

# Let It Marinate: The Importance of Reflection and Closing

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I am one of those people who regularly figures out exactly what to say after the moment has passed. I will be deep in conversation with someone, sharing thoughts and bouncing around ideas. Yet, as the thoughts swirl, I'll have an unsettled feeling. Often it is not until some time later, when the ideas have marinated, that I realize what matters most to me and how to say it. I find that the flow of learning for many of my students matches my personal need for intellectual reflection.

## A Classroom Example

Recently, we spent a chunk of one of my world history classes discussing an excerpt from [The Power of Myth](#), a conversation that Joseph Campbell had with Bill Moyers about enduring myths and the human condition. The students read the text during the previous class and had done a writing exercise that helped them begin to explore some of the different ideas contained in the dialogue.

The discussion was interesting but felt aimless. Some students were interested in the idea of learning deeper messages by reading the myths of others. Others were struck by Campbell's idea that we are all imperfect. For many, it was unclear if they found anything of meaning in the reading. The body language in the classroom was mixed. Some students turned to face whoever was speaking and eagerly responded, often referring to the text in front of them. Others were slouched in their chairs rarely looking at the text or at the speakers.

Students knew that this was the beginning of our religion unit and had spent time earlier in the week attempting to create a definition of religion, yet if felt as if no one knew how to successfully put these different pieces together into larger, coherent ideas with greater meaning. As teacher, I felt unsure about our status in this early part of our unit.

As the discussion slowed down and the clock began approaching the end of the period, I asked everyone to jot down a one-sentence final thought. After two silent minutes, we started in one corner of the room and quickly whipped around as, one after another, students shared final thoughts from the reading and/or discussion. It quickly became clear that a lot more deep and rich thinking had happened than I previously realized. "Religions are glorified myths," said a student who had been quiet all period. "We all need ways to find meaning in our lives," offered a young man who had previously seemed to find very little meaning in the discussion.

## Deepening Learning

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the Brazilian educator [Paolo Freire](#) reinforces the idea that reflection is an essential part of learning and of becoming an agent of change in the world:

*Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed -- even in part -- the other immediately suffers . . .*

Freire also reminds us that this process (that he has named [concientizacion](#)) involves a true exchange of ideas:

*If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants.*

The end of a class period may often feel like a time to slow down and regroup before another set of students arrives. An alternate view is that these last moments, which usually occur when ideas have had a chance to marinate, can be a time when quiet thinkers finally articulate their ideas and move toward Freire's idea of *concientizacion*. In these moments, students can deepen their own learning, and entire groups can share ideas and make meaning of content. Additionally, the time when a large piece of work is submitted is an important opportunity for students to articulate their own learning and self-evaluate in order to improve learning and the quality of their work for the future.

## Closings and Reflective Activities

There are many different ways to integrate closings and reflective activities into classroom practice. Depending on the circumstances, closings and reflective activities can be quickly jotted down and shared out loud, or they can be larger writing assignments that are submitted with projects or posted as an introduction to blog posts of student work.

The following is a list of different reflection and closing prompts:

- Share one thing you learned.
- Share a question for future investigation.
- Respond with a word.
- What worked? What didn't work?
- What is one part of your work that you are proud of?
- How would you do this differently next time?

School is generally not structured in a way that easily accommodates ambiguity and differentiation. While this presents a challenge, the strategic integration of meaningful closings and reflection into classroom practice gives students multiple avenues for engaging with complex ideas and allows more students to find broader meaning in their

work. Additionally, these activities help teachers to more deeply understand and adapt to the intellectual processes of our students.

***Please engage in a reflection on the subject of reflection... (choose one or two to consider and jot down your ideas)***

In what different ways do you structure reflection and closings in your classroom?

Do you allow yourself time for reflection as an educator? Why or why not? If not, what could you use to guide yourself in this practice?

What do you do in your class that you are most proud of? Least pleased with?  
Desperate to change/improve?

What questions about instruction/differentiation/reflection do you have moving forward?