowledge with their previous knowledge. Furthermore, since this activity was used periodically throughout the course, there was potential for students to get into the habit of reflection. Additionally, the reflection activity also helped the educator know what were students understanding or misunderstanding.

Recreating the Reflection Activity

	Description
1	Provide students with neon cards and a reflection prompt.
2	Collect and read the reflection.
3	Debrief students in the next class period (i.e. thank them for engaging in the reflection, correct any misunderstandings).

In the words of the Educator: Tips and Inspiration

Be prepared to answer questions related to the purpose of the reflection. When I engage students in this activity, I do not make a big deal about the reflection. Rather, I simply handout the neon cards and give them the prompt. Because there is little to no discussion with students about the purpose of the reflection activity, students may question it so be prepared to answer. In my experience, one student asked the purpose and I told her exactly why I was doing it (i.e. I wanted to be sure that you understand what I am trying to teach, and if I see a disconnect in terms of your understanding, I am going to come back and help you with that).

Make time for the reflection activity. In integrating a reflection activity into your class, make sure to make time for it. Don't try to cram it in, because you're cramming in yet another thing.

Slow down. When engaging students in a reflection activity, try to slow down. I have a tendency to talk really fast and talk over people. I have found that it is important for me to just wait and let students have some time to process it.

Be prepared for students to take the reflection seriously. I was surprised by how seriously students took this informal task. Some of them wrote quite astutely and deeply on the brief question I asked. That surprised me because I wasn't sure if they would take it seriously. I thought they might think, "Oh well, I'm just trying to fill up words" but they really did pose interesting responses.

Make sure the reflection is relevant. At a previous institution, the freshmen composition program required educators to collect student portfolios (i.e. a manila folder in which you put every piece of the student's work). The reflection part of that was students going back into their freshmen composition pieces and correcting grammar and writing comments about it. At times this process could be quite frustrating. I told myself I would never get involved with something like that again. So I don't think that reflection serves anyone if it's just there to check off a box. It has to have some relevance, direct relevance, you have to see its effects at least initially in the class itself.

Be intentional in adding a reflection component to the course. I think you should be intentional in why you're adding a reflection activity to the course, and in doing

so, it is important to have a plan. Not, “Oh I think I’ll try reflection today” but I want to do a reflection activity with my students because it serves this outcome or this objective or I’m trying to get this out of students.

Introduce the students to reflection with a low stakes reflection activity. I think it is important to introduce reflection as a low stakes activity. In my classes, I do this by giving them a prompt to respond to. This helps because sometimes students get stuck and they say, “I don’t know what to write about.” Secondly, it makes the grading minimal, so students don’t focus on the grading aspect.

What was the inspiration for the reflection activity? A few different interactions with other educators inspired this reflection activity. The first is when Dr. Tom Angelo, a learning theorist, visited Rose-Hulman this past fall, he encouraged us to do an activity that is more active for students. Second, Dr. Rachel McCord, an engineering educator and researcher, talked about observing engineering teams and how reflection helped students in these teams with their metacognition. These two interactions inspired me to start using the neon notecards reflection activity, although I’ll admit that the idea to use a brightly colored card was mine!