

Using a 'rapid reflection on learnings' process in graduate teaching

CTLT Spring Institute

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Susan M Cox, Charlyn Black and Kate Jongbloed
School of Population and Public Health, UBC

Introduction

- Context is a new graduate level course “Approaches to Enquiry”, a required course for SPPH doctoral students – co-developed & offered for 1st time in fall 2014 by Susan Cox, Charlyn Black and Kate Jongbloed (TA).
- Course goals are to:
 - ▣ broaden appreciation for range of relevant research paradigms
 - ▣ learn to construct researchable questions
 - ▣ foster self-reflexive stance

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Focus of SoTL research

Which pedagogic strategies are most effective in team-teaching students how to appreciate a wide range of possible approaches to enquiry in population and public health (P&PH) research?

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Our current research

- Prospective case studies of co-teaching 'Approaches to Enquiry' (with new cohort each year)
- Use of autoethnographic (Reed-Danahay 1997) & participatory action research (McIntyre 2008) to capture multiple perspectives, involve students in process & apply learning in iterative cycle
- Methods of data collection include:
 - in-class observations & formative review of teaching and class interaction (done by instructors and students or peers)
 - instructor de-briefing and reflective journaling after each class
 - **rapid reflection on learnings process**

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Rapid reflection on learnings process

- Evolved from 'critical incident reporting' (see Fook & Gardener, 2007), renamed and oriented to avoid perception that something went wrong
- Consists of one page form, completed and shared (one copy each for instructors & student)
- Asks students to identify:
 - points in the class where they felt most and least engaged
 - actions taken by anyone that were affirming or confusing
 - specific 'aha' moments
 - salient take-away messages

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Applying the rapid reflection process

- Provide students with forms at beginning of class and they hand in completed forms before they leave.
- Allow about 5 minutes for completion at end of class.
- Hand written is okay though variability in neatness means forms are sometimes hard to decipher.
- Students provide their names on forms so comments are NOT anonymous.
- Response rate was nearly 100% over 10 classes (not used at 1st and last class of term).

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Usefulness of RR process

The systematic feedback we obtain is invaluable to our team teaching in several key ways:

- it provides weekly input that allows us to monitor students' learning
- it helps us to identify & respond to trouble spots
- it prompts to students to engage in reflective learning about their own learning
- it gives us insight into effective and ineffective pedagogic strategies

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Monitoring students' learning

Confirming what students understood and found relevant or irrelevant through key learnings question

- “Yes! The framing of a research paradigm driving a question that is answered by a method seems blindingly obvious now.” (Week 2)
- “That I need to think more deeply over the next few months about what my positions as a researcher are. That your positions as a researcher evolve over time.” (Week 2)
- “Interdisciplinary thinking can be beneficial on collaborative teams.” (Week 3)

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Identifying trouble spots

Identifying substantive issues or topics that were confusing and may require additional clarification

- “Discussion about methodology versus methods was a bit confusing.” (Week 2)
- “I liked the cartoon [of the sheep talking about a conspiracy] but I felt people may have been confused about the kind of answers being looked for.” (Week 4)
- “I’m still unclear about the difference between theory and paradigm. How can critical theory be fitted into the description of a paradigm?” (Week 4)

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Prompting students to reflect on their learning

Locating a sense of how students understand their own learning process and what facilitates this

- “Some experiences shared by students that made me realize that I am not the only one!!” (Week 3)
- “I had new insights about ethics in my research. Particularly about ‘ethical moments’ that I encountered in the past. This was surprising and sometimes disturbing as I think I may not have acted properly.” (Week 6)
- “Last class the personal aspect of the journal synthesis was emphasized and this week it was de-emphasized. After last class I tried to personalize my synthesis #2 more but now I wonder if I went too far. I guess time will tell! :)” (Week 7)

Insight into effective/ineffective pedagogic strategies

Gaining insight into what engages students and usefulness of specific exercises or approaches

- ▣ “I enjoyed our lab activity. It was neat to operationalize the concepts in different ways.” (Week 7)
- ▣ “Loved the jeopardy [game] too – great interactive activity.” “It applies what we learn from the seminar.” (Week 5)
- ▣ “Theory-based activity and solid examples can be used more frequently (i.e., drawing from instructor’s research experience really helpful).” (Week 5)

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Other insights from the process

- ▣ Question about when students felt least engaged shed light on physical and other constraints on ability to concentrate or stay engaged (e.g., hungry, tired, too much ambient sound at back of room)
- ▣ Engagement interpreted in different ways (e.g., “I got to talk a lot” vs the ideas were thought provoking)
- ▣ Very little critical material perhaps because of identifiability of respondents

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Other insights from the process cont'd

- Strong endorsement of value of student/peer expertise in learning and appreciation of students being asked to contribute to a discussion, especially as it affirmed respect for student learning and voice
- Widespread collective concern for other students' learning process and what might impede it
- Thoughtfulness about actions taken by instructors was inspiring/affirming to us along with tips for improving our teaching

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Ethical considerations

- Considerations around identifiability vs anonymity
- Ability to provide candid perspective without concern for impact on course grade
- How to identify and respond to moments where there is a conflict and someone feels hurt or left out
- Accountability to students and regular sharing of what we learn from process each week

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Conclusions

- Rapid reflection process is a core piece of our evolving pedagogy, used as one piece of a constellation of components
- Need to evaluate whether students actually do find the process helpful to their own learning
- Reconsider allowing for some portion of the process to be anonymous and doing it electronically

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References

- Fook J. & Gardner F. (2007). *Practicing Critical Reflection: A Resource Handbook*, Maidenhead. McGraw Hill/Open University Press.
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- Palmer, Parker J. (2007). *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Reed-Danahay, D. (ed.) (1997) *Auto/ Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. Oxford: Berg.

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