

Dan Reeve: We're talking now about reflection. And you've kind of pieced into it a little bit, and we will spend a little more time here. What reflective questions or practices do you have students consider once they've completed any part or a full cycle of any Applied Learning activity?

Steve W. D.: One of the big questions, the big statements we make to students regularly is, our role here at the college is to help them be successful. We want to see them move out into whatever industry sector they choose to follow their path and be better trained, better prepared, and more capable than those people that have not been through a program such as ours. So, when it comes to reflection, we want them to recognize the complexities and the dynamic of food in general, as I mentioned earlier, whereby it's part of our culture. It's part of our society. It's part of our global economics. You know, North America, the reason we're here is because of a search for a faster route to get spices to Europe. So, utilizing that as a platform to say, "Why am I doing ... why am I in this business? Is it just for a paycheck?"

I believe it's more than that. I think we have a greater value to our communities because of the work that we do. And what I want to see, or what we are constantly striving to do, is give our students the ammunition, for want of a better word, to be able to move out into the work force and demand higher wages, to command respect, to be able to do the work that they are trained to do in a manner that I'm going to say makes their career sustainable and lucrative.

Dan Reeve: Right. How do you pinpoint times or breaks when student reflection is critical? How do you know when "Okay, I think we need to look back on what happened?"

Steve W. D.: I mean certainly, I use the terms "crisis points" or "critical control points", which is an industry term, which is used for the health and safety of food, but it's also relevant here. So, any point where there is a potential for a negative outcome, particularly when you're talking about safety, is certainly a good chance to look at that process or that system or that activity and reflect upon it. "Did we meet critical control points for temperature? Did we deal with the food safely? Did we receive it? Did we store it properly?" All these kinds of things. And then again the interaction, the interface with the paying customer is also a good one. In the short term after that we like to say that cooks spend hours and hours and hours making something that's generally gone in 15 or 20 minutes. So, you can get almost instant feedback when you're dealing and you have an opportunity to communicate with your end user.

You can find out very quickly and hopefully very honestly whether they liked it or not. In some cases it might be a technical criticism, or it might just be a personal opinion on whether or not they enjoyed it or not. Now you're talking about things that are quite ... is it ephemeral? Ephemeral where it's personal taste, personal preference, and that's one of the challenges that the industry

has... is that of the seven and a half billion people, all of us have a different makeup or different wiring of our taste buds and our brain synapses, so that you're unlikely to ever get two people have exactly the same experience.

Dan Reeve: So, it sounds like you coach up a certain kind of resilience. [crosstalk 00:04:16] Where on the one hand you want to be open to reflective critique, criticism. If the steak was tough, that probably is more objective than it was subjective, although there's a certain blend of the two.

Steve W. D.: And if you just add to that, using that as an example, so now we have to say, "Well, why was the steak tough?"

Dan Reeve: Right.

Steve W. D.: Was it a poor choice of purchase? Was it poor cooking method? Was it a poor [crosstalk 00:04:41] was there an event throughout the processing of that piece of meat that made it tough? Was it from an unreliable source? There's all sorts of criteria that could result in just having a tough steak.

Dan Reeve: Right. Yeah. I think that there's sort of a critical discourse as well. So, on the one hand, it's like, look, we need thick skins, but we need open skins. On the other hand, let's look at the chain of events.

Steve W. D.: Correct.

Dan Reeve: You may have cooked it perfectly, but these factors beforehand were never going to make a tough steak tender.

Steve W. D.: That's right. Yes.

Dan Reeve: Okay. So, when and how do you reflect, you as an instructor, or you as a program leader, I want to know how do you reflect on a whole unit or a cycle of activity, an Applied Learning cycle of activity? Is there a time at the end of a semester? Is there a time at the various points? I mean, beyond this sort of critical short term ones, are there points where you've sort of built in reflection, or is there a process there that you follow?

Steve W. D.: The way our classes work is that the students rotate through a number of different stations during the course of the program. So, there's five stations that they rotate through twice, or two weeks on each station. So, at the end of each two weeks, that's a good opportunity to reflect. That's when the instructors are doing their grading on that particular station.

There's an ongoing series of assessment tools, both quizzes and block tests for those stations as well. That's another area we can ... and even on a day to day basis, there's a daily assessment at the end of the day, as an overall sort of

reflection to see what the outcomes were, and kind of briefing, a preamble for the following day's assignments.

Steve W. D.: So, it really is an ongoing process, and of course we do have our final technical exams. We have a final practical assessment. Then the final piece of the whole puzzle is an ITA certificate, a qualification exam.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Putting this in the students ... it sounds like there is a lot of conversation and reflection throughout, sort of in cycles, but daily, how does student reflection impact the Applied Learning cycle?

Steve W. D.: We're trying to be as responsive as we realistically can be. And it is certainly a conversation that is ongoing, because we provide ... As well as providing a learning landscape or a learning environment for our students, we're also part of the service provider within the institution. So, we are ... I don't know if "constrained" is the right word, but we certainly have to take into consideration that we are delivering a service to the institution and all the population that exists here.

So, that's certainly a part of that discussion, but what we want to see is that our students are ... we know the industry is evolving, and things beyond the restaurant and hotel type environments are providing some great opportunities for our students. So, how are we able to shift and change in motion the things that we're delivering so that students do have an understanding?

Our food truck is a great example of that. It's a relatively new, in this part of the world anyways, a relatively new sector, and we are now hoping to be able to create that learning activity for the students, which means they can then have that one more skill in their tool belt, as we refer to it, that we add into industry, which makes them that much more appealing to employers.

Dan Reeve: That kind of brings us into orientation and training. Now, you've been part of this for a long time, but how do you prepare yourself to guide an experiential learning activity, or guide even the instructors? How do you make your own preparations?

Steve W. D.: I think when it comes to Applied Learning, I'm a big believer in the using your own personal experiences, having a ... and being reflective of those, because our own personal ... we're human just like anybody else. We've made mistakes in our own professional lives. Utilize those as learning tools, being able to explain. One of the, again, statement I like to make to students is "I'm here to help you not make the mistakes. I've made through my own experiences, and you'll have plenty of your own to make, but hopefully I can guide you away from some of the ones that I've experienced"

I think that's where the Applied Learning has its most value... is the personal experience of the people delivering the training, as well as teasing out of the

cohort what their experiences are. This is where we try and get the students as, again, over and above the technical training they're getting, it is softer skills, or the soft skills, the communication skills, the leadership qualities.

Steve W. D.: We've got some really interesting situations where students, and students from an area or a source, you wouldn't expect them to have strong leadership skills, but that particular person has risen up and for whatever reasons, has commanded a position of leadership amongst their peers. Those are the kinds of things, and then we've been much more cognizant of exploring those and having the conversation with both that student, but also the rest of the cohort. What is it that makes this person ... what gives you the respect, or makes you respect this person more than others?

Dan Reeve: Right. Right.

Steve W. D.: We've found that to be very, very valuable.

Dan Reeve: Right. So, this is just to sort of... bring us up to speed here. While it is important to learn the chain, but there's also these soft skills of looking at yourself, reflecting on your own behavior, being able to laugh at your past mistakes, and learn from them.

Steve W. D.: That's right.

Dan Reeve: And then learn from others.

Steve W. D.: That's right.

Dan Reeve: Successes and failures. So, I think most disciplines would say that that's ... those soft skills are vital to resilience.

Steve W. D.: Absolutely.

Dan Reeve: You will screw up. You'll screw up a plate. You'll drop a whatever, and it's the resilience to go ... to move on from that, and to see that other people have demonstrated that resilience.

Steve W. D.: Yep. Yep. And be able to recognize it, and be able to reflect on it. "Okay, was I moving too fast? Did I take on too much? Was I not prepared?" All sort of these questions have to be ... and honesty is a big part of that.

Dan Reeve: Yeah.

Steve W. D.: There are times when ... we're renowned in the industry as having inflated egos, and some of that's self-induced, but it certainly is not helpful in many cases when it comes to reflection, and when it comes to being able to take that step

back and say “Okay, well did I perform to the best that I could possibly have done?”

Dan Reeve: Okay. Awesome. This is going to be a little bit weird, because your discipline's really built around this. So, the students may not come with these questions, but for some questions, the question was initially: “How do you explain an Applied Learning process to students?” And then more how do you explain why are we doing this, and how do you connect to that to how we are doing this? So, the “why” and the “how” are two separate ideas when you're teaching something.

Steve W. D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think it's as relevant, if not more so, with our discipline, than others because we have a lot of students come to us and say “Can you just teach me it. Just give it to me, and then I'm going away” We have to really expect, particularly younger students, particularly those coming out of the K to 12 system. It's a very conscious effort to be able to sit them down and say “We are going to teach you more than just how to cook a steak, how to prepare a dessert, how to do all these dishes. We want you to understand. We want you to conceptualize what is happening, or what's happened to that particular piece of food. How it impacts you and your community”

So, it really is a case of we do, even though we are very much entrenched in Applied Learning, we do have to lay it out for the students from day one. As they come through at subsequent levels, then we reinforce it, but it's already there.

When it comes to the “how”, it's really about constant reaffirmation of what it is that they're here to learn. It is more than just technical skills for putting food on a plate. One other saying that we use quite regularly is that people ... there's lots of great chefs who have gone broke, because they don't know money, they don't know people.

If those skills are not there, it doesn't matter how good you are as a technician, if you don't understand how to work with people, motivate people, inspire people, see people for ... see the skills that people can bring to your operation, or you don't know how to work within a budget or be profitable, then your skills are kind of wasted.

And vice versa. There's people that I know personally that are mediocre cooks. They're competent, but they're mediocre cooks, but they know money, and they know people. They're very successful. So, it really is about broadening their understanding of the role that they play. We have a number of students that have ...

We have our sort of alumni that we follow, and considerable numbers of them have left the actual physical, or the primary act of cooking to go into other fields, but the skills they've learned are incredibly transferable because of both

the part food plays in people's lives, as I've said, but also those soft skills, those abilities to work with people. I had to learn.

Steve W. D.: The idea of learning about food is endless. There's so much to take on board. When you talk to the best chefs in the world, they'll tell you they're still learning, day in and day out. So, that's where I think the idea of really reinforcing with them, and then actually telling them, and getting them to recognize the fact that this is Applied Learning, and it will benefit you in so many other ways than just that ability to cook.

Dan Reeve: Right. Right. Beyond the technical stuff.

Steve W. D.: Yes.

Dan Reeve: Now, this question does apply to you quite directly. Does your preparation differ when you work with a community partner?

Steve W. D.: It becomes, generally speaking, it becomes less about the financial implications when we're dealing with ... I mean, our program is called Professional Cook, therefore by its very nature, professional is about earning a living from it, and generally speaking, making a profit.

Dan Reeve: Right.

Steve W. D.: So, there's a lot of emphasis on the financial side of that and how to make the most ... get the most bang for your buck, so to speak. With community partners, that's not necessarily less so. It's just less obvious. They'll still be working to a budget. They'll still try and get the best bang for their buck, and they'll still be trying to maximize their resources, whatever they may be.

But when we're working with community partners, we are obviously a little bit softer about how we deliver. The emphasis, while it's still on creating maximum outcomes for whatever resources are available, it's more about that community building exercise. It's more about creating connections, about having them be open and accessible to whoever their market is, whether it be helping people with barriers or social barriers or any of these kinds of things.

I find that to be much more ... and it's an even softer soft skill.

Dan Reeve: Right. Right. Okay. Let's move on now. We're going to talk about a little bit ... we're going to move on, and talk about ... a little bit about continuous improvement, which again, this may be a little bit of things we've touched on. So, this is simple. Sometimes when your activities don't go as planned, for better or for worse, how do you assess your students' experience, like when things go sideways? And then I'm going to follow up immediately and say, when things don't go as planned, what tools do you have in place to reset and get things back on track?

Steve W. D.: I guess when things ... errors, I'm a big believer in you learn more from your mistakes than you do from your successes. So, the idea of things not going to plan, we are always advocating for the fact that this is a safe environment for our students. Because we're creating a quasi-realistic cooking environment for them from an industry standard, we want them to know that here... it's a good place to make mistakes, because this is where... we are here, as the instructional staff, to analyze them, reflect upon them, and look at ways in which they can be nullified in the future.

So, I think safety is probably the single biggest factor there, and that's not as easy as it sounds. And again, that's part of our culture. People are brought up being made to feel bad about making mistakes, and being reprimanded or chastised, or any of these things, and what we are very very conscious of and very very supportive of is that mistakes are okay. Mistakes are mistakes.

Again, this is a safe place to make mistakes, because this is where we can look at them. In the industry, when there's ... that's not to say we don't have real money on the table, but when there's real money on the table and you're getting a paycheck to perform those duties, when you do make a mistake, it's costing somebody something.

We've built that in. That's part of what we do. It's less safe. It could be a situation where particularly if it's a perpetuating ... somebody has perpetual mistakes, or somebody that's taking a longer time to develop and learn the skills, that could mean their job.

Dan Reeve: So, kind of that ability knock.

Steve W. D.: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Of that "Make mistakes now. Learn from them now. Reflect on them now"

Steve W. D.: Yep.

Dan Reeve: So that when the future... you'll have not only tools to deal with how you, when you screw up, how to think about it, and how to walk through it, but also tend to make less.

Steve W. D.: That's right.

Dan Reeve: Okay. What role do students play in the feedback loop for the way you build your applying ... and we've kind of touched on this a little bit, but not so much from the service end, but you go through an Applied Learning activity, and you're like ... you have thoughts of how it went. Do students get a role there? What's that look like?

Steve W. D.: Peer review is something that we do. Probably more so in the lab environment rather than the production kitchen, just because of the logistics of... generally speaking in the lab scenarios, the students will all have the same assignments, and at the end of the class, then they can lay them all out, and everybody can try each other's dishes, and comment on them, or we do in our second level, there is the idea of the plating, the conceptualization of the plates and what they're going to look like, and we tend to let the second year students have much more input into what a plate that's going into the restaurant looks like.

So, in the initial stages, when they're in the lab, and they effectively cook the entire three week rotating menu in three weeks, they then create a standard collectively for a number of the plates. Not all of them. The instructors will do some, but then the students will do, and it's always interesting to see what the students come up with, and how they break them down.

So, you'll have a dozen students with a dozen different plates of the same dish, and collectively they'll look at components of it, and that piece. That's a good garnish, and that's a nice way to serve the sauce, and that's a nice way to present the meat. Together, they'll create one plate, which then becomes the norm for the rest of the program in the restaurant.

Dan Reeve: That's a very interesting methodology.

Steve W. D.: That also gives them that creative input. They're able to bring some of their own applied experience from industry back into the learning environment.

Dan Reeve: Very interesting. We're going to talk a little bit about assessment evaluation. So, first, how do you structure your formative and summative assessment for students?

Steve W. D.: Formative is done on an ongoing basis. So, on a daily basis, they'll be given assignments where they have to take those assignments home, prepare for the following day, convert recipes, prepare work plans. So, prioritize which order the different components need to be done in. Then that will be, it's sort of built upon. So, they do the two rotations through the kitchen. So, in the first rotation, in the first year anyways, it'll be a very basic list of dishes or assignments that they have to complete, and as they come back in the second half, then the standard of those is lifted, and they'll be coming right up to the PC one level.

Then from a summative, it's very much, again, on the day to day basis. They're graded or they're given an assessment by the instructor on how did those assignments, how were those assignments prepared and delivered? Then there's the theoretical [inaudible 00:23:41] online. They were using D2L for online quizzes and block tests.

The quizzes... we are very conscious with the quizzes to explain to the student that quizzes are not an assessment tool. They're a learning tool. Quizzes are



there to help you. That is sort of old school. It's very repetitious. They can do it innumerable times, and then the block test will be where there's more of an assessment component to that.

Steve W. D.: Then at the end of the program, there is a practical assessment and a technical exam as part of that sort of summative, and then we have ... it's informal, but the instructor will take the results of the grade book, and if they have a transcript, and we'll sit down and have a short interview or a short conversation with the student basically highlighting the good points and the bad points and anything in the middle.

Dan Reeve: Sure. I'm going to flip this question a little bit around. So, one of the I think more surprising ideas that I think people who probably are outside your program like myself might be surprised to learn is just the emphasis you have on the deeper connection that food has to society. So, the question was originally: "What evidence do you have that Applied Learning activities deepen students' understanding of a concept, idea, or theory?" I'm going to flip that question, because you've answered that question, I think, fully. When you're teaching ideas and making connections to food to the environment, to social economic roots of food, how food is delivered, sort of what I would call the politics of food, how does that deepen their understanding?

Steve W. D.: This is my personal view on this, but I think it has enormous capacity to enlighten them about not just food. I just did my master's degree last year, and my final paper was creating a culture of curriculum that uses food as a vehicle of learning. I think getting people to use food as a means to think about themselves and think about their environments, think about their communities, simply opens up their minds to ask other questions.

So, if we're talking about the politics of food, and we're trying to get them to understand why the grain [inaudible 00:26:24] but the grain trade organization is in place. So, there's a government body that controls how much grain is grown, and where it goes, and who gets what, and all these things. How does that give them an opportunity to look at other government function? Other ways in which the government is working to aid or deter different parts of our society and our community and our nation, and globally, for that matter.

So, I think it's really just a ... it's a stepping stone to far more ... far deeper conversations. But ultimately, it's about the fuel that keeps us going.

Dan Reeve: Right.

Steve W. D.: As far as I'm concerned, and I'm actually biased based on my ... the sector I work in, but we all need it. We all have to do it. We all love it at some level. It's something we should be paying more attention to, and we should be focusing more of our energies on.

Dan Reeve: Right. Okay. So, the end... you've talked a little bit about at the end of the summative evaluations. I want to talk a little bit about process or informal processes or formal processes to celebrate the transformation. If a student comes in at the beginning, and they're just like, just teach me how to cut. Just teach me the things, and I'll do the rest. Then by the end of the second year ... how do you celebrate that transformation?

Steve W. D.: We don't have a formal mechanism in place for that, but we certainly, as I mentioned, we do follow our alumni. The nice thing about technology now is that it is ... it's relatively easy to keep an eye on people, and sort of see where they're going. Especially if it's been a good relationship, and we have a lot of industry connection, and Victoria is a pretty small community.

So, we are regularly hearing about former students, and we have a lot of them out there. We've been around for 40 plus years. So, there's a lot of our students in industry, not just here, but across the country and beyond, for that matter. So, we do enjoy having that connection post educative process.

Having those "do you remember when" conversations. Do you remember that discussion? Do you remember that? I had somebody walk up to me just a little while ago, and quoted me, work smarter, not harder, and explaining how much that resonates now with the work that she's doing, and how it's become one of her mantras to consider what you're doing, how you're doing it. Can you make your life less stressful by processing these activities ahead of time. As I say, using your experiences, using your mistakes, being ... mistakes are normal. If you keep making them again and again, well, that's not so normal. The idea is to learn from them, and move on from them.

Dan Reeve: Excellent. Any final thoughts that have percolated through our conversation? Anything that you want to talk about just to finish off?

Steve W. D.: I think we've covered everything pretty comprehensively. Obviously I'm passionate about this. I enjoy what I do. I enjoy what we do as a department and as an industry. I genuinely believe that we have so much more to offer, and we're working on a few initiatives to try and do that, to try and create a ... one of the things I'm working on with Carl Everett over at the hospitality management program is ultimately we'd like to see a culinary undergraduate degree, which would bring a lot of this stuff together at a higher level or at a deeper level than what is currently on offer, focused, again, predominantly on food being the ...

And again, it's almost hard to put all that into one program, because it's such a broad subject. We've been working with Nicole Kilburn over at anthropology, again, because of the nature of food, and the nature of society, and human history, it's a fascinating subject to help people understand why we're doing what we're doing now, because of what we've done in the past.

Steve W. D.: So, it's an ongoing exercise, and I certainly would anticipate pursuing that much further as we move on.

Dan Reeve: Excellent. Thank you very much for your time. Very informative, and very thoughtful. Appreciate it.

Steve W. D.: Some sort of-