

Imagination and Reflexivity Activities

Shamini Dias, Ph.D & Jeremy Schneider, Ph.D.

Future Focus Outcomes Visioning

This process gets all participants to imaginatively share a vision of the future world into which their students will enter and the skills and capacities their students will need to flourish in that future.

Based on this imaginative work, participants then explore 2 tools for significant outcomes and reflect on how they align their goals and values to the larger, future-centric vision of education as well as outcomes they can integrate into their immediate teaching.

Creating a Shared Vision of the Future

1. Imagine the world 10 years into the future. Use a concrete date ten years from the present time, for example 2029. What will 2029 be like?
2. Working in groups and without talking, write a list of verbs and adjectives on a single sheet of paper for 1 minute. Stop.
3. Individually - Think of someone you know personally today who is in college. Now, imagine them in the future world of 2029. Our question is - what skills and capacities would this person need in order to flourish in this future world?
4. Imagine that you have the superpower to give them any capacity or skill - but you are limited to only three. What three would you choose? Write them down.
5. Share with your group. How similar and different are the skills and capacities you have come up with? What is your final list of gifts as a group?

Mapping a Futures-Based Vision to Current Goals.

6. Now look at AAC&U's LEAP Outcomes as well as Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning for the 21st Century. Map your gifts onto these two frameworks; do you see outcomes that connect with the kinds of skills and capacities you thought of?
7. Group Reflection: Based on your imagination work and the process of mapping your vision to the 2 frameworks, what is the mission of education from a future-centric perspective?
8. Solo Reflection: What kinds of outcomes, learning activities, and assignments can you do in teaching your subject area contents that would foster these capacities and skills?
9. Share solo reflections in pairs or as a group so that each person can appreciate and learn from others in different disciplines.

Metaphors for Developing a Teaching Philosophy

We each have long years of lived experiences as learners, and many years as well as teachers. In that time, we have accumulated a great many assumptions, values, and beliefs about teaching and learning, and much of that tacitly. Things have shaped themselves without our conscious choice just through the weight and complexity of our experiences. Using metaphors helps surface tacitly held assumptions, values, and beliefs about teaching and learning. By playing with metaphors to unpack them, we become more self-aware and take the first reflexive step toward developing an explicit set of values, beliefs, and goals as educators. In short, we develop a living philosophy of teaching and learning that we can bring to bear on our current practice as educators, and that can be continually informed by changes in the educational landscape and research on learning.

1. Give out strips of paper and ask participants to complete sentences starting with “Teaching is ...” and “Learning is ...” Put these up somewhere so everyone can see. Pin them on a poster board or use 3 X 5 inch post-its and put them up on a wall or whiteboard.
2. View the different sentence definitions. Ask participants to think of what resonates and does not resonate with them. Encourage them to adopt other people’s definitions if they read something that really connects with them.

This part is a warm-up to get everyone thinking about their ideas around teaching and learning. It begins the process of surfacing deeply held beliefs that have formed themselves over years of lived experiences as learners.

3. Ask participants to think of teaching as analogous to something else - to find a metaphor in a process or object or phenomenon that encapsulates what teaching is for them. They can sketch it or just write it down.
4. Participants meet in pairs to share and then unpack or interpret each other’s metaphor. During the unpacking process, the person whose metaphor is being unpacked listens without interruption to correct the interpreter. After both parties have unpacked each other’s metaphor there will be a chance to respond to the interpretations.
 - a. What are the values and beliefs revealed in the metaphor?
 - b. What teaching goals might be generated in thinking of teaching using the metaphor?
 - c. What assumptions about teaching and learning does the metaphor reveal?
5. Each person now responds to the interpretations of their metaphor. It is important to stress that there are no right and wrong interpretations, and the focus on this process is to discover what is contained in a ,
 - a. What reading or interpretation surprised me and why?
 - b. What interpretations do I resonate with and why?
 - c. Would I change or modify my metaphor - what metaphor better captures my conception of teaching?
6. Review the sentence strips. How would you now rewrite your sentence definition of teaching? This can be done as a solo activity, or the participants can do group writing to come up with a new sentence definition of teaching.
7. Solo Reflection: Were there any surprises in what your metaphor revealed to you? Did hearing about someone else’s metaphor give you new insights or ideas, question your values and beliefs or add to them? What assumptions, values, and beliefs about teaching and learning were revealed to you? How do you think these assumptions, values, and beliefs were formed?