

Recollections: The Experience of Documentation as a Form of Evidence for Reflective Practice

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As I sit down to write this piece late in August, I cast a quick glance at the several tabs open on my laptop. Most of them are related to teaching as I prepare a lesson on literacy narratives for my undergraduate students. Since I plan to focus my literacy narrative assignment on the students' experiences with digital technology, I have been visiting the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives to find sample narratives. My current lesson plan, meanwhile, is on reflection, since it is a component of each project that I assign to my students.

Reflection has been a major part of my teaching for the past several years. Initially, I would only include it as a part of the final ePortfolio due at the end of the semester. However, with time, I started assigning it as a part of each major assignment as well as peer reviews. Similarly, unlike the earlier iterations of reflection that were closer to freestyle journaling, my reflection assignments are now better guided, more streamlined, and immensely thought-provoking.

I am currently a doctoral candidate, an ABD, who is teaching writing to undergraduate students. In my current position, I get very little chance to methodically reflect on my own writing, personal and academic. Therefore, the opportunity to reflect that I have been granted as a Documentarian for the virtual CCCC conference held in 2022 is a good moment for me to employ some of the techniques that I have been using in my own courses as a teacher who has reflection at the heart of her pedagogy.

I will develop my reflection within the framework of Gibbs's Reflective Cycle (Fig. 11.1) which will help me illustrate and elaborate on my reflective choices and make them more lucid and comprehensible.

Graham Gibbs's Reflective Cycle, developed in 1988, offers a framework for examining experiences, and, given its cyclic nature, lends itself particularly well to repeated experiences, allowing you to learn and plan from things that either went well or didn't go well. He claims, "Learning from experience must involve links between the doing and the thinking"

(Gibbs 14). He further maintains that in order to bring about behavioral change through learning, it is essential that the acquired learning is reflected upon. Gibbs's reflective cycle has six domains: description, feeling, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan.

REFLECTION ON CCCC 2022

Experience: Attending the conference in the virtual format over the course of four days.

Description

The conference was a good opportunity to be a part of the community virtually. This year, I was a little less apprehensive about attending the conference virtually because it had already been done in the previous year. I did, however, have to spend a little more time on my schedule, but it was taken care of after a few emails with the organizers.

My presentation was an on-demand session, and I uploaded it a few days before the actual conference. However, on the day of my conference, I found out that my presentation was inaccessible. I let the tech support know immediately, and they took care of the situation.

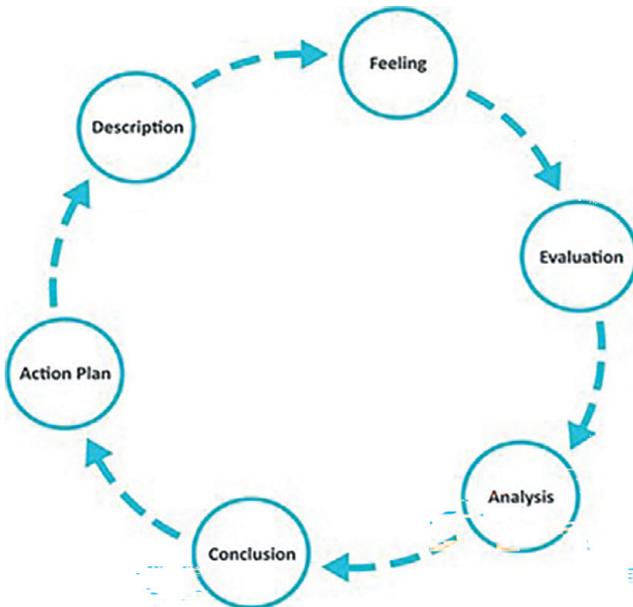


Figure 11.1. Gibbs's Reflective Cycle (The University of Edinburgh).

The sessions were interesting, but after a day, Zoom fatigue took over. I stayed on schedule most of the time, and I attended the sessions I had originally planned to attend, on-demand and live.

But unlike the initial two days when I was easily juggling grading with conferencing, I had to stop grading on the third day to take breaks and then continue conferencing. In addition, on Thursday, I was also teaching a section of a 3000-level composition course at my institution as an instructor of record. So, there was an added layer of working/conferencing balance since I had to be on campus to teach the class in person and attend the conference around the class schedule.

I always attended the conference from my living room. So, the physical setting remained the same throughout the four days. I was on the same couch next to the big window from where I could see the road. There were times when the weather changed: it rained and the traffic got a bit slower, and, since I live in Florida, the rain never lasted for too long, and we had the sun shining almost instantly.

My cat was a permanent fixture in my living room apart from my couch, desk, and laptop. I would get up every now and then to feed her and stroke her and let her out when she wanted to get some fresh air.

Feeling

I felt fortunate to be able to be a part of the conference. I attended several sessions that I found interesting, ranging from the ones on feedback and peer review to those on instructional design. I was happy that I was able to stick to a plan and attend most of the sessions that I wanted to attend. I was also excited to attend the conference after paying only the registration fee that was reimbursed by my institution. This was quite different from the usual in-person event that would have been much more expensive.

There was some anxiety attached to time management that probably would not have been the case if I had attended the event in person, because then I would have found alternate means of conducting my classes, and I would certainly not have taken my grading along. That would have allowed me to focus fully on the conference, which was not the case this time, because I was juggling work and personal life with conferencing.

However, I cannot deny the warmth that came with attending the conference from the comfort of my home. I sipped my freshly brewed sweet tea while I listened to people discuss things that they and I cared

about with equal passion. My cat purred on my lap as I stroked her, a cozy bundle that reminded me that, despite wars, hiking prices, and pandemics, life still had some goodness to offer.

In the scenario, the only physical challenge I experienced that dampened my spirits toward the end was Zoom fatigue. By Friday evening, I had a dull headache and my eyeballs felt as if they would be falling out. I decided to attend fewer sessions than I had planned earlier and not do any grading to give my eyes some much-needed rest.

Evaluation

It was, overall, a positive experience with some minor glitches. For example, there were instances when one of my devices froze, thus hindering my participation in the event. Likewise, there were other minor issues, such as unstable internet connection, that were solved quite easily. There was also the part about having to juggle multiple roles in life.

However, for the most part, I think the experience remained good. For a conference of this magnitude and participation, I think the organizers did a good job putting it together virtually. Most of all, I enjoyed attending it from the comfort of my home where I got the information, but without having to plan an expensive trip to a new city. Nonetheless, I missed the chance to actually meet people and socialize with like-minded individuals from the field and spend time networking and conversing about life, academics, and everything else. And finally, as someone who loves to travel, I missed the opportunity to visit a new city.

Analysis

I think the experience was mostly positive. But the fact that helped me weave it into a narrative was my role as a Documentarian. This is the first time I am taking it up at the Cs or any other conference. And I think it was an excellent decision. The forms that I had to fill twice a day kept me accountable for the job I had signed up for. But more than just that, they helped me stay grounded and focused. In one of my forms, I mention that they were like prayer beads that I sometimes use to meditate. Although technically intangible, these documents were like threads that helped me make sense of the huge conference with many sessions, spaces, and workshops.

The forms not only helped me gather my thoughts but also were able to take me back in time when I revisited them as I was drafting this reflection.

Nevertheless, they were not perfect. I feel that there could be practical and thought-provoking questions that would help people be more reflective. For instance, would you apply anything that you learned in your own teaching? If yes, how would you do that? Or a second idea could be, if you could join a panel, hypothetically, what would it be and how would you contribute? Similarly, a third question could be about the experience within the conference, such as how attending a live session was different than viewing an on-demand session, and so on.

Conclusion

This was a good experience, and I can totally imagine attending another virtual Cs. However, I think, with time, I would expect it to be a little more organized since that is one area with room for improvement. Also, I would probably expect more on-demand sessions or the live sessions to be recorded and stored separately so they could be easily accessed later. And finally, I could also see the Cs as a hybrid conference that would be inclusive of people who would not be able to attend in person and would still be willing to participate and contribute.

Action Plan

I do not have a concrete action plan. But if the opportunity arises, I would, most definitely, sign up for the role of a Documentarian because it would make my experience with conferencing so much better. Moreover, I would now also think about being a Documentarian for an in-person conference and a hybrid conference.

WORKS CITED

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- The University of Edinburgh. "Gibbs' Reflective Cycle." The University of Edinburgh, The University of Edinburgh, 11 Nov. 2020, www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflection-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience/gibbs-reflective-cycle.