Ideas for reflecting on Student-initiated inquiries

We want our students to reflect on their learning and be able to identify the learning process they have undertaken. We also want them to reflect on how they have grown as a learner naming skills or dispositions they may have needed to use. Finally we want them to be able to articulate pride in their achievements describing what they have discovered or created, and suggesting any improvements they might make next time or ways in which they would like to take their ‘project’ or learning further. However, we don’t want to make the process of reflection too laborious or compromise the engagement and joy of participating in ‘student-initiated inquiries.

If we make the reflection process too structured and rigid we run the risk of doing exactly that. So how do we strike the balance of supporting and scaffolding deep reflection without making reflection a chore? I think it is important first to build a culture and language of reflection. We can do this by modelling the language of reflection orally during share time; either by using a student who is sharing with the whole group to demonstrate reflection questioning; or by using turn and talk, or buddy sharing.

Examples of reflection questions include:

Thinking about what you have achieved today:

* What went to plan and worked well?
* What was difficult that you had to persist with?
* Did you encounter any problems you had to solve? How did you do this?
* How do you feel about your efforts today and why?
* Whereabouts were you in the learning pit, and how did it feel?
* What learning dispositions or skills did you use as you were working?
* What new ideas or thinking do you have as a result of todays work?
* What might you need to do next?
* How will you go about this, and what help might you need?

Some of this thinking could be provoked during the introduction by asking students to review their plan and set a goal for the day. Or you might highlight a disposition, skill or strategy you want the students to be thinking about as they work (eg persisting if things get difficult, trying a different way if something is not working, collaborating with others to get feedback or solve a problem). This could then be a specific area they reflect on during share time.

When you feel they are ready to start formalising and recording the reflections it is good to give students some different options of how they could do this. For example:

* Using reflections journals that have blank pages (not templates or black line masters). They can record in words, diagrams, pictures or using flow charts, concept maps or other visual strategies.
* Allow them to video their reflections using ipads, tablets/chromebooks or flipcams. You could set up a ‘diary room’ in a quiet space for this.
* Taking photos and annotating them using seesaw or other communication apps.
* Setting up a ‘blog’ that they add to during the course of the project.

Some students may like to record during the session, for others you may dedicate 10mins at the end of the session for this. Some teachers use a section of a writing time that they strategically schedule in the session that follows ‘genius time’ so students don’t feel their working time on their project is cut short.

Having reflection starters that are displayed may help with this stage. It is not expected that students use all of these prompts every time they reflect, rather they choose one or two that are relevant to what they experienced in that session and go deep with those. It is helpful for students to see examples of succinct but deep reflections their peers have produced. (Quality not quantity)

Sample reflection prompts:

* Something I am proud of is…
* Something that surprised me is…
* I solved a problem by…
* Something that is worrying me is…
* I asked for feedback on… because…
* Something that is going around in my head is…
* I needed to use the disposition of… because… I did this by…
* A new learning for me today was…
* I wonder if I could…
* Something that sparked an interest for me is…
* Something that is blocking me from going forward is…
* I know I am in the learning pit because…
* I know I need to work on… because..

Students need to see the purpose of reflecting. We need to build their understanding that reflection, goal setting ad feedback help us to become better learners- it is part of the culture of learning and reflection we are trying to create. Sharing their reflections publically will give the message that their reflections are valued (eg through share time or displaying learning stories for other students, parents and the community to see, or during celebrations of leaning during the course of the year).