The Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle: A Reflective Analysis Tool for Engaged Learning

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Abstract

Traditional university education has focused on academic learning, which is followed by a graduate’s attempts to apply this learning to various career-related pursuits. Experiential learning turns this focus on its head – at least partially. Instead of learning preceding praxis, learning now follows praxis. In this latter model, much of the post-praxis learning is focused and achieved via reflective analysis of experience – also called reflective practice – through written reflection. Reflective Practice Writing (RPW), also called Reflective Practice Journaling, is much more than traditional journaling. For reflective practice to effectively facilitate the learning process for students, RPW requires students to deeply probe and explore their experience to realize maximum learning. A guide or a “tool” to assist this process is useful and, I argue, required but, in too many cases, is either inadequate or not provided at all. This paper provides and describes such a reflective practice writing tool, which has been imagined as a bicycle – with a “front wheel” and a “back wheel” of spokes or questions. A reflective practice writing tool cannot, however, simply be developed on its own; it must be tied to a teaching and learning philosophy which has student learning integration and, ultimately, student transformation as its goal. The Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle is based precisely on such a teaching/learning philosophy, which is integrated into The RPW Bicycle tool itself.

Keywords
reflective practice writing, experiential learning, engaged learning, community engagement, community service learning, reflective practice

Reflective practice writing: A reversal of pedagogy?

A few years ago, while living in rural Waterloo, Ontario, our Old Order Mennonite neighbours explained that, as per their tradition, the young men and young women of their community were expected to move away from...
home for a year or two and live with another family. The purpose in doing so was for the young men to “learn the ways of another farmer” and for the young women to “learn the practices of another woman’s farm, garden and household management.” This is a continuation of ancient communal apprenticeship traditions which existed in other settings. It is also somewhat akin to the educational learning format that we now call Reflective Practice. In this method, learning comes through praxis and guided reflection thereupon. For our Old Order neighbours, the reflection in barn, field, household or garden was not usually processed through writing, but consisted of oral discussion with their farm-based mentors and was committed to memory by the “apprentice” not only due to oral communication but through repetitive practice.

Historically, university education – frequently delineated as “high” university learning and occasionally also referred to as “professional knowledge” (Schön 1983, 3–20), in contrast to applied learning models or “professional practice” – focused most commonly on the extraction and memorization of theory from books and lectures with the application of such concepts left for graduates to decipher once they were settled into their chosen job or career.¹ The past eighty years, however, have seen a reaffirmation of experience in education, thanks in no small part to the advocacy of John Dewey (1933) and, especially, reflective practice learning, where practice most frequently precedes reflection and the resultant learning therefrom. The critically vital focus, however, is on reflection and the means by which reflection can be harnessed to transform experience into learning (Boud, Keogh and Walker 1985, 19; Dewey 1933, 17–34; Brockbank and McGill 1998, 127–144; Schön 1983, 1987). As David Boud, a leading researcher into how people learn, summarizes: “Reflection has been described as a process of turning experience into

¹ This essay is written in honour of my mentor and friend, Dr. Michel Desjardins, on the occasion of his retirement from Wilfrid Laurier University. The central topics of this essay are also key themes from the teaching career of Professor Desjardins. Experiential/engaged learning is his passion; he has taught me much in that regard. He created the Community Engagement Option (a joint program between Wilfrid Laurier University and The Working Centre in Kitchener, Ontario, which takes university students and immerses them into the downtown urban community) and invited me to teach the capstone course in it. The Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle (RPW Bicycle) featured in this essay was first developed for that course and for the Community Engagement Option. The imagination of the RPW Bicycle fits with the image of Prof. Desjardins in other ways also: he has always been closely associated with his bicycle; it continues to be his preferred mode of transportation. The RPW Bicycle, then, integrates two key themes from the teaching career and life of Prof. Desjardins: the centrality of experiential learning (via reflective practice) and the bicycle as both symbol and lifestyle.
learning, that is, a way of exploring experience in order to learn things from it” (2001, 10). The importance of reflective thinking has been well rooted, ever since Dewey emphasized that “reflective thinking must be an educational aim” because “it makes possible action with a conscious aim” (1933, 17). Reflective thinking, he said, “enables us to act in deliberate and intentional fashion” because “[it] enables us to know what we are about when we act” (Dewey 1933, 17).

This article focuses on the process of reflection through writing – reflective practice writing (RPW) – or, as some prefer, reflective journaling or “learning journal” (Boud 2001; Moon 2006; McCormach 2010; O’Connell and Dyment 2013). O’Connell and Dyment (2013, 19) also speak of a “reflective journal” and, significantly, of the former as an “integrative journal.” Still others use some of the above terms interchangeably (Bolton 2009; Bolton 2010). Much has already been written about RPW as a learning practice or even as a learning tool, so designating a learning journal as an appropriate instrument for RPW could be seen as fitting, although some resist the instrumental aspect of RPW as a “tool” or technique. Gillie Bolton, a reflective practice writing consultant to medical and other health and social care professions, and a frequent author on this subject, makes this point explicit:

Reflection is a state of mind, an ongoing constituent of practice, not a technique or curriculum element. It is a way of learning from one’s own experience to inform practice, widen perspectives and challenge assumptions, taken-for-granted and damaging social and cultural biases and a way of learning from the experiences of others. (2009, 752)

While Bolton’s point about technique is clearly articulated and easily understood, the importance of a learning journal for reflective practice writing requires elements of curricular definition. Bolton too uses the term “learning journal” (2010), placing it not only in the larger learning context, but providing detailed how-to guidance for effective reflective practice writing. So, what is a learning journal – or an RPW journal? Jennifer Moon’s excellent handbook on learning journals states it simply and succinctly: “A learning journal is essentially a vehicle for reflection” (2006, 1). Most writers move quickly from definition to a focus on purpose and process or simply use the latter as definition. Indeed, the definitional labels used – learning, reflective, integrative, already hew towards purpose and process – and purpose and process are themselves intertwined. Boud paints journal-writing with the broadest of brushes: “We may want to capture an experience, record an event, explore our feelings, or make sense of what we know. We may want to narrate something of importance so that others can see what we saw in it” (2001, 9). Boud emphasizes, however,
that for learning to take place, journal writing needs to be integrated with reflection in order to learn from experience (2001, 10).

Bolton, Moon, and O’Connell and Dyment all provide lists to define the benefits of a learning journal or to delineate the process of reflective praxis. Bolton focuses on the latter:

A learning journal asks a writer directly or indirectly to enquire into:

What you:
- and **others did** on any particular occasion
- **thought**, and what **others might** have thought
- **felt**, and what **others might** have felt
- **believe**, and how these beliefs are carried out in your practice
- are **prejudiced** about, take for granted, and unquestioningly assume
- can do about how **all** of the above affects **yourself** and **others** (2010, 126).

Moon’s critical list is focused on the process of student learning via journals. In her estimation, there are six key benefits:

- slows the pace of learning
- can increase the sense of ownership of learning
- acknowledges the role of emotion in learning
- give learners an experience of dealing with ill-structured material of learning
- encourages metacognition (learning about one’s own process of learning)
- enhances learning through the process of writing (2006, 26).

O’Connell and Dyment (2013, 24–31) are intensive users of journals in their university teaching – O’Connell for Recreation and Leisure studies and Dyment for Education and teacher training. They utilize Moon’s list and expand it significantly, adding additional benefits identified by others and gleaned from their own experience. Their list identified 16 benefits for students and nine for educators. They will not be listed here, but are easily accessible, especially since all 25 points are organized into a tidy table (O’Connell and Dyment 2013, 31). It is, however, worth adding an additional point made by David McCormach: a key goal and benefit of journaling is inner processing leading to self-transformation (2010, 27–31). Although McCormach focuses on the professional growth and development context, student transformation will figure prominently as a goal for us also and will be discussed further below.

Those who have written about the benefits, value, and even the necessity of reflective practice writing for reflective practice learning have also identified a common problem in implementing RPW. An articulate pro-
ponent of reflective practice, Annetta K. L. Tsang, is also critical of student writing: Students lack “the ability to critique, analyze and evaluate information obtained” (Tsang 2011, 58). She places the blame on a lack of skills development and points out that “attributes such as critical reflective skills are often left to chance and assumed to happen over time” (Tsang 2011, 58). Tsang adds that while reflection is widely “viewed as essential for optimizing practice-based and problem-based experiential learning” (2011, 60), students frequently see it “as irrelevant, difficult and unengaging” (2011, 61). O’Connell and Dyment clearly echo this sentiment when they lament the frequent practice of handing students a “blank journal” without training, structure or guidance (2013, 34–35): “We certainly don’t leave other more traditional assessment tasks so open ended” (2013, 34). O’Connell and Dyment dedicate an entire chapter of their excellent book to assess the challenges of journal writing, but begin with the almost universal complaint of “No Training/No Structure.” The problem of effective reflective practice writing by students highlights another lack, namely, the absence of an adequately effective tool or guide for reflective practice writing – one which students could use to guide them in the reflective process and one which would take them beyond the simplistic observation to a deeper reflection and learning on their experience. It is precisely this missing structure for pedagogically effective reflective practice writing that we seek to address through our development and use of an RPW tool, The RPW Bicycle. It provides guidance for the student and yet is easily adapted by a broad spectrum of reflective practice focused courses and other experiential learning programs.

Applying the principles of reflective practice writing to an effective RPW tool: Key pedagogical features for the RPW Bicycle

Like others already mentioned above (Bolton 2010; Moon 2006; Tsang 2011; O’Connell and Dyment 2013), we also discovered that when students were asked to write a journal to reflect on their experience – particularly when asked to do so for Community Service Learning (CSL) placements or even more intensive experiential learning or Community Engagement (CE) placements – most stayed in a simple basic reflective observation stage. They failed to explore deeper levels of the experience. Thus, the primary task was to create a device designed to draw students into deeper and more meaningful reflection – in a way that would be successful in engaging them towards more advanced levels of learning. One way to do this would be to provide specific markers to be addressed or to provide guiding questions, requiring students to “answer” these in order to move forward to the next steps. In other words, a progressive engagement would need to be facilitated.
Second, and similarly, the goal must always be to move students from being casual observers to being engaged participants in their own learning experience. When students remain in an observational mode, they also remain stuck as observers of their own learning, rather than facilitators thereof. Reflective practice writing is always about students being actively engaged as the drivers of their own learning experience. This permits them to learn most effectively from their own experience but, more importantly, it helps them to assess, on multiple levels, what they are learning in their placement.

Third, effective reflective practice writing is about understanding and articulating the link between theory and practice. Thus, for an RPW tool to be effective, it must facilitate that theory-praxis linkage – between the theory that is learned in the classroom and the practical experience gained in the placement. Students who remain fixed in the observational mode will discuss what they see, but sometimes eschew the theory they have learned in class. An effective RPW tool will bring these together and help students make the essential connection between theory and praxis.

Fourth, the goal of reflective practice writing is not only to move students beyond observation to deeper levels of analysis, but also to move students beyond an intellectual understanding towards an integration of knowledge – including especially knowledge derived through experiential learning – into their own belief system. In doing so, critical interaction – sometimes experienced as a “clash” – with previously held beliefs occurs and students are required to sort out the differences and integrate the experientially learned beliefs with the rest of their belief system. The guided journey provided by an appropriate RPW tool must, therefore, push students to ask questions about their own socio-economic, ethical and intellectual positionality and to call forth analysis not only of the placement and its situational learning, but of a student’s preconceived systems of understanding and knowledge.

Fifth, and not wholly dissimilar from the previous point, reflective practice writing, more than most other pedagogies, aids greatly in moving the student towards the ultimate teaching and learning goal: student transformation (sometimes referred to as the “holy grail” of teaching). After knowledge integration has been facilitated, student transformation may follow. An effective RPW tool, therefore, forces students to think about how they are being personally impacted by the experience, what they believe, and how they can and should respond. It asks probing questions about values and belief systems – and ultimately asks the student to evaluate what they believe about a certain situation. Theory is no longer “out there” but embedded in the heart and mind of the student – and that demands a deeper response, sometimes becoming a life-altering response.
Sixth, an effective RPW tool cannot be developed in a haphazard or ad hoc manner; it must be rooted in a teaching philosophy. A systematic pedagogical structure needs to undergird the RPW tool’s learning progression; this is most effectively achieved through the structural linkage to a teaching philosophy. Any RPW tool is only as effective as the teaching philosophy which undergirds it. Hence, *The RPW Bicycle* was created based on the teaching philosophy that I developed. Although this teaching philosophy is a fairly lengthy, detailed and comprehensive document, we wish to refer only briefly to one early section therein: *The Five-Step Arc of Learning*, which can be summarized as follows:

**Step one:**

*Creating cognitive disequilibrium (or cognitive dissonance)*

In order for a student to acquire and integrate new ideas, preconceived notions and beliefs need to be challenged and become the subject of re-examination. This allows a student’s legacy ideas to either be abandoned in favour of new beliefs based on new learning, information and experience or for these formerly held ideas to be affirmed and adopted with the support of newly acquired information. Experiential learning placements in challenging environments are one approach to pushing students out of their comfort zone and which can thereby create the necessary cognitive disequilibrium for new student learning.

**Step two:**

*Information acquisition*

The acquisition of new information, already referenced, is critical – it is not only transmitted through classroom teaching but also through the experiential learning in placement. In the latter context, it is most especially acquired through reflective practice writing but it is also pursued in the context of theoretical study. Praxis must always interact with theory; it is the inter-modal dialogue between theory and praxis that provides the friction and spark for engaged learning.

**Step three:**

*Knowledge and understanding*

The processing of new information, whether mediated via classroom or praxis, remains a critical part of the process. Knowledge only exists once there is understanding. Possessing information is not yet knowledge. To truly know one must first understand. For this reason, a reflective practice writing tool must facilitate the translation of knowledge into understanding.
Step four: Integration of knowledge

The integration of knowledge has already been referenced above. New understanding must be integrated into the student’s own belief system before it can be effectively applied – both intellectually and in practice. It can also only properly displace formerly held “legacy” beliefs (sometimes referred to as “false beliefs,” although this assigns a value judgement to older beliefs that cannot always be sustained; a better term is “unexamined beliefs”) until the new knowledge, understanding and beliefs have been properly integrated into the student’s own worldview.

Step five: Personal transformation

Once a particular concept has been thoroughly integrated into a student’s worldview, the student is able to interpret the world from that newly owned perspective and act on it. The pedagogical goal of facilitating actors with fully-owned beliefs and perspectives – based on proper research, experience and learning – is, as referred to above, “The Holy Grail of Teaching.”

The question remains: How can an RPW tool effectively facilitate the pedagogy espoused by the above Five-Step Arc of Learning? The RPW Bicycle, as seen in the tool itself, below, guides the students through deeper analysis – including self-analysis – which is intended to lead the student through the pedagogical steps or phases as described above.

The seventh principle, or set of principles, for an effective RPW tool refers to logistical and style considerations that have a pedagogical impact:

1. The tool, while providing direction and guidance, must consciously and continuously insist on pushing students out of their comfort zones. This coincides with the “cognitive disequilibrium” step described above.

2. The tool must be practical and easy to use. The RPW Bicycle is entirely structured as questions for the student to answer. The ease of use contributes to its effectiveness.

3. The tool needs to be manageable in size. Other tools do exist, but some are almost book-length and require an entire course to focus only on learning the reflective journaling skill. This can be unwieldy and potentially counter-productive for a placement-based class – unless an entire degree program is focused on Community Service Learning, for example.

At the same time, a tool that is too brief provides insufficient guidance for the student. We found that The RPW Bicycle was the right length and embedded enough detail, adequate complexity, and sufficient flexibility to allow students (and others) to dig as deep as they wished – or were expected to do.
We turn now to *The RPW Bicycle* itself (reprinted on the following pages) and our own experience with it. The sections following will add some interpretive comments regarding *The RPW Bicycle* and describe some principles for effective use. Finally, some student and associate staff responses to using *The RPW Bicycle* will be provided.

**The Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle:**

**The integration of experience and learning**

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**PART I:**

**Self-Assessment via reflective practice writing**

*(Engaged journaling)*

(The *Front* Wheel of the Reflective Practice Bicycle)

This is an eight-step reflective practice tool imagined as the front bicycle wheel. Step number eight moves you forward into a new revolution and slightly further ahead on your journey.

1. **Observation:** What did you observe today? What did you experience? Listen to the voices. What did you hear? What did you see?


3. **Internal (Personal) Reflection:** How do you feel about the event now? What do you think were the key elements of the experience? List the participants and their reactions to the situation. What worked; what did not?

4. **External Reflection:** What might theorists you have read or heard (e.g. in past courses) or persons and experiences you have learned from in life have to offer on the subject of your observation and reflection? What about other readings and past learnings? How would these interpret your observations, reactions, reflections?
Think deeply. “What are the larger social, economic and historical forces at work?”

5. **Interpretive Analysis:** Having considered your own response and the external / theoretical input, how do you interpret the events now? What is your diagnosis? What have you learned? What ethical assessments can you make?

6. **Learning Integration:** How does this learning fit with what you have known and believed before? How will it change or reinforce your existing belief systems?

7. **Personal Transformation:** How can this new learning change your outlook and approach to your placement / work and perhaps even to your life? Will it change your moral outlook? Your social values?

8. **Transformed/Informed Action:** What will you do differently or the same in your next encounter, based upon numbers 1-7 above? How will you be inspired to act? This is the start of a new revolution of the front bicycle wheel.

**Note the cyclical progression:**

Action → Reflection → Theoretical Analysis → Integration → Revised (Transformed) Action

**LONG-TERM GOAL:** The above eight-spoke wheel is a process known as Reflection ON Action. The goal is to become sufficiently familiar with the wheel to engage in Reflection IN Action and thus respond in a more reflective and considered way within the process. Even if achieved, however, it will not diminish but only increase the importance of regular Reflection ON Action and the eight-spoke wheel process.

**PART II:**

**Engaging / Processing reflective practice exercises**

*(The Crankshaft & Pedals of the Reflective Practice Bicycle)*

1. Sharing your journal entry with class peers and receiving feedback for “peer mentoring.”
2. Class reflection and role-playing for critique, supportive feedback and class learning.
3. Instructor mentoring.

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2. From The Working Centre’s “Pastoral Circle” as described by Ken Westhues, *The Working Centre: Experiment in Social Change* (1995). Several other points of this particular tool are likewise informed by The Working Centre’s “Pastoral Circle.”

3. Donald Schön is credited with the theoretical articulation of *Reflection-on-Action* and *Reflection-in-Action.*
PART III:
Organization / Placement analysis
(The Rear Wheel of the Reflective Practice Bicycle)

1. **Observation**: Describe what you see. What strikes you as working particularly well? What impresses you? Are the people involved happy?

2. **Interpretive Observation and Analysis I**: Can you discern the operational / organizational philosophies at work? What are they? Provide a case that illustrates each philosophy you have identified. What makes this approach work?

3. **Interpretive Observation and Analysis II**: Can you discern the ethical values that govern this workplace? What might these be? Give examples that elucidate the values you have identified. Why are ethical values intimately connected with the programs? Are they different from what you have known or learned previously?

4. **Interpretive Observation and Analysis III**: How are the organizational philosophy and values mirrored in the structure and operational culture and practices (policies)?

5. **Theoretical Reflection**: What do the various theorists you have heard, read and studied have to say about the values, philosophy, operational practices or structures that you have discerned or observed? Can this work on a more widespread scale? Have you seen these same principles at work elsewhere?

6. **Contra-Doctrinal Observations**: Do you see anything or any practices that are not working effectively or that contradict the professed values of the organization? Why do you think they are not working as they should? Is the problem rooted in operational practices, in personalities, or in the philosophy or values themselves?

7. **The Goals-of-life Harness**: How will what you have seen and experienced impact your career / life goals and choices? How will it influence your choice of workplace?
The Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle: Commentary

The RPW Bicycle, reprinted above, has several noteworthy distinguishing features:

1. The RPW Bicycle is organized into three sections:
   a. Front Wheel: Self-Assessment via Journaling
   b. Crankshaft/Pedals: Class and mentor processing – written and oral
   c. Rear Wheel: Organization / Placement Analysis

2. The RPW Bicycle follows the above-described Five-Step Arc of Learning and seeks to guide the student from observation and experience to learning integration and, finally, to personal transformation – resulting in transformed action.

3. The rear wheel of The RPW Bicycle addresses an area of analysis and reflection that is often overlooked: other journaling guides require the student’s personal engagement and self-analysis but neglect reflective analysis regarding the placement itself. It is important for the student to reflect not only on their own experience, but also to engage in thorough analysis of their placement. The rear wheel of The RPW Bicycle requires the student to dig deeply and engage the placement with questions about organizational philosophy, workplace ethics and values. Careful observation also requires that contra-doctrinal practices (the dissonance between organizational philosophy and organizational behaviour) be noted and properly examined.

4. Finally, the “goals of life harness” takes the reflection wheel full circle and reconnects the rear wheel with the front wheel and the personal career steering that is involved.

Principles for using the RPW Bicycle effectively

Any tool is only as good as its usage; it is only through proper use that the tool can be effective. It is no different with The RPW Bicycle. When we first introduced The RPW Bicycle to a course, the tool was not very effective. Students had been asked to use the tool and go deeper as they worked through the steps (or spokes). Some did; most did not. When we changed course and assigned subsequent steps and spokes each week, The RPW Bicycle worked exactly as hoped. Following are several additional principles about applying The RPW Bicycle that we found both useful and essential.

First, RPW needs to be pursued as a regular practice in order to be effective. In a twelve-week, one-semester course, we required ten two-page (600-word) submissions. Students need to learn the discipline of reflective practice writing/journaling in order to realize its value; it feeds into more engaged and intentional practice – and better practice, in turn, feeds better
reflection and reflective practice writing. Furthermore, the value of RPW grows exponentially as its practice increases. We have seen students crave the exercise in order to evaluate and learn more from their experience.

Second, an introduction about how to do RPW is important. Reflective practice writing is a skill that students need to learn; preparation on this subject at the outset of this course is essential. This preparation will provide specific directions and guidance on exactly how to do RPW in a way that is beneficial and effective.

Third, weekly guidance in the use of the tool is also essential. What are the expectations? Which spokes (steps) of the front or back bicycle wheel need to be addressed in the coming week’s submission? This is essential, because most students will need help to step out of their comfort zone and to get beyond their default track of superficial observational reflection.

Fourth, RPW can and should include oral group processing in order to be most effective. This is called the crankshaft (or pedals) in The RPW Bicycle model.

a. Oral reflective processing allows students to share experiences with their peers, get feedback, and learn from them. The oral – and aural – RPW process provides essential reference points for the student.

b. Oral processing, however, requires the creation of a “safe space” to do this. The classroom discussion parameters for this must be set by the instructor so that students can safely share their experiences and reflections without risk of inappropriate responses from others. Emphasis needs to be placed on this confidential sharing remaining within the “closed circle” environment of the classroom.

Students responded to the oral process in positive and yet surprising ways:

i. Result A: Originally, students were placed in sub-groups. We found, however, that students did not wish to be in pre-formed sub-groups for this. For them, it was like “dividing up the family.” Students desired to be in one indivisible group. This necessarily limits the size of the class.

ii. Result B: Students looked forward to the reflective process. Some even, seemingly, yearned for the group sharing. It was an opportunity to process their learning and experiences. Students actually complained when there were not enough classes! They missed the weekly processing of experience with their peers. Furthermore, students were overheard saying to peers in the class that they had shared things with them which they had not shared with their long-term roommates.

Fifth, weekly feedback is essential. When students examine their deepest selves (of course, not all go that deep, but some do), feedback, encouragement, support – and critique – from the instructor-mentor are critical.
For this feedback to be effective, a relationship of trust is essential. When students probe their inmost depths in relation to their experience and share these thoughts and feelings in their written reflection – to which only the instructor-mentor-guide has access – holding that trust with gentleness and care is paramount. Feedback that is given must always seek to move the student’s learning forward; critique therein is necessary, but it must be offered with care and understanding.

Sixth, feedback also involves grading. A grade provides incentive and motivation to the student – to follow the instructions and to move deeper into *The RPW Bicycle* framework every week as assigned. In our case, a grade out of two, along with the paragraph or two of feedback, was assigned every week for all students who submitted their RPW assignment on time.

Seventh, it bears repeating: it is important for RPW to also include course readings (for example, texts) that are integrated with experiential learning. Academic rigour that includes both theoretical and experiential reflection is essential. In our case, we required that each reflection also reference readings and other learning from the theorists studied in the courses. The reason is simple: RPW should strive always to facilitate integration of theory and praxis in order to maximize learning.

**Conclusion:**

**Students speak about the RPW Bicycle experience**

Student response to the use of *The RPW Bicycle* has been positive – especially after we learned how to use the tool effectively. We offer only a few student comments, below:

By establishing an open mind I was able to develop a greater understanding of the relationship between theory and praxis as stated in the third learning objective of the class. I have learned that praxis refers to reflective action and I have successfully applied it to my placement and reflections this term (Student TM).

I personally loved the reflective writing and Bicycle questions - they gave me a topic to write about and helped me think about my reflections more deeply. Furthermore, they were helpful to guide me in a new direction for reflection so I did not feel as though I was repeating myself (Student EB).

I wanted to write to say that I thought the RPW Bicycle questions were really helpful in guiding my reflection. They were specific enough to give me a start on a topic, but broad enough that I could express my reflection without strict guidelines!

I really appreciated the questions as a guideline for my reflecting (Student VC).
Reflective Practice Writing helped me to reflect in my mind while working (Student VC).

Additional feedback was received from the program placement coordinators and instructional assistants in response to my query:

Yes, we [received feedback] – mostly positive!

Specifically, we didn’t get as much feedback around it being ‘repetitive’ as we did in previous years. Some students suggested that the way in which you directed their reflections was helpful (that is, each of the reflections having a specific focus).

We also heard from students that they were using the practice in other contexts as well. They spoke of both academic and personal contexts; other courses, thinking about future education paths, career and life discernment, etc.

Finally, they spoke (as in every other year) strongly about the significance of the collective reflective conversations in class. Many felt that this was the very key to their learnings in [the Community Engagement Option] (Heather Montgomery 2017).

I would echo Heather’s comments. The only thing I would add is I remember distinctly students commenting that reflective practice has developed as a habit over the year that would continue - some said they would continue journaling, others simply would have the mental habit of reflection (Isaiah Ritzmann 2017).

Clearly, the years spent developing The Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle and learning to use it correctly in order to maximize its effectiveness have been worthwhile. Our Old Order neighbours, John Dewey, Donald Schönh, and the pantheon of forerunners who have informed this development of reflective praxis and RPW would most certainly agree. And the number of learners eager to hop on the RPW Bicycle continues to grow.

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