

Self-reflection through the adoption of various activities

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Reflection

In addition to books and lectures, reflection is believed to impact significantly on the process of learning among students. Reflection represents not only profound association between knowledge acquired in lessons and personal experiences in daily lives, but a chance to express and review personal opinions towards these knowledge and experiences. That is, reflection ensures both the consolidation of academic knowledge and the realization of personal growth and development, which can't be accomplished with merely the help of unidirectional teachings. Therefore, reflection is considered to be a vital and meaningful element that should be incorporated into the design of learning activities in tertiary institutions.

In view of these benefits, GESH1010 Orientation and Outreach, which was offered by S.H. Ho College at CUHK, took the lead in making reflection central to its course, together with the adoption of an activity-based approach as its mode of implementation. The course served as an introduction to students in preparing themselves better for challenges ahead of their journey at CUHK and in future. The course was in 3 stages, which took place one after another in the following order over the course of fall semester: Adventure Stage (奮志), Reflection Stage (明志) and Expression Stage (明達).

It is believed that teamwork plays an important part in facilitating self reflection. Therefore, the course began with the Adventure Stage, which focused on developing attachment between members of a team. The Adventure Stage consisted of a Team Identity Design activity and an Adventure Camp (奮志營) – an overnight wild camp or an Adventure Expedition (毅行). The former involved in the creation of team mottos, slogans and t-shirts whereas the latter required students to hill-climb with their friends in the countryside of Hong Kong. Throughout the process of teamwork in both activities, students were enabled to develop sound friendships with others, which was essential to enhance the effect of self-reflection in later stages.

The Reflection Stage served as the second phase of the course, which directed students to self-reflect their goals and accomplishments over a number of aspects. The stage consisted of four dialogue workshops (明志聚話), which covered various themes of fresher's agenda (明志議程), including my dream, my studies, our university and our voices. Each of these workshops contained a short lecture, experiential activities, small group discussions and a reading assignment. Students were then required to take part in a logos production (心聲習作), which was a written piece of their reflection corresponding with each of those themes. As the relationship between students became mature in the Adventure Stage, they would be more comfortable to share their opinions and internal thoughts in front of their group members, which in turn maximized self-reflection.

Last phase of the series, the Expression Stage contained activities, which assisted students in transforming their feelings and internal thoughts from the Reflection Stage into physical manifestation, i.e. a tangible product. Students were required to develop their logos production into final productions in any forms or styles that they perceived to be appropriate, such as articles, dramas or short films. A number of workshops, for instance, a digital art and craft workshop was in place to assist students in finishing their final products. In addition, a staff patron was provided to offer advice and support. The assignment in turning inside thoughts and feelings resulted in previous reflections was considered to be effective in assuring fruitful learning experiences at CUHK as well as that in future.

Advantages of the learning activities

As a cornerstone of the S.H. Ho College General Education Programme, the course Orientation and Outreach included a number of advantages, which were beneficial to the further development of freshmen. These advantages can be summarized as follows,

- Assisted freshmen in blending into the S.H. Ho College.
- Facilitated freshmen in knowing each other through sharing of their personal experiences and internal feelings.
- Helped students to develop team skills, rapport, self-discipline and resilience through different activities.
- Allowed students to reflect their school experiences and their aspiration towards the university life.
- Encouraged students to determine their learning or career goals in future.

Feedback from students

A survey was conducted to look at the opinion of students towards the course at the end of the first semester in 2010. Students perceived the Adventure Stage to be particularly effective in enhancing students with a wide variety of collaborative skills and the ability to restrain their behavior in face of group challenges. With regard to the Reflection stage, students believed that those activities, such as dialogue workshops and logo production had helped significantly to improve their teamwork skills. Moreover, last part of the evaluation suggested that most students, in the Expression Stage perceived the writing workshop to be the most useful one. In general, students also perceived positively towards the course and most of them agreed that all activities in the course had helped them substantially in adapting with the college life.