



## Reflective Exercise for Self-Awareness

# Self-Awareness

In these three videos, UNSW teachers talk about their backgrounds and their perceptions of teaching.

### Video series - Self-awareness

## Reflective practice exercise:

Below is a series of questions designed to help you reflect systematically on who you are. In considering each of these questions, you will increase your self-awareness. This in turn will make you a better university teacher, particularly in terms of recognising your responsibilities in relation to **Equity and Diversity**.

## Demographic data

Begin by listing (you don't need to write this down) your demographic data: gender, age, background, nationality, cultural heritage, first language etc.

Add to this what you consider to be the formative influences on your development, such as parental attitudes, memorable advisers, political and religious beliefs. Where do you fit, in the wider Australian culture? How would you look in terms of the **Australian Census**?

Just considering these questions, you will realise that you are unique. More importantly, it will become clearer to you how the rest of the world - including your students - might see you.

## Qualifications

It's quite straightforward to list your formal qualifications. But what other courses, workshops, team building exercises and skills have you developed that might be useful? Do you have keyboard skills (touch typing)? Are you practical, and can you fix things? Are you good with computers? Have you led a social or professional team before?

Thinking about informal skills, you may find that you're better qualified than you thought you were. How can you put your informal qualifications to good use when communicating with students?

# Motivation to teach

Your reasons for teaching may change with time. Teaching might be one step in your 5-year plan to become a full-time research academic. It might be a short-term strategy to earn some extra income. You may be teaching simply because you enjoy it, or because you want to engage with academia as you conduct further study. Perhaps you've never stopped to wonder why you teach!

List some of the reasons why you teach—are they career-based, financial, vocational?

Whatever brought you here, it's worth recognising that teaching is a valuable opportunity for you to develop personally. Teaching makes you review, and sometimes rethink, your understanding of your discipline in order to transmit it to your learners. Having to present the core content and values of your field forces you to continually re-evaluate the relative importance of content and its relevance to practice. University teaching also develops new skills in communication and education that look good on your curriculum vitae (CV).

# Past experience in discipline

- Have you worked professionally in your discipline? For how long?
- Have you been responsible for "teaching" or guiding someone in their professional practice?
- Have you ever presented at a professional conference?
- What do you see as the essential skills and knowledge to practice effectively in your field?

Whatever content you teach, it is more valuable if you can demonstrate to students how it applies to the profession. Explicitly linking the theory you teach with professional practice contextualises your content, showing students why it is included in the course, and why they should learn it.

# Past teaching experience

- Have you taught before? Is this your first formal academic appointment?
- Have you ever informally instructed someone, "teaching" without realising it?
- In situations where people looked to you for guidance, what sort of information or activity did you provide that was effective?
- Have you ever had to explain something complex to a colleague?
- Have you ever led someone through a series of operations towards a goal?

# Past learning experiences

Your educational experiences have not been limited to teaching. Think back on your time as a student.

- What stimulated you to learn in the first place?
- Do you remember a time when some piece of course content really sank in, when "the penny dropped" and some complex concept suddenly made sense? What was the teacher like, who led you to that revelation; how

did she or he behave?

## Current circumstances and beliefs

Consider your current teaching commitment:

- What are you trying to achieve as a teacher? Are you trying to teach facts, skills, concepts, values, processes, all of these?
- How do students actually go about learning in your discipline? What motivates students to want to learn and understand rather than just go through the motions?
- How can you ensure that all your students are actively involved in learning - actually thinking about what they are doing, not just doing what is required?
- Do you think that knowledge is something that you possess, that is to be transferred to your students through your teaching? Or is it something they construct for themselves?
- What is your attitude to students? What do you expect of them in terms of behaviour, attitude and achievement?
- What strategies will you use to ensure the learning environment is effective for all students?
- How will you and your students agree on what kind of behaviour is acceptable? Will you treat all students equally (**Equity and Diversity**)? What will you do if you have difficulties (**Support for Staff**)?
- How do you feel about taking on the role of the teacher?
- How will your other work, especially research, affect your teaching role?

(Parts of this exercise are adapted from the **University of Wollongong's Teaching @ UOW**, 2008.)

### Reflective Exercise for Self-Awareness

Document Version Date 15/10/2018

UNSW CRICOS Provider Code: 00098G

<https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/self-awareness>