Condensed Learning Diaries for Reflective Development

“a new approach to learning diaries which is less time consuming for students (and staff), and engages them in the valuable activity of reflective learning”

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Contents

Part 1 Reflective Practice – essential but neglected?
Part 2 Condensed Learning Diaries – an innovative approach
Part 3 A new research project

With pauses for questions, comments and of course, reflection
Part 1: What is Reflective Practice and why does it matter?

Our ability to reflect on thoughts and behaviour – is it uniquely human?

The philosophical tradition includes:

"The unexamined life is not worth living" Socrates

“By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.”
Confucious 孔夫子; Kǒng Fūzǐ,

Dewey ‘The Founder of Reflection’

Reflective thought begins when we experience and problem or dilemma:

‘a “felt difficulty”’

Reflection - part of the cycle that enables us to learn from experience

“To maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry — these are the essentials of thinking.” Dewey 1933 p118

So Reflection is active and deliberative

is about thinking to learn

- a way to escape from the captivity of routine
Late 20\textsuperscript{th} century a surge of interest in applying reflection to professional learning and training

\textbf{Donald Schön} 1983 \textit{The Reflective Practitioner}

‘The importance of doubt’
- reflection-in-action
- reflection-on-action
A number of theories and models soon emerged

- **Chris Argyris (1991)**: Single and double loop learning

![Diagram of Single-Loop and Double-Loop Learning](image)

David Boud – Reflection not just about reasoning but also about feelings, emotions (e.g. Boud 2001)
Kolb’s Learning Cycle (Kolb 1984)

Kolb’s terminology

Concrete Experience
Reflective Observation
Abstract Conceptualisation
Active Experimentation

Doing/
experiencing
Planning/
trying out
Concluding/
Learning
Reviewing/
reflecting

Explanation
... a more radical sub-set of Reflective Practice that focuses on the question of power, challenges assumptions and questions organisational norms, for instance those of new managerialism (Bray and McLellan 2019)

• Jack Mezirow (1990) – Transformative Learning - for whom it questions everything that practitioners had previously take for granted


Brookfield’s ‘lens’ model: we view the world through four lenses:
Possible purposes of Reflective Practice

• Learning – Individual, Group and / or Organisational
• Personal Development and Psychological well-being
  • Widely used in therapy – for instance therapeutic journaling
• Organisational control and efficiency
  • as a means of ensuring performance meets targets, as a method of involving individuals in their own assessment
Variations, methods

RP may be carried out on a regular/routine basis or for Critical Incidents (‘trigger’ events)

May be individual or Group/collective

Used by Learners (trainees, students) or practitioners/professionals

May be voluntary or compulsory (for instance as part of assessment)

Methods:
- Individual: journals, diaries, logs, blogs, vlogs etc.
- Group methods include Action Learning Sets (Guest et al 2006).
Time for some definitions

Reflection is a critical analysis of knowledge and experience, in order to achieve deeper meaning and understanding

“Reflection is a metacognitive process in which professionals and students actively and purposefully consider their feelings, reactions, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, responses, and experiences” Vianamuri et al 2017 p2

“An important characteristic of Reflective Practice rather than reflection is the fact that it is captured and expressed in some form - usually written, spoken or pictorial - on a systematic basis” CIPD 2020 (my emphasis)
Levels of reflection – several models

For instance the Fleck and Fitzpatrick (2010) model

1. **R0 Description:** revisiting
2. **R1 Ref Description:** revisiting + explanation
3. **R2:** Dialogic Reflection: exploring relationship
4. **R3 Transformative Reflection:** fundamental change
5. **R4 Critical reflection**
So ... Reflective Practice is 'the bedrock of professional identity' (Finlay, 2008 p 2).

• Reflective Practice is now often regarded as essential to the professional role (Finlay, 2008).

• In some professions RP has become standard, for instance:
  • “Reflective practice has become part of the discourse of nursing education classrooms, conferences, and journals, and are popular features of nursing continuing education programs.” Ruth-Sahd, L. A. (2003 P 488)
In Education – it’s embedded in policy nationally ...

The College Development Network’s *Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland’s Colleges* area 2 (Professional Knowledge and Understanding):

2.5(c) Understand[ing] how to reflect critically on their own learning and the application of this to student learning and experiences (College Development Network 2020(a))

... the purpose of the Standards as a whole includes:

*Developing critically reflective and evaluative practitioners.* (College Development Network 2020(b))

Accordingly, RP is frequently built into initial training courses (often assessed) and CPD for teachers in secondary, further and higher education (Canning 2011; Collin et al 2014).
... and at UHI

The UHI Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (2017-2021) includes Twelve Learning and Teaching Enhancement Values that provide the basis of the strategy itself, one of which is

**Reflective practice and continuous improvement:**

“At individual, team, departmental and institutional level we will review the effectiveness of our teaching practices, reflect on the potential for improvement and actively plan for a better educational experience for current and future students.”

*UHI Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (2017-2021)*
Note that RP can be conducted by professionals or students -
Example of using reflective practice with students


Used Learning Logs in undergraduate Entrepreneurship module at a Malaysian University

N = 136

Assessed (10% total mark) – graded according to level (similar to the Fleck and Fitzpatrick model from purely descriptive to Critical Reflection

55% of the completed logs were at the lowest level – purely descriptive
Student 20:

“In this chapter I study the definition of SME. SME apply for the following sectors which are primary agriculture, manufacturing (including agro-based), manufacturing-Related Services (MRS) and Services (including information and communication technology). My comment for this chapter is, I can find out about the importance of SME entrepreneurs in Malaysia” [sic]
They concluded:

“self-confessional writing is hard to come by “

and students

“had difficulty in writing the reflection when being requested to do so. This has resulted in their reflection being written descriptively which lacks in critical analysis and deep thinking”.

but nevertheless the

“Reflective learning log provides students with a profound insight into their own world ...” (p15)
So reflective practice is a well established part of what we do – as practitioners and as part of our teaching strategy with students?

• Probably not! (but see later)
• Most published literature refers to use with students (HE) or in CPD
• What is the evidence for use of Reflective Practice outwith these?
• Uptake outside mandatory requirements is low
• Evidence that there are many barriers
• RP is out of fashion: doesn’t fit with current trends
General barriers to Reflective Practice

• The underlying approach at odds with dominant rationalist narrative – Habermas (1998)

• Skills may be difficult to acquire “I believe that reflection is more intellectually challenging than is generally recognised (Francis 1995: 229)

• Might lead to unresolved internal conflict, cognitive dissonance, awareness of contradictions, troubling knowledge (Bray and MacLellan 2019)

• Professionally risky (Luft and Roughley, 2016); Critical Reflection may be viewed negatively by organisations (Lynch 2014) - Who is the reader ....? (see Boud 2001)
Specific barriers to journals and logs in RP

• Journal writing is time-consuming (Langer 2002)

• Journals are too unstructured (or occasionally too structured!)

• The process is oriented towards the writing rather than the cognitive element of reflection itself

• Participants may have negative affect towards their experiences of the compulsory use of journals during training (some find reflection unhelpful and not relevant to learning: Stephens and Winterbottom 2010)

• Participants don’t know what do with them – ‘so what’

• [Note there are specific issues with assessing learning logs]
Part 2 A solution?: the condensed reflective diary (Lean Learning Logs) or Reduced Reflective Records

- For use by professionals ... or students, voluntary or assessed?
- LLL’s are very short, but still capture the essentials points
- Involve minimal writing, leaving more time for reflective process itself (we all reflect – but we rarely make time to record those reflections)
- Structured using Kolb’s experiential Learning Cycle
- Cumulative so can be used as based for longitudinal meta-reflection
The Lean Learning Log: Instructions

1. Select a learning event (something that you were involved in that made a significant impression);

2. Record in Circle 1 what you did – summarise in a sentence (two at the most);

3. Record in circle 2 your reflections - how you felt about what happened and your own role/actions (and any tensions between understanding and feeling) (again a sentence or two);

4. Record in circle 3 what you learned from these reflections – this could be in terms of your own practice, others’ practice, organisations, ideas, theories ..... a sentence or two;

5. In circle 4 record how this may affect your future behaviour (in the same event or more generally) (“I planned”);

6. In the box on the right: Date and Summarise the whole thing in a few words.

Note: entries should be short, but can be expanded if appropriate: they can be regarded as ‘gateways’ to larger, more extensive/deeper reflections
I did

I planned

I learned

I Reflected

Invitation: complete one now

Date:
Summary:
Over 6 weeks of term I completed 21 logs

1. **I did:** Assessing students practicing counselling skills (formative)

2. **I Reflected:** Dissonance: - was I too harsh & negative?/but I had to explain faults

3. **I learned:** Tutor has responsibility to give honest feedback but sometimes this will be painful to student.

4. **I planned:** Be more sensitive to individual student needs?

5. **Date:**

**Summary:** Teaching and assessment is difficult - walking a tight-rope between standards and student support!
Some meta-reflection on my logs

The dominant theme in the Log using Mezirow’s classification of Critical Reflection types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Log</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Summary (Mezirow 1998)</th>
<th>Redacted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Practice - student support</td>
<td>Subjective - Narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Practice - student support</td>
<td>Subjective - Therapeutic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Practice - Assessment</td>
<td>Subjective - Therapeutic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Subjective - Therapeutic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Practice - Teaching</td>
<td>Subjective - Systemic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Practice - Assessment</td>
<td>Subjective - Systemic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Action identified

Yes | Partial | No

Classification of Topics

- Research
- Organisational
- Practice - student support
- Practice - Assessment
- Practice - Teaching

Number of logs
My reflections on using Lean Learning Logs

• The logs were very quick to do – a few minutes ... as I had already done the ‘thinking’ (the cognitive elements)
• The structure helped me organise my thoughts
• It was relatively easy to extract the main points and create meta-reflections
• It was interesting to see patterns emerge from these meta-reflections: has helped in ongoing personal development
• The Logs became more interrogative, less superficial (more ‘critically reflective’?) with time
• Some Logs (4) led to useful, concrete Action Planning
Questions, issues, criticisms?

- Reinventing the wheel? Or ...
- ‘Reintroducing a neglected wheel with upgrades’?
- Use for individuals or groups (collaboratively) or organisations?
- Should reflection ever be compulsory?
- Possible developments – an App
- The Learning Log as therapy?
Part 3 Some research
Reflective Practice – awareness and usage within UHI
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Research questions

1 To what extent are academic staff aware of the University’s policy on Reflective Practice, and of the pedagogical theories underlying the relevance of Reflective Practice

2 To what extent do academic staff use Reflective Practice to reflect on their own learning and development as professionals,

3 To what extent to academic staff use Reflective Practice as a method of assessing students (for instance using diaries, journaling, logs.)

4 Is there potential for introducing new forms of Reflective Practice to enhance its uptake, for instance using video, audio, reduced, co-operative reflective records, Action Learning Sets and digital methods such as apps
Despite the centrality of Reflective Practice within educational thought there has been remarkably little research into the reality of how it is used by practitioners.

Method
1 Questionnaire to UHI teaching staff
2 Follow up semi-structured interviews

For more information contact rob.bray@uhi.ac.uk

Thank you
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