PORTFOLIO REFLECTION AS AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

STUDENT AFFAIRS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Colorado State University
Be aware and mindful of what is going on around you and within you. Review your data and think deeply and purposefully about what is happening and how you are perceiving, thinking and feeling.

Ask new questions:
- observation - describe what is happening
- collaborative interviews - engage in purposeful dialogue - and record it!
- artifacts - class papers, agendas, org documents, group swag... items (or photos of items) that help to tell the story of your experience
- keep an autoethnographic notebook to record your data and initial reflections or notes

Examine your experience and what you are learning in the context of Student Affairs and Higher Ed. and your own lived experience.

Prepare to write:

Data Collection:
- observation
- collaborative interviews
- artifacts

Be aware and mindful of what is going on around you and within you.

Read, re-read and reflect:
- MEZIROW’S 1990 7 LEVELS OF REFLECTION
- ESPINO ET AL.’S 2012 PROCESS OF REFLEXIÓN THROUGH BRIDGED TESTIMONIO

Data Analysis:
- analysis
- interpretation

Ask new questions:
Examine your experience and what you are learning in the context of Student Affairs and Higher Ed. and your own lived experience.

Analysis and Interpretation:
- “top down” - use the 33 SAHE competencies to identify learning moments in the data
- “bottom up” - look for patterns in the data that illustrate and tell the story and/or counter-story (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) of your development as a Student Affairs scholar-practitioner

Describe (WHAT?):

What data do you need to include to describe the relevant parts of what happened?

Analysis (SO WHAT?):

What points from your data analysis illustrate learning moments and your thoughtful reflection?

Interpretation (NOW WHAT?):

What points from your data analysis demonstrate what you have learned/more learning you need to do/who you want to be as a practitioner/how you will do the work?

Prepare to write:

4 Use the descriptive data and your analysis to construct the story of what you are learning:

- pull data and analysis points to create an outline using an adapted Gibbs’ (1988) Reflective Writing Model:
  - Description (WHAT?):
    - What data do you need to include to describe the relevant parts of what happened?
  - Analysis (SO WHAT?):
    - What points from your data analysis illustrate learning moments and your thoughtful reflection?
  - Interpretation (NOW WHAT?):
    - What points from your data analysis demonstrate what you have learned/more learning you need to do/who you want to be as a practitioner/how you will do the work?

- review your outline and “plug in” course concepts that support, or fail to support your experience.

5 Tell the story of how you are becoming a scholar-practitioner:

- using the same flow of description, analysis, interpretation, expand your outline into the narrative of your experience, focusing on rich, real description to make your story clear, compelling and believable
- use standard APA formatting and a qualitative voice
- include a reference page
- connect your story to the larger story of student affairs and higher education, citing the literature you use as well as the SAHE competencies you are addressing
- write a first draft, maybe write a second, then READ your drafts for errors, flow, and clarity.
- select an artifact from your data that represents your learning moment to include with your reflection
- respond to feedback from your committee

Write, revise & edit:

Tell the story of how you are becoming a scholar-practitioner.
Step 1 in Developing a Portfolio: Keeping an Autoethnographic Notebook

What is an Autoethnographic Notebook?
It is a record of everything you are thinking and feeling about your experience as a student in the Student Affairs and Higher Education (SAHE) graduate program. It is a record that says “I am paying attention to what is happening around me and my role in those happenings.” It is a place to capture your lived experience as you move through your day, in and out of the classroom and related to your learning/development as a professional. It is data. It can be handwritten or an electronic file.

With the exception of the four entries you will turn in for EDRM 698, an autoethnographic notebook is meant for YOUR EYES ONLY. It is a place for recording what is happening and initial reflection on those happenings. You should feel free to write what you want, without worry of perfecting the writing, or even worrying about whether the ideas are correct, or valid.

The Benefits of an Autoethnographic Notebook
• Capturing what is happening. In the words of a famous philosopher, “Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in awhile, you could miss it” (Ferris Bueller’s Day Off, 1986). A notebook is a place to record the data of your daily life before you “miss it”. This data then becomes the foundation for portfolio reflections.
• The practice of writing. A notebook helps you keep writing, which is one of the things many students find challenging about the reflection and portfolio process. Writing can be easier to do with a notebook because you know that no one else will look at it, and you know that you don’t need to be sure of what you are writing.
• The process of writing. Writing is a form of analysis that can help make meaning of your experience. The ways our brains process information in order to write can often lead us to new insights and discoveries when we get thoughts our of our heads and onto paper.
• A focus on learning. Using an autoethnographic notebook as the initial step in developing a portfolio allows reflections to be developed from lived experiences that can be connected to the 33 competencies, rather than beginning with the competencies. The approach of starting with an autoethnographic notebook centers you and your learning in the portfolio process and creates space to question and challenge that experience.

How to Create an Autoethnographic Notebook
• Can be handwritten or digital
• Must be accessible to you throughout the day
• Can begin with notes jotted between experiences that can later be expanded upon
• Captures the what, who, when, how, and where of your experience
• Is attentive to the internal and the external
• Includes the data and initial reflection – musings, questions, connections

What You Can/Should Include in an Autoethnographic Notebook
• Keep everything in one document, and keep it in chronological order.
• Use headings to differentiate between topics.
• Include the day/date/time of happenings of your entries
• Observational data such as
  o Capturing the progression of events and happenings in:
    ▪ academic coursework and classroom engagement in the SAHE Program of study
    ▪ assistantship/employment experiences related to learning moments or personal growth
    ▪ practicum experience related to the educational process and professional development.
    ▪ personal development and transitions related to academic work, assistantship/employment or cohort dynamics.
    ▪ assistantship/employment supervisor and colleague interactions.
    ▪ organizational dynamics
  o Being aware of and recording:
    ▪ the behaviors, action, or inaction of others
    ▪ dialogue, conversations, exchanges, phrases and words used
    ▪ the impact of identities, intersections, and power have on your experience – yours, and those of the people around you
    ▪ personal behaviors, action, or inaction
    ▪ internal thoughts and feelings – and how related they are to what is happening and/or how they might be a part of your larger story
    ▪ things that don’t make sense to you
• Connections (or lack of) between what you are learning in the classroom and what you are experiencing outside the classroom
• Questions that come up for you, about course content, the field, your own development, etc.
• Things you want to explore and why you want to explore them
• Triumphs, successes, joys, trials, struggles, mistakes, frustrations… – often the times we experience intense or ongoing emotions are moments of dissonance and potential learning.
• Initial reflection on these happenings: insight, hindsight, foresight, and whole-sight about who you are, who you want to be, the profession, higher education, SAHE, etc…

To sum up: What Do You Put in an Autoethnographic Notebook? EVERYTHING!!
Your notebook may read like a diary at times. It is important to include personal information about what is happening in your life, as context is important for autoethnography and reflection.

Remember that outside the context of the EDRM 698 assignment, no one else has to see this but you. There may be some rambling or confusing notes in your notebook as you begin to notice what is happening around you and, as you progress. There will most certainly be some real gems of writing that you will be able to develop into portfolio reflections.

If you are stuck, and don’t know what to capture in your notebook, it may be helpful to start with “I don’t really know what to write now, but…”. One of the most important things in keeping an autoethnographic notebook is to START!!

Adapted from

EDRM 698 – Research Methods: Personal Perspectives
Student Affairs and Higher Education (SAHE)
Drs. Pamela Graglia and Kyle Oldham
Colorado State University
Steps 2 and 3 in Developing a Portfolio: Data Analysis and Ongoing Data Collection

The Cyclical Process of Data Collection and Analysis in Qualitative Research

Ways to Reflect on the Data

There are many ways to reflect on the data, from spending time alone thinking or sharing your data with others and engaging in purposeful conversation with mentors or peers. Regardless of your method, record the meaning you are making in your notebook. You will draw directly on your data and analysis to write your reflections in Steps 4 and 5.

Mezirow’s Levels of Reflection

Level 1 – Reflectivity
One becomes aware of a specific perception, meaning, or behavior as well as habits of perceiving, thinking, or acting.

Level 1 questions to ask yourself:
What is happening around me? What am I thinking and doing?
Level 2 – Affective Reflectivity
One becomes aware of how one feels about the specific perceptions, meanings, or behaviors and habits of perceiving, thinking or acting.

**Level 2 questions to ask yourself:**
*How do I feel about my perceptions, thinking and behavior?*

Level 3 – Discriminant Reflectivity
One assesses the efficacy [ability to produce a desired outcome/result] of one’s perceptions, thoughts, actions and habits of doing things. One identifies immediate causes; recognizes reality contexts in which one functions; and identifies one’s relationships in reality context situations.

**Level 3 questions to ask yourself:**
*Is my perception/behavior/thinking helping me? Am I effective? What else could be happening here?*

Level 4 – Judgmental Reflectivity
One makes and becomes aware of one’s own value judgments about one’s perceptions, thoughts, actions, or habits.

**Level 4 questions to ask yourself:**
*What value judgments are reflected in my perceptions/thinking/action? What am I framing as good/bad, right/wrong, “normal” or expected?*

Level 5 – Conceptual Reflectivity
One becomes aware of concepts used to understand or judge.

**Level 5 questions to ask yourself:**
*What values, lenses, socialization, etc. are my perceptions/thoughts/actions grounded in or driven by?*

Level 6 – Psychic Reflectivity
One recognizes that interests and anticipations influence the way one perceives, thinks, or acts. One becomes aware of the tendency to make precipitant judgments [early judgments that may have a causal effect] based on limited information.

**Level 6 questions to ask yourself:**
*How might my values, lenses, socialization, etc. be causing me to make judgments or fail to seek additional information in ways that limit my understanding and effectiveness?*

Level 7 – Theoretical Reflectivity
One becomes aware of taken-for-granted cultural or psychological assumptions, and recognizes other perspectives that offer more functional criteria for perceiving, thinking, and acting.

**Level 7 questions to ask yourself:**
*What new thoughts/behaviors/mindsets could I adapt that surface my assumptions in situations like this and help me to be more effective?*

(as found in Jensen & Joy, 2005, p. 139-140) *Bracketed content and questions added.*
Espino et al.’s Process of Reflexión in Bridging Testimonios Across Lived Experience

Reflexión is a process of data analysis that focuses on interpreting individual testimonios (stories of lived experience) as part of a larger collective experience, often across generations. Reflexión disrupts and exposes oppressive, exclusionary systemic narratives found in theory and ideology in favor of centering knowledge creation in collective lived experience. While reflexión comes out of Latina feminist consciousness, it may also have application for those who hold other marginalized or subordinated identities.

Reflexión entails an examination of the inner self and sharing that inner self with a trusted dialogue partner. Through reflexión we move beyond self-reflection and self-inquiry toward shared experience where our dialogue partners reflect our truths back to us as they share their own life journeys. This process accounts for the distortions and (mis)perceptions of ourselves based on the vestiges of oppression that continue to manifest within academe, tethering us to one another in the midst of racist, sexist, and classist environments. Reflexión helps us situate and explain how our lived experiences exist within a broader set of social and institutional structures. Through this process we analyze data at multiple points in time. (Espino et al., 2012, p. 446)

Approaches to Analysis

Analysis from Bottom Up
• Researcher uses a type of analysis to look through data and create codes and themes.
• Codes and themes are not imposed on the data, but emerge from the data.

Analysis from Top Down
• Researcher starts with preexisting codes (such as SAHE competencies) or theories and organizes the data around them.

Most researchers use both.

Types of Analysis for Portfolio Reflections

Thematic/Categorical Analysis
• Concepts indicated by the data (not the actual data)
• One unit of data is compared with another (grounded theory constant comparative method)
• A unit is any meaningful portion
• Themes and notes of dissonance (outliers) are presented
Narrative Analysis

- Researcher seeks stories in data
- Convinces the reader through the impact of the story
- Narratives and counter-narratives
- Is presented as a whole story and not solely in small themes

Interpretation

- Results do not speak for themselves researchers must speak for their data.
- Often this will simply be illuminating the obvious. (“Well we knew that already!”)
- Researchers job is in many ways to attribute meaning to things we may feel we know, expand on ideas, and clarify misconceptions.
- Brings unique insight to the situation that may not be evident in the initial analysis.
- Interpretation is geared towards the situation for whom you are writing.

| Analysis: reduces data to a story researchers can tell. |
| Interpretation: tells the readers what the story means. |

(LeCompte & Schensul, 2010)

References


Steps 4 and 5 in Developing a Portfolio: Outlining, Writing, Revising and Editing Your Reflection

Selecting a Topic for Reflection Writing

Analyze your data and identify a learning moment that illustrates or prompted your work towards specific SAHE Competencies. Each reflection should address 1-4 competencies.

NOTE: The data source determines the type of reflection you are writing NOT the competency or competencies you are writing towards.

Knowledge Based Reflections originate from in-the-classroom data (coursework, group projects, papers and literature reviews, lectures, presentations, field trips, and other course activities) and may demonstrate work towards any of the 33 SAHE Professional Competencies.

Professional Based Reflections originate from out-of-the-classroom data (supervising students, advising a student group, developing and/or facilitating a training session, organizational culture and norms within student groups or work settings, sitting on a committee or work group, other leadership and work related experiences or role responsibilities) and may demonstrate work towards any of the 33 SAHE Professional Competencies.

Basic Structure of a Portfolio Reflection

Adapted from Gibbs, 1988
Pull Data and Analysis Points to Create an Outline

There is no “standard” format for a reflection, however every reflection must contain the following:

**Description (WHAT?):**
What data do you need to include to describe the relevant parts of what happened?

**Analysis (SO WHAT?):**
What points from your data analysis illustrate learning moments and your thoughtful reflection?

**Interpretation (NOW WHAT?):**
What points from your data analysis demonstrate what you have learned/more learning you need to do/who you want to be as a practitioner/ how you will do the work?

Then review your outline and connect course concepts that support, or fail to support your experience.

Write, Revise, and Edit Your Reflection

The writing process will naturally lead to more meaning making. Continue to reflect as you build on your outline in order to tell the story of what it means for you to become a scholar-practitioner in Student Affairs.

What follows are the components your Reflection must include, which creates a general outline to follow. As you grow more comfortable writing Reflections you may wish to incorporate narrative devices to tell the story and may rearrange portions or flow back and forth between description, analysis, and interpretation.

Plan to write at least two drafts. Beyond checking grammar and APA, when you read your draft consider: Can the reader follow the path of your meaning-making from description through interpretation? Are there gaps where I expect the reader to have a basic knowledge of Student Affairs, what you do, acronyms, etc.? (Remember, you will have an outside committee member). Is my story compelling; does it feel real? Does my reflection demonstrate a breadth of awareness from individual actions to the systems at play? How am I connecting my story to the larger story of the field of Student Affairs and Higher Education both in context and through citations? Does my story provide insight into who I am and how I do/aspire to do the work in meaningful ways?

Components of a Portfolio Reflection: Expanding on the Outline from Your Data

**Description (WHAT?):**
Using specific and relevant detail from your data to give a rich, real description of your experience (i.e. a situation that prompted or illustrates the learning that is the focus of your reflection).

- **Describe what happened.** The “what” may be a single event/process or a pattern of events that emerge from the data. Set the stage, provide context. Include data (conversations and observations) that illustrate the situation and support the competency you are demonstrating.
progress towards.

• **Share personal feelings and thoughts.** What were you thinking and feeling *in the moment*?

*This part is not analytical, it is descriptive.* It describes an experience, personal feelings, thoughts, and actions or inactions PRIOR to letting our brains begin to process and make meaning. It demonstrates mindfulness and an awareness of what is happening around you. It sets the stage for the meaning you are about to make.

**Analysis (SO WHAT?):**
Continuing in a narrative writing style, make meaning of the experiences and share what you learned. Ground your meaning making in your understanding of the profession by evaluating and analyzing what happened through the lens of professional literature/theory/research and use citations to demonstrate your connections. Evaluate the situation and the actions/responses of others and (most importantly) your actions/responses/feelings. Analyze why this learning is important and share your reflection and meaning making, using literature, theory and research to position your learning

*This part is analytical, it makes positive and/or negative judgments about an experience. (If a lot of different things happened during the experience, focus on one or two, try to choose the things that are most important, most relevant or most representative of the experience.) This part tries to explain the causes and consequences of things that happened, it asks questions like why? so what? and what if?*

• **Evaluate your role and the situation.** What was good/went well? What was challenging/could be improved? What have you learned? Cite the literature/theory/research that supports these evaluations.

• **Analyze your role and the situation.** How does literature/theory/research account for what could be happening? How might literature/theory/research fail to account for what could be happening? Who is centered in the literature? Does that matter? What have you learned? Cite the literature/theory/research that supports this analysis.

**Interpretation (NOW WHAT?):**
Continue to make meaning and apply your learning about what this experience and progress towards the competency means for you.

• **Apply what you learned.** What insight, hindsight, and/or foresight have you gained about students, organizations, groups, the profession, theory/literature, your own identity and experience? What could you have done differently? What would continue to do in the future? What insight and understanding have you gained as a result of this experience and your reflection? If your reflection includes critique, what is the “solve” that reflects a breadth of awareness from individual, group, and systems levels?

• **Conclude the reflection.** What does all of this mean for you? How have you changed as a result of this experience? What gaps remain in your learning? What future experiences do you want to seek out to fill those gaps? What gaps exist in the literature/research? What does that mean for Student Affairs professionals? For you as a Student Affairs professional? About the professional you want to be? How will you continue “becoming” in this area or competency as you grow in the profession?
Formatting Your Reflection

APA Guidelines
The portfolio is a scholarly work and is formatted using the standard guidelines of the profession: the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), Sixth Edition. Additionally, as the portfolio is grounded in autoethnographic methods, it is written in a qualitative first-person voice (Ellis, 2004; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Including Citations In Your Reflective Writing

Citing and Referencing Course Content and Other Relevant Material
You can use research, literature, policy documents, or theory (from academic sources) to support your meaning making. While not an all-inclusive list, you can use citation to:

- to show why something is done in a certain way (e.g. by referring to a policy guideline)
- to explain what brought about certain feelings or reactions (e.g. by quoting a theory)
- to explain what went well or what went badly (e.g. a policy guideline, a piece of literature or a theory could be used to explain why a certain action had a positive or a negative outcome)
- to discuss what could have been done differently (e.g. policy, research or theory could be used to support your reflection that doing things differently could have had a better outcome)
- to justify why you plan to do something (e.g. literature might be used to show the value of developing a skill or of acquiring knowledge)

Citing and Referencing SAHE Competencies
Within your reflections for your portfolio, you are asked to cite the competencies you are writing about and proving within the reflection. Please use the following standard format to cite competencies in your reflections

Citation Examples:

1 Competency within the text
(SAHE Knowledge A, 2009)
(SAHE Professional Practice I.B, 2009)

Multiple Competencies within the text (cite in alphabetical and numerical order)
(SAHE Knowledge A, 2009; SAHE Professional Practice II.B, 2009)

Reference Examples:
