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Reflective Journaling as a Flipped Classroom Technique to Increase Reading and Participation With Social Work Students

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Abstract

Students in undergraduate social work practice courses come to the class with varying levels of educational, life, and practice experience. Students require an introduction to the material through textbook reading before they are able to engage in critical discussions, yet reading adherence varies widely among students. This research explores the use of reflective journals as a Flipped Classroom technique to increase reflective thinking and reading adherence. This study surveys 27 students in two practice courses about the use of weekly reflective journaling as a flipped classroom assignment. Findings support that reflective reading journals increase student preparation and engagement, but require more work for students and instructors. Implications are discussed.

Students in undergraduate generalist social work practice courses come to the class with varying levels of educational, life, and practice experience. One goal of social work education is to enhance the critical thinking of students. Classroom discussions and applied practice are some ways to accomplish this goal. However, students benefit from an introduction to the material through textbook reading before they are able to engage in critical discussions, and reading adherence varies widely among students.

Social work students must be trained to apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments (Council on Social Work Education, 2008), and this can be practiced during classroom discussion. But many teachers use precious class time to define and explain concepts, and then rely upon the student's performance on homework assignments and papers to assess the student's ability to apply concepts. Bloom's Taxonomy identifies six levels of learning, ranging from "lower-order goals" like memorization (defining, naming, stating) to "higher-order goals" such as evaluation (rating, defending, predicting) (Houston & Lin, 2012). Review of the reading material in class limits the amount of time to focus on those higher order goals, especially if it is the student's first exposure to the concepts; yet, students have little motivation to read thoroughly when all of the key concepts are explained during classroom lecture.

There are many approaches to college teaching that counter the traditional lecture and maximize student learning through experiential and engaging techniques (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2013), and many of them are incorporated into an emerging set of strategies referred to as the Flipped Classroom. The use of Flipped Classroom techniques requires students to better prepare for class, which allows instructors to spend more time modeling, watching, and correcting as students apply concepts in the classroom.

Flipped Classroom techniques, sometimes also called inverted classroom (Gardener, 2012; Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000; Talbert, 2012), upside-down classroom, or backward classroom techniques (Houston & Lin, 2012), are described as activities in which “events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa” (Lage et al., 2000, p. 32). Talbert (2012) notes that Flipped Classroom method shows promise for making the university classroom experience more interactive, inclusive, and effective. In the Flipped Classroom, concepts, definitions, and traditional knowledge become “homework” so that classroom activities can be spent on applied learning, problem solving, and discussion (Gardener, 2012). Many types of “Flipped Classrooms” achieve this by having students watch a pre-recorded lecture, which is delivered as homework, or creating quizzes on the required reading and administering the test before class so students can demonstrate their knowledge of concepts and reading adherence, and can come to class ready to apply basic concepts. This frees instructors to reserve most of class time for applied practice.

Websites such as TEDtalks and Kahn Academy popularized the basic Flipped Classroom model by designing teaching components that allow instructors to assign homework based on brief subject-based video segments, where students learn basic instructions on their own by watching videos. Students then get the opportunity to practice the techniques in an instructor-facilitated class. Instructors using Flipped Classroom models can also create their own media for homework assignments, such as videos or PowerPoints, so that classroom time can be spent on deeper discussion and practice application. Instructors are then able to see whether students understand material by watching them attempt to apply it during group work and classroom interaction (Houston & Lin, 2012).

In an increasingly complex world, a reflective environment is important to student learning (Lerch, Bilics, & Colley, 2006). Although the homework used in flipped classroom methods increases class time for discussion, it does not provide the opportunity to assess whether students have thought reflectively on their own about what they have learned, which is especially valuable in social work. Reflective journals on the other hand, in which the assignment requires students to explain key concepts from the reading and reflect on their application, can be used as a Flipped Classroom technique to assess reading adherence, and adds the benefit of reflective thinking about content. In this case, students can demonstrate their knowledge and consider how they might apply it; the classroom time is then freed for deeper discussion and practice. Reflective journals as a teaching device have empirical support in professional programs for their ability to foster clinical judgment (Lasater & Nielsen, 2009), encourage students to articulate their thinking (Fogarty & McTighe, 1993), and to enhance self-reflection to foster personal growth (Blake, 2005). Through the in-class

sharing of student reflections, students also have the opportunity to gain the perspective of others and guide the direction of the class discussion toward what they most need to know.

A Literature Review of Flipped Classroom Outcomes

The reasons for using a Flipped Classroom are multifaceted. The peer-reviewed literature offers few examples of outcomes regarding these techniques, but those offered come primarily from the natural sciences. Professional fields such as pharmacy are using Flipped Classroom techniques so that more time in the classroom can be used to practice clinical skills (The Center for Digital Education, 2012), and as a way to counter the so-called “bulimic learning” that happens when students memorize and regurgitate information rather than apply and engage critical thinking (Zorek, Sprague, & Popovich, 2010). Another perceived benefit of this approach is that instructors are able to see whether students understand material by watching them attempt to apply it in practice during group work and classroom interaction, and create a more participatory environment (Houston & Lin, 2012), which is also associated with student engagement. A Flipped Classroom innovator, Sal Khan explains that a Flipped Class benefits from practice-based classroom activities that “humanizes the classroom by supporting peer learning and practice” (as cited in Houston & Lin, 2012, p. 1177). Flipped Classroom techniques lend themselves to collaborative learning environments, and support critical thinking (Gokhale, 1995).

Research suggests that many students come to class not having completed assigned reading and therefore require concept review. For instance, the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) collected data from 285,000 freshmen and seniors, and the data indicates that a fifth of students come report they come unprepared for class regularly and there is not a great expectation for them to read material ahead of time (Kuh, 2003). However, students also prefer collaborative and active learning. Data from the Kuh study was analyzed using Hierarchical Linear Modeling and found that teaching which employed active learning techniques such as group work, student presentations, and class discussion, and also focused on higher-order learning concepts, like critical thinking, analyzing, and solving complex real-world problems, resulted in more engaged and satisfied students (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

The Flipped Classroom creates an increased demand on students because they are required to do more work outside of class; however studies of the Flipped Classroom techniques in college settings generally report the benefits of increased classroom discussion and practice time outweigh this drawback. For instance, in a study of five microeconomics courses of approximately 40 students each, students reported that they preferred the Flipped Classroom methods to traditional lectures. Faculty in these classes reported that students benefitted from having content explained to each other during class discussions, appeared more motivated to keep up with the class material, and seemed more engaged in classroom discussion (Lage et al., 2000).

Students in Flipped Classrooms also report improved access to material and better study habits. In a study of Electrical Engineering students in a hybrid inverted classroom piloted at Northern Arizona University, where students watched lectures and then came to class once a

week to discuss the content, nine focus-group participants indicated that what they liked about the inverted classroom format was that they had more flexibility in accessing the learning modules on their own time, and they could go back and re-watch online lectures (Haden et al., 2009). Other research indicates promise for Flipped Classroom practices in improvement of study habits; for instance, Papadopoulos, Santiago-Roman, and Portela (2010) flipped their statistics classrooms by requiring students to watch videos and then complete online practice assignments, and shortened their in-class lecture of key concepts. Students then practiced statistical problem solving in class. Of 63 students surveyed, 36 provided feedback, and they reported that these teaching methods are antithetical to cramming. They spread out their work more because of the Flipped Class structure, rather than trying to fit in all the studying in before the exam. Of these respondents, 81% said that they preferred the inverted format; however, they said it required more time versus traditional classes. Most (70%) said the extra time required was worth it. In another study, a survey of 51 Agricultural Economics students who were taught using a Flipped Classroom technique reports mixed results related to full participation in the model; although 81% of students report helpfulness of pre-recorded lectures, only 47% said they watched all the videos (Gardener, 2012). However, about 90% of students said that the class discussions and peer-based work was helpful to their learning. Results of a regression model in the study demonstrated that viewing prelectures was associated with higher grade-assessed performance, and students reported high levels of satisfaction with course delivery in Flipped Classroom versus standard lecture-supported classroom structures.

Flipped Classroom techniques often rely on some amount of technology in order to pre-record lectures, host student journals, or pre-test students. Instructors can post entire lectures, video clips, reading materials, screen captures, and audio media online using a variety of tools. An overview of many of these is provided by Gardner (2012) in a paper on the discussion of using Flipped techniques. According to Talbert, (2012, p. 2) “the profusion of cheap, simple, and accessible technology for recording and sharing video online has made the inverted classroom easier than ever to implement.” Specific examples of technology that is helpful to this approach includes YouTube and Jing, both of which are free. However, “Flipping” can be fairly low-tech, and can include activities such as reflective journaling or reading quizzes that support content acquisition outside of the classroom.

The practice of “flipping” and reflective journaling both have some support in the literature, but there is a gap in the literature about how these tools complement each other. Most Flipped Classroom literature utilizes video lectures and tests, and much of the literature on reading reflections is related to the reflection of field work. Because of this, we set out to investigate the experiences of students in a social work generalist practice classroom using journaling instead of pre-recorded lectures as a Flipped Classroom technique. This research explores the use of reflective journals as a Flipped Classroom technique answer the questions, (a) do students’ reading reflections illustrate reflective thinking about the reading, and (b) how do students perceive the impact of reflective journals as a class assignment. Each week, instructors asked students to journal about three questions relative to the assigned reading. Using a Likert-type scale and open-ended questions, students reported on their experiences about how the Reading Reflections contributed to their learning and classroom preparedness.

Methods

We used a mixed-methods analysis of student responses to an online survey, and qualitative and illustrative use of reading reflections to explore whether the use of reading reflections enhance student preparation and engagement for class discussion. Students answered twelve questions about their level of agreement with a number of outcomes that we expected would be related to Reading Reflections, including questions about reading adherence and value of Reading Reflections.

Although there is an emerging body of literature surrounding Flipped Classroom techniques, there is no consistent or normed survey tool used to assess outcomes related to Flipped Classroom outcomes. The survey questions were all asked in one direction in order to avoid confusion of respondents, on a Likert-type scale with responses ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). Please see Table 1 for a list of questions, response frequencies, response means, and standard deviations. Two additional open-ended questions assessed what students liked and did not like about the use of Reading Reflections.

The University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study. Participants acknowledged their implied consent by reading about the study and clicking "I agree" at the beginning of the online survey, that they were over the age of 18 and voluntary participants, and were attendees in either of the two sections of the generalist practice social work class utilizing the Flipped Classroom model.

Participants

Invited participants include 34 students in two undergraduate *Generalist Practice with Individuals and Families* semester-long courses. This is a three-credit required course taught each semester for students who have been admitted to the Bachelors in Social Work degree program, offered at a medium-sized Midwestern university. Students at this university are generally traditional-aged, and the university's Office of Institutional Research reports that 24% of undergraduates hold full-time jobs off campus. Institutionally, 12% of students are first-generation college attendees, 60% of students come from out-of-state, and 80% of students are Caucasian. Two sections of the class are offered each semester. For the study period, Class A enrollment was 20 students, and Class B enrollment was 14 students. In all, 27 students participated in the anonymous survey: 13 from Class A (65%) and 14 from Class B (100%). Of the Likert-type questions, 26–27 students responded to each. Twenty-two students answered the two open-ended questions.

Procedures

The Flipped Classroom technique used for this study required students to complete Reading Reflection journals. Each week, instructors in an undergraduate generalist practice social work class asked students to complete a homework assignment where they responded to the required readings by answering three questions in an online journal: (1) What did you learn; (2) What do you still have questions about, and (3) What personal or professional connection can you make to this topic? Instructors asked students to answer each question in a few sentences, and provided students with examples of quality journal entries. The

students submitted assignments in Blackboard Journal, a classroom management software tool, which allowed students to record information which is only viewable to the instructor. The reflections were due each Sunday evening, before each Tuesday's class, to afford instructors time to review the entries, assess for themes, and include relevant content in the brief in-class PowerPoint presentation. The student comments replaced the chapter key concept reviews used in previous semesters; instead, the instructors utilized reflections as starting points for class discussions and practice exercises, and attributed comments to students unless they specifically requested otherwise.

In the last week of classes, instructors invited students to provide feedback in a survey about their experiences with Reading Reflections for one extra credit point. Students could print out the extra credit form from the last page of the survey regardless of whether they answered any survey questions in order to maintain anonymity. Through the university-licensed survey software Qualtrics, students responded to multiple choice Likert-type scaled questions. Students could skip any question. The survey contained 12 scaled questions and two open-ended questions, and took approximately ten minutes to complete. Question development followed a literature review about the known benefits of Flipped Classrooms and Reflective Journaling techniques. Most questions ask students about their specific experiences using the technique, but one survey question asks students generally whether they believe they learn better using discussion, which is the style of learning that the Flipped Classroom techniques support.

Data analysis occurred at the end of the semester after instructors submitted student grades. The survey responses were imported from Qualtrics to SPSS, version 21, for analysis. The means for the two classes were combined and analyzed together to derive a larger sample size, and a Mann-Whitney U test was also utilized to explore for differences in means for each question between classes to examine whether there were any differences in outcomes between class sections, which might suggest that students respond differently to the assignment based on the instructor.

For thematic analysis, we used open coding methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as a framework for coding the two open-ended questions to help us understand student perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the use of reflective journals. We approached the qualitative analysis with no preconceived expectations about responses. Both authors read each qualitative statement and generated descriptive concepts that emerged from the data. Multiple codes were used for each open-ended response when applicable. After individual coding, authors discussed the concepts and grouped them in to higher-order categories to narrow down to salient themes. Interesting feedback that added to the discussion but did not appear to be a part of the salient themes were coded as "other".

Results

Reading Reflections: An Illustration

To demonstrate how Reading Reflections illustrate the ways in which students responded to the educational value of the assignment, we asked representative students for permission to share their submissions. Each of the seven students asked granted permission. They had the

option to append their own name or a pseudonym to the Reading Reflections, and all preferred to use their own name. The examples that follow are submissions in which students are asked to reflect on either textbook or journal article readings. These examples drawn from various reading reflections demonstrate that students responded reflectively to the readings, asked questions that reached beyond the content of the readings, and were able to consider the content in relationship to their personal and professional lives.

Question 1: What did you learn?

White privilege is an "invisible package" or unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day. There are positive advantages which we can work to spread and negative advantages which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. To change social systems we must acknowledge their unseen dimensions. -Allison

Solution Focused therapy appears to me to be very strength based. The Miracles, Dreams and Empowerment article talked a lot about making the client feel like they have the answers to their problems inside of them. -Amy

Question 2: What do you still have questions about?

Reading this chapter makes me nervous to mess up, what if I ask a question that upsets my client- how do I bounce back from that without damaging the rapport we had built up to that point? -Kenzie

Are there any types of clients or situations when motivational interviewing will not work or is not recommended? -Amy

I want to know more about cultural nuances of nonverbal cues, because I was raised in a culture in which people do not put importance on eye contact and after I have been here for a while I have learned to give eye contact, but I still struggle with it. When I first came to the U.S I always felt uncomfortable when people look me in the eye and they expect me to do the same... Sometimes my American friends would tell me I am not paying attention when I am or they would think they are boring me. How can I overcome that barrier so people don't think that I am not paying attention? -Lul

I really want to practice these different types of empathetic communication and open and closed questions... I feel like being empathetic will be really hard at times especially if your clients are doing things you don't agree with or approve. How are you supposed to be empathetic then?—Jenny

Question 3: What personal or professional connection can you make to this topic?

One of the articles talks about rolling with resistance and it mentions challenging the clients thought process. The other day at work ... one of the new clients made the statement "the day my life was ruined." I stopped and turned around and asked her if her life was really ruined forever now by her situation, if she thinks it can never be the same or better again and how. She thought about it for a minute and then said it wasn't ruined forever and she did think things could get better.—Amy

Reading about families and how different each one can be in terms of rules, roles, expectations, etc. reminds me of how difficult it can be to set your own bias aside at times... The more I learn though, the more I am able to look at things from a more positive perspective and even begin to look at systems within my own family from a new standpoint. –Erica

When the book talked about two-thirds of the population between 20– 65 will be in a family that receives benefits from a welfare program I thought 'Heck Yeah!'Why is this not the poster child for the advocacy we need to push for more funding statewide for social welfare program? Social empathy is the problem we face.... People need to understand it's your neighbor, fifteen students in your child's class, the man sitting next to you in the doctor's office, the lady in the checkout line in front of you, the high school kid bagging your groceries, and the elderly man scanning your purchases that are benefiting from these welfare programs. It is easy to rationalize apathy when the concern doesn't seem to touch your world, but it does....- Darrin

Scaled Questions

Students' responses support the utility of the Reading Reflection assignment. Over 70% of students responded affirmatively that the Reading Reflections benefited their learning process and outcomes. The statements with the highest support include, "I feel like Reading Reflections help stimulate class discussion" (92% agree/strongly agree), "I learn better through discussion of material than through lecture review of material" (88% agree/strongly agree), and "My reading is more thorough than it would have been if Reading Reflections were not required" (85% agree/strongly agree). The statements with the least support still had an overwhelming majority of students who responded positively. The lowest rated comments are, "The benefit of completing the Reading Reflections is worth the extra time they require" (74% agree/strongly agree), "I would be happy to have another social work class that used Reading Reflections the way they were used in this course" (71% agree/strongly agree) and "I am more involved in class discussion in this course because of the use of Reading Reflections" (67% agree/strongly agree).

The authors compared means for each question between classes using Independent Samples Mann-Whitney U tests to detect differences that might be related to teaching style or class group. The results indicate significant differences only in the question "This class uses more discussion-based learning than my other social work courses" ($U = 42.5$, $Z = -2.475$, $p = .029$), but no significant differences in the other responses. This may indicate students in one section of the class felt more discussion was used than in the other section, or the finding could reflect differences in student populations. It does not appear that the other answers were affected by whether students were in the class that reported more discussion-based learning.

Qualitative Themes

Two open-ended questions solicited information about the strengths and weaknesses of the Reading Reflection. Instructors asked students to reflect on the questions, "what did you see as the (a) drawbacks and (b) benefits YOU experienced by using Reading Reflections in

class?” Twenty-one students responded to the question about drawbacks, and 22 students responded to the question about benefits of this model. Students could write as much as they wanted, and some wrote about several drawbacks and benefits in response to the inquiry.

The coded responses were used to develop a theory about student’s key perceptions: the use of reading reflections shifted the use of class time and required more class preparation, which presents both drawbacks and benefits for learning. The following analysis is organized around the themes that emerged in each of the questions.

Drawbacks—Several clear themes emerged in response to the question, “*What did you see as the drawbacks YOU experienced in using the Reading Reflections in class?*”

Theme 1: Timing and time requirement: The first emerging theme related to drawbacks due to the extra time required and the timing of the due date of the weekly assignment. Six students commented on the time requirement. Examples of this response include, “It did take a lot of extra time. But at the same token I was taking 6 classes this semester,” and “I sometimes didn’t feel like I could focus on the big assignments because I had to do the Reading Reflection.” Six students also reported that they disliked the due date on Sunday evening, “I think it would be easier if they were due Monday nights when we are not in weekend mode,” and “If they were due during the week I think that I would have remembered them more.” Three students reported Reading Reflections took too much time for the point value assigned.

Theme 2: Class time use: Three students reported drawbacks related to the use of Reading Reflections as taking up class time, and two respondents stated that they would have preferred the time was devoted instead to more traditional instruction. Examples include, “Sometimes, I feel like reading were reflections were gone over the whole class time, “discussions are important, but an hour of reading reflections can be a little over the top,” and “they take away (time) from time for spontaneous questions that could have arisen in class.”

Other responses: One student said that reflection is difficult with no previous work experience, “I particularly did not like the question about how this relates to my experiences because I found it difficult to find stuff to talk about.” Two students disliked how peers reacted (critically) to their reflections in class. An example of a statement is “I did not like it when someone harshly commented on my reading response.”

Benefits—In response to the question, “*What do you see as the benefits YOU experienced in using Reading Reflections in class?*” several encouraging themes emerged.

Theme 1: Better prepared: The most salient theme reported by ten respondents is that reading reflections prompted their class preparation. Examples of these responses include, “It also kept me more on track with the reading instead of just waiting until right before the test. It is more beneficial to read the material before coming to class,” “If there was not a reading reflection I would probably not read the book,” and “I was more prepared to “take

in" what was said in lecture because I had already gone over what was going to be talked about, and I was familiar with the "jargon."

Theme 2: Improved class discussion: Ten students reported benefits of improved value of class discussion; the discussion was more relevant or more engaging. Students shared, "I believe it did help other classmates interact more in class which benefited me with more discussion with more people," "I was able to learn even more about the topic because we discuss them even more and class and because we were able to ask questions in our Reading Reflections that were answered in class," and "I think that I was more engaged in class because I would do the Reading Reflections and I would know what would be discussed in class."

Theme 3: Peer-based learning: Four students reported on the benefit of seeing the reflections of their peers; they could see another perspective and assess their work in comparison to peer work. Examples include, "I enjoyed seeing what the other students wrote in their reflections so I could compare what they understood from the reading to what I understood from the reading. Their questions also brought up subjects that I maybe would not have thought about otherwise," and "I liked seeing other student's comments and questions. They had questions that I hadn't thought about, which were helpful to stimulate my understanding of the chapter."

Other responses: Students reported increased levels of reflection, and two said they asked questions they would not ask in class. One student reported that she liked seeing her reflections in the PowerPoint presentation. Student comments in these areas include, "It forced me to think more critically while reading the material, because I knew at the end I had to think of a question and how it related to my life," and "So, even if I wouldn't necessarily want to ask questions out loud, my questions were answered because I could ask them in my Reading Reflections."

Discussion

As mirrored by outcomes that appear in the literature, the majority of students report that they benefit from Reading Reflections as a result of their increased preparation, more engagement, and improved reflection. The qualitative data presents some conflicting themes; on one hand, students appreciate increased discussion and engagement in class, but on the other, they realize it requires an additional time commitment, and sometimes engagement is uncomfortable. One theme emerged that is not presently found in the Flipped Classroom literature about the benefit of peer-based learning when students saw the reading reflections of other students.

Although the qualitative responses to the question about drawbacks center on the time requirements, the quantitative responses reflect that students generally feel the extra time is worth it; most would be happy to have another social work course that used this technique. Although 30% reported that they would dislike another class that used Reading Reflections, an overlapping group of students also admitted that the exercise improved their reading

adherence and class discussion, as evidenced by the high level of agreement on items about whether they read more than they would have without the use of reflections.

As evident in the illustration of Reading Reflections presented earlier, students ask questions, divulge personal stories, and offer vulnerabilities that they might not volunteer in class. At the beginning of the semester we discussed boundaries relevant to the journaling process, and students are reminded that their instructors are not their therapists. However, some of the self-disclosure offers learning opportunities that can be shared with the class to help normalize fears, highlight themes in questions, and focus on shared concerns that emerge from the Reading Reflections. In many ways, the Reading Reflections allow the needs of the students to guide the classroom discussions, and allow instructors to respond to themes where students express greatest interest or confusion.

Occasionally a student asked a reflective question in the journal that can be responded to directly and not shared with the class; in one instance, a student asked if it would be appropriate to share her story of recovery from addiction. It created an opportunity offer some personal guidance to the student about appropriate ways to use self-disclosure, and for the instructor to generalize the reflection to promote class discussion about appropriate use of self-disclosure.

The outcomes of our data informed our development of the Reading Reflection assignment for the same course in the following semester. First, the due date was adjusted to Monday at noon in response to student feedback about the weekend due date. Second, we adjusted the the Reading Reflections provide increased clarity; the new questions are (1) What was the most significant thing you learned; (2) What do you want to know more about; and (3) What might you contribute to this topic based on your work, family, or life experience, or how do you envision yourself using this information in the future? We anticipate that these adjustments will increase student reflection about how topics will apply to their future work, and that we will continue to gain insight about the areas of the reading that are most interesting and most difficult for students.

Although generally students completed the weekly assignment on time, we chose to offer some “forgiveness” for a few missed weeks throughout the semester in this weekly assignment. Our hope is that this flexibility encourages students remain honest to the integrity of reading and then reflecting versus just scanning the text in order to answer the journal questions. Students could miss up to two journal entries and still receive full credit. In this way, students are able to make some choices about how to prioritize their efforts around this assignment.

In previous semesters course evaluations, students offered feedback that they were unmotivated to read the book and that pop-quizzes might help. Although students are classically opposed to such tests, they realize that their reading is improved through assessment of their knowledge. Reading Reflections may be a more meaningful ways to engage social work students in their reading assignments than knowledge-based quizzes.

Limitations

This study provided a limited sample of student perceptions in two sections of generalist practice courses at one Upper Midwest University, and has limited generalizability. Our survey did not use reverse-coded questions and had a limited response range and small sample size, which further limits the strength of statistical findings. Control-group studies would improve our knowledge about outcomes. This is one of the first studies of a Flipped Classroom pedagogy offered in a social work degree program; however, it explores only post-hoc student reflections of their own experiences. It primarily explores the homework aspect of the “flip” but gives little attention to the benefits of the freed classroom time.

Recommendations for Future Research

Impact on Instructors

We did not set out to capture the experiences of the instructors (who are also the authors) as an original part of the design methodology for this study, yet this exercise had some significant impacts on our teaching. First, our experiences support these themes reported by students, in that class discussion and student preparation improved when compared to prior semesters. Therefore, we were motivated to continue using these methods for future classes. Examples of increased participation we noted included the ability to call upon students who are otherwise quiet in class by drawing upon the content of their Reading Reflections, and we also noted an improved range of participants who appeared more prepared to discuss the reading. However, this method results in more work for the instructors, and relies on last-minute class preparation in order to include student comments or find materials that are responsive to the needs students identify in their journals. Future research can investigate the workload consequences of student-centered Flipped Classroom techniques.

We also developed a greater appreciation for student learning and growth through these journals. Our perceptions of student improvements in areas of reflection, honesty, vulnerability, and genuineness support the ongoing use of Reading Reflections. It is difficult to know the level of engagement and introspection of some students, especially those who are more reserved, and this exercise offered another lens by which to assess student participation. The Reading Reflections demonstrated the reflective thoughts, discoveries, and thoughtfulness of some of the journal writers. Future research may investigate qualities related to student-instructor relationships, instructor perceptions of students, or quality of journal content when using models such as these.

Impact on Learning

This research did not directly assess the impact on student learning outcomes. Future studies should consider linking a Reading Reflection technique to more specific outcomes, such as student performance on standardized tests, exercises, or final grades. Other Flipped Classroom pedagogical approaches should be considered, as a growing body of literature supports these techniques as a way to assess and enhance the ability of students to apply their learning; as our students prepare for practice in the field, techniques that offer practice opportunities can provide useful and practical insight. Finally, future research should

consider the impacts of the collaborative and applied practice work that is used in class in place of traditional content review.

Summary

In our social work practice courses, students responded overwhelmingly that the method of using Reading Reflection journals as a Flipped Classroom exercise improved their reading, supported classroom discussion, and was worth the extra work required. The authors also perceived unanticipated benefits of increased student learning and engagement. Reading analysis and reflective critical thinking are vital skills for our profession. These findings support further development and use of reflective journaling and Flipped Classroom practices. This method requires a higher level of student responsibility, preparation time, and instructor trust to imagine students are reading thoroughly and thinking reflectively outside the classroom, and changes the context of in-class discussions. However, these practices, which depart from our traditional lectures and coverage of readings, show promise for increasing the opportunities to help students practice their skills in the classroom. Given the ever-increasing technologies that allow students to access and demonstrate learning outside the classroom, the Flipped Classroom holds promise for enriching student learning.

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Table 1**Student Perceptions of Reading Reflections**

	Mean, Standard Deviation, and n	SA	A	D	D	SD
1. My reading is more thorough than it would have been if Reading Reflections were not required.	3.2 .9 n=27	12	11	2	2	
2. I am more engaged in the classroom when my Reading Reflection questions or comments are addressed in class than I would be if the lecture was only a discussion about the material presented in the textbook.	3.1 .9 n=27	10	12	3	2	
3. I enjoy seeing my questions and comments used as part of the classroom discussion.	3.1 .9 n=27	9	12	3	2	
4. I enjoy seeing the questions and comments of my peers used as part of the classroom discussion.	3.1 .9 n=26	9	13	1	3	
5. I learn better through discussion of material than through lecture review of material.	3.3 .9 n=27	12	12	1	2	
6. I feel like Reading Reflections help stimulate class discussion.	3.4 .6 n=26	11	13	2	0	
7. Sometimes I share questions and/or comments in my reading reflection journal that I probably would not share in class.	3.2 1.0 n=27	12	9	4	2	

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	Mean, Standard Deviation, and n	SA	A	D	SD
8. I am more involved in class discussion in this course because of the use of Reading Reflections.	2.9 .9 n=27	7	11	8	1
9. This class uses more discussion-based learning than my other social work courses.	3.0 .7 n=26	5	16	4	1
10. The benefit of completing the Reading Reflections is worth the extra time they require.	2.9 .8 n=27	6	14	6	1
11. Overall, I like the way Reading Reflections are used in this course.	3.0 .9 n=27	8	13	4	2
12. I would be happy to have another social work class that used Reading Reflections the way that they were used in this course.	2.8 .8 n=27	4	15	6	2

Note. Questions rated on a likert-type scale rated 4 (strongly agree), 3 (agree), 2 (disagree) and 1 (strongly disagree).