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**Finishing Strong: Scaffolding Metacognitive Reflection in Course Closure**

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to help instructors harness metacognition as part of reflection in course closure activities. Metacognition – or actively thinking about how one is learning and monitoring that process – is an important part of growth and has been central to educational theory since the 1970s (Flavell, 1979). Research has demonstrated that metacognitive activities can lead to more transferable and durable learning in classrooms from kindergarten to higher education. Inspired by Dawn (2017), who encouraged faculty to create activities that ask students to reflect about ways they've grown as learners, about new understandings they can claim related to course content, and about new practices they've learned, we created an activity that scaffolds reflection in the final learning phase of a course.

To make the last day of class meaningful for our class of approximately 60 students in an agricultural communication course, we utilized several metacognition-focused activities. These activities included reviewing what students learned, what we learned about their growth as students, a game based team quiz and individual reflections. Finally, students completed a course evaluation to help us improve the course for future students. Details for implementation are below.

## Procedure

Prior to our last class meeting, we asked students to use their notes, assignments, and textbook readings, to review key concepts from the semester, their growth and development in communication skills, and challenges or benefits they've encountered over the course of the semester and to come to our last session ready to discuss these ideas. At the same time, faculty and teaching assistant staff prepared for the last session by creating a brief review of content for students. We pulled a copy of the syllabus and compared it to the activities we completed during lecture and discussion sections. We used this to create a brief overview for students of specific learning objectives that course activities supported. Next, we analyzed the course schedule to determine key concepts and skills covered. This information was synthesized and presented to the class at the beginning of our final session.

After presenting an overview of course concepts, faculty and teaching assistant staff discussed what we learned as teachers and mentors and asked students to do the same. We reflected on the improvement we observed in their communication skills over the semester in both writing and speaking assignments. We discussed how they made it through the challenge of working in large teams to complete a team symposium. Overall, we talked about how hard they worked and how much they have grown by learning these skills and concepts.

A last day of class experience that honors and empowers students is critical. The experience can be intellectually challenging, but it also should be fun (Bleicher, 2011). To accomplish this and add a team component to reflection activities, we used a game based strategy that guides student reflection on key ideas and theories from each unit of the course.

This activity was facilitated by creating a Kahoot! quiz for teams. To create a Kahoot! quiz for teams, login to your Kahoot! account, create the quiz and add questions. After all questions have been entered, click the 'Play' button and click on the 'Team Mode' button.

Finally, after completing this team reflection exercise, students worked on their individual, final reflections essays. This was a written essay and included the following reflections questions:

1. What are the most important concepts or skills from this semester for you? Why?
2. How will you take this information out into the world with you?
3. What advice do you have for future students in this course?

**Assessment**

We compared the final essays from this semester to the previous two semesters. Overall the quality of the essays improved. Students pulled out more concrete concepts. We also saw a wider array of terminology incorporated in their essays. This resulted in a more diverse utilization of course concepts. Student responses also demonstrated more awareness of their progress as learners, increased understanding that skill development requires lifelong learning, and an improved ability to share specific next steps that will help them incorporate course concepts into their identities as future professionals.

**Literature Cited**

Bleicher, E. 2011. The last class: Critical thinking, reflection, course effectiveness, and student engagement. Honors in Practice 7: 39-52.

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