Reflective learning and assessment: a systematic study of reflective learning as evidenced in student Learning Journals.

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Abstract

This paper provides a summary of research undertaken to derive a critically informed but learner sensitive framework for facilitating the presentation and evaluation of reflective learning. The fascination with this topic arose in the context of teaching final year business undergraduates through the medium of learning journals. Initial research was undertaken to derive an analytical and empirical basis for orienting students and lecturers, to some of the key processes involved in reflective learning and the ways these can be displayed. This entailed journeying between the highly formalised language of theorists such as Van Maanen (1977, 1991) and Barnett (1992,1997) and the more loosely structured, everyday language of our students. The techniques of template analysis provided us with a methodological tool for deriving a framework, which is sensitive to both languages. An analysis of students' learning journals deploying the framework enabled the learning and teaching to be developed and thus, facilitated students' engagement with reflective learning.

Key words: Reflective learning; Learning Journals; Assessment

Introduction

Learning journals represent a move away from traditional teaching materials such as management texts which some suggest, '*tend to invite, endorse and reproduce a detached, instrumental and closed attitude*' (Knights & Wilmott 1999). The strength of the learning journal is that it can entice students to think in unconventional ways

(Fulwiler 1987) and provides an opportunity to both develop and capture reflection in the learning process (Moon 1999).

Against a backdrop of criticism of the ability of Business Schools to deliver the skills and competencies required by managers (Thomas & Anthony 1996), improving our understanding of an alternative method of management education would seem to be valuable. The learning journal may provide an approach that addresses concerns that students need a more critical appreciation of management (Reynolds 1998; Mingers 2000) and greater confidence and creativity. It purports to provide students with an opportunity to experiment with a range of discourses and allows an opportunity for students to reflect on experience. However, while there is wide support for the use of journals to promote reflection, there is very little attention paid to evaluating such techniques and little research evidence that specifies the means by which particular kinds of reflection are being demonstrated (Smith & Hatton, 1992,1993; Hatton & Smith 1995).

The focus of the study

The focus of this study is the 'Adaptive Manager' final year unit, on the BA (Hons) Business Studies Degree programme. The unit seeks to highlight the ambiguity and complexity of management, introducing more critical perspectives. It encourages students to engage in reflection on their industrial placement experience, the links between practice and theory, their personal development, learning, and anticipated career. Part of the unit assessment requires the completion of a Learning Journal. This type of assessment is innovative and not surprisingly, upon implementation, staff quickly realised that further research was necessary to find more effective ways of promoting and assessing reflective learning. In the first year of implementation we sought to develop our understanding of reflection, reflective learning and the

deployment of learning journals. Students' learning styles were also correlated with their ability to engage with the task. The research on learning styles is not presented here, rather this paper focuses on the derivation of a framework for presenting and evaluating evidence of reflective learning.

The process of deriving a framework starts with a review of the literature on reflective learning. The review enabled us to clarify the formal understanding of reflective learning, how this might be evidenced and to identify conceptual distinctions that might be incorporated in the framework. In reflecting on the literature, we were all too conscious of the esoteric nature of the language and the lack of a systematic interest (with the notable exception of Hatton & Smith) in the language of the learner. If the framework was to do its job and to facilitate learning, we needed to be sensitive to how students manage the task of presenting evidence and to develop a framework that was not only well grounded in formal conceptual distinctions, but would also be accessible to students. The second stage of the paper presents how we refined the initial, formally derived framework, in the context of our own students' evidence of reflective writing. The approach that we developed in handling this task came to approximate that associated with template analysis (King 1998).

The first stage – what do the theorists say?

In exploring the literature we drew on three main strands:

1. Reflective learning

2. Reflection in experiential learning and professional practice

3. Written evidence of students reflective learning

1.   Reflective learning

At a common sense level 'reflection' is at the heart of the learning process, yet the literature that links the two concepts is '*sparse or lacking in detail*' (Moon 2000:152). Morrison (1996) warns that 'reflection', has become something of a '*portmanteau term*' and its sense is over extended. Reflection and critical reflection, have been an integral part of teacher and nursing education; more recently the development of the 'reflective practitioner', has been incorporated into management education. However, in spite of the popularity of the term, some suggest that it is '*an illusionist charter*' (Harvey & Knights 1996); others conclude that the terms are often not clearly defined and embrace a range of concepts and strategies (Hatton & Smith 1995).

Two main lines of inquiry have influenced the development of the literature on reflection. Both build on the work of the educational philosopher, Dewey (1933) and the sociologist of knowledge, Habermas (1971). The first line of inquiry, exemplified in different ways by Van Maanen (1977, 1991) and Barnett (1992, 1997), focuses on levels of reflection developing a hierarchy. The second explores the role of reflection in experiential learning and professional practice (Boyd & Fayles 1983; Boud et al 1985).

Levels of reflection

Van Maanen (1977; 1991) demonstrates the complementarity of Dewey's and Habermas' work and applies the Habermasian scheme of knowledge constitutive interests (1977) to argue for curriculum development that questions assumptions and aims for emancipatory ideals.

In the earlier work, his concern is mainly with reflection as a tool for curriculum construction. He proposes three levels at which reflection operates: technical, practical

and critical. Technical reflection is concerned with effectiveness and efficiency in achieving ends, which are not open to criticism. In practical reflection the goals and means are questioned and it is acknowledged that meaning is not absolute but constructed through language. Critical reflection incorporates aspects of the previous two but also includes consideration of moral and ethical criteria (Adler 1991) and locates analyses in the wider socio-historical context (Hatton & Smith 1995).

In his later work, Van Maanen (1991) adopts an approach similar to Dewey, seeing reflection as a mental action, where the individual distances himself/herself from events to view them more objectively. He organises reflection into a cognitive hierarchy that has been applied by others (Moon 2000; Wedman & Martin 1986; Hatton & Smith 1995).

First level

- thinking and acting in a common sense manner on a daily basis, clear separation between reflection and action

Second level

- more specific reflection focused on events or incidents

Third level

- reflection on personal experience and that of others, which is more systematic (Moon 2000), with the aim of arriving at an understanding through interpretation.

Fourth level

- reflection on the manner of reflection, thinking about the nature of knowing (meta-cognition) and the conditions that shape experience.

The third and fourth level is similar to the use of reflection implied by Habermas's interpretive and emancipatory knowledge constitutive interests.

Mezirow (1991) adopts a similar approach, but draws a distinction between reflective and non-reflective action, identifying three types of non- reflective actions: habitual action, thoughtful action and introspection and two types of reflective action. The lower type of reflective action is sub-divided into content and process. The higher level of critical reflection he calls 'premise reflection'. This echoes Dewey's 'considered reflection' and Habermas's 'emancipatory' reflection.

Barnett (1992: 1997) in contrast to Van Mannen, applies the views of Dewey and Habermas to the higher education sector. Building on the work of Schon (1983), he initially develops the idea of the learner as a reflective practitioner incorporating four concepts:

1. '*the action*' – engaging in a forms of reasoning to make knowledge claims and develop personal knowledge.

2. '*interpersonal engagement'* – reasoning as a form of interpersonal engagement where a 'critical listener' or audience provides substance to the learners views where they '*withstand the critical scrutiny of others'* (p195).

3. '*reflection in action'*- '*some kind of internal dialogue…What is presented on paper is simply the current stage of the student's reflection-in-action, the reflection occurring during the action of conducting he internal dialogue*' (p195).

4. '*Knowledge-in use*' – the existing knowledge that a student brings to the learning situation, distinct from Schon's professional practice.

Barnett subsequently (1997) draws on Habermas to formulate a more radical and emanicipatory vision of reflective practice. This encapsulates the concept of 'critical being', embracing a reconstruction of 'self, and world' and includes a transformatory critique of knowledge. His later work involves a fundamental criticism of Schon, '*where the student's inner self is constructed more by external agendas…than by the student's own personal aspirations, values and hold on the world*' (1997:100), which following Habermas he now regards as embodying an instrumental and technical discourse.

Barnett's application of Habermas differs from Van Maanen in that it demonstrates how critical reflection can support radical change and empowerment and introduces the affective domain. Barnett (like Habermas) does not provide much detail on the concept of reflection. His account is largely theoretical and does not specify the pedagogical approaches that facilitate his vision (Moon 2000). While he recognises this, one is left wondering what needs to happen in the learning process to ensure that 'the state of critical being' is achieved.

Barnett's notion of 'critical being' draws attention to an aspect that is underdeveloped in Van Maanen's work: the affective level. The significance of the affective level was recognised earlier by Hullfish and Smith (1960), who highlighted that imagination and 'sentiency' play a role in good quality reflection.

Boude, Keogh and Walker (1985) also argue for the inclusion of emotion in the reflective process suggesting:

"*Reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations*." (Boude et al., 1985:19)

This is an important corrective to the Cartesian tradition which, as Brockbank & McGill (2000) note, has tended to give sovereign status to the rational and cognitive over the emotional and physical, in explanations of reflection. They argue for a more 'holistic' approach, which gives due consideration to all the senses, and embraces personal experience through dialogue.

The inclusion of the 'affective' aspect and the role emotion plays in reflection would also seem to be useful as reflection not only triggers emotion but emotion can affect reflection, a factor that is not considered much in the literature.

This section has provided a basis for understanding reflection and helped to identify some of the key features of a framework for investigating reflection. The next section considers how the concept of reflection has been developed in experiential learning and professional development. Although this literature does not explore in depth the specific notion of reflection, it locates reflection in the learning process.

2. Reflection in experiential learning and professional practice

Reynolds (1998:186) in an argument that stresses the value of critical reflection in management education, suggests that the work of Kolb (1975) and Schon (1983) have been most influential because:

1. their focus is '*readily applicable to learning in and from work experience*' and

2. less emphasis is placed on the more abstract theorising associated with formal education, '*whether implicitly* (Kolb) *or explicitly* (Schon)'.

At the heart of both concepts is the notion of reflection and interpretation of experience.

Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984) is widely cited however, it is often stripped of his elaboration of the work of Dewey and Lewin and reduced to little more than the stages of the cycle (Reynolds): experience; reflection; conceptualisation; experimentation. Whilst Reynold's comment may be a valid, Kolb does not say much about the process of reflection (Boud et al 1985) except in relation to the other three parts of the cycle. Thus, Kolb notes that in the process of learning, the actor becomes more detached from the action, moves to the role of reflective observer, creating a new form of experience that becomes the subject for reflection at each stage of the cycle.

Moon (2000) drawing on the work of several writers (Boyd & Fayles, 1983; Atkins & Murphy 1993; Boud et al 1985; Steinaker & Bell, 1979) from different theoretical traditions, identifies the following stages of the reflective process and links these to Kolb's cycle. Each stage in the process is highlighted in bold print.

All accounts start with an **experience** with a **need to resolve** before the learner can move on. Boyd et al pick up on Dewey's notion of a problem ('discomfort') and Atkins & Murphy talk of 'uncomfortable feeling'', at this stage. Boyd & Fayles and Steinaker & Bell suggest that there is then a phase of identification and **clarification of the issue** that leads to the stage of **reviewing and recollecting** (Boud et al & Steinaker), involving returning to the representation of the experience (Steinaker & Bell). (Moon

suggests that at this point the processes of clarification, review and recollection are likely to interact). Boud et al & Atkins & Murphy incorporate the stage of **reviewing the emotional state,** stressing that emotion plays an important role and can block or facilitate reflective processes. At the **processing of knowledge and ideas** stage, Boyd & Fayles talk of 'openness to new information' and Boud et al suggest ideas are re-evaluated, although Moon comments that none of the writers pay much attention to Kolb's 'abstract conceptualisation' stage. The outcome of reflection as '**resolution**'' is apparent in all the papers however, Boyd and Fayles go further, as do Steinaker & Bell suggesting possible **transformation** (in the Habermassian sense) and **possible action**.

The stage model is useful in that it relates the process of reflection to learning. However, Moon suggests that what is less clear, is where reflection ends and learning from experience begins. Does reflection cease once the individual moves out of reflective mode and on to the next stage of the cycle? It seems questionable, as Kolb seems to imply that reflection can be completely separated from experience. If one follows Brockbank & McGill (2000), then experience and reflection mutually elaborate one another.

Schon's research (1983, 1987), in contrast to Kolb, expands upon the process of reflection and develops the notion of reflective practice. Schon distinguishes 'reflection-in and reflection-on' action. He regards reflection in action as something that is understood almost at an unconscious level and embedded into performance. Reflection on practice entails reflection that is post-event and mostly involves verbal description of the event and its meaning. It is this more restricted sense of reflection that this research is concerned with.

Another area of professional practice that has embraced reflection is counselling therapy. While the term 'reflection'' is not used explicitly within this field (Moon 2000), counsellors use techniques to stimulate reflection seeing reflection as a 'deficit'. Thus, the client is redirected to their own words and history, to find and improve meaning (see Branmer et al 1989). Moon suggests that in a 'non-deficit' situation, reflection enhances personal growth by increasing self-awareness (Winter 1995; Harvey & Knights 1996); can lead to a sense of personal worth (Progoff 1975); and improve understanding of personal limitations (Eraut 1994) leading to self-improvement and empowerment. Reflection can allow the individual to integrate new and old knowledge (Walker 1985); perhaps 'rechaining' (in the Dewey sense) perplexing issues in the light of represented information.

Whilst the benefits of reflection in terms of health and personal development are acknowledged, it is also important to recognise that for some, reflection can be 'self-confirming' (Harvey & Knights 1996), rather than transformatory.

3. Written evidence of students' reflective learning

Few researchers formally detail how students' reflections are evidenced in written form; the notable exception is the work of Hatton & Smith (1995). They created a framework for evaluating activities within teacher education, as a basis for developing the learning experience, to foster reflective practice. Their analysis of written reports revealed three types of writing:

- 'descriptive reflection' – of events

- 'dialogic reflection' – involving some stepping back, exploration of reasons and consideration of different viewpoints

- 'critical reflection'- exploring reasons in the wider sense for an event and locating this in broader ethical, moral, social or historical contexts.

Although their research found few examples of critical reflection their framework seemed to offer a useful way to analyse reflective writing. Their 'types' resonate with the levels identified by Van Maanen and Barnett.

Summary and emergence of an analytical framework

The review of the literature on reflective learning enabled the following key points to be identified:

- Reflection may involve a hierarchy of levels moving from the common sense, technical level to the emancipatory/critical, which may include locating reflection in the wider political structure, meta-cognition and 'premise' reflection (Van Maanen; Barnett; Mezirow).

- Reflection can include the affective as well as the cognitive levels (Barnett; Hullfish & Smith; Boud et al).

- Reflection may entail 'reflection-on-action' and/or 'reflection-in-action' (Schon). (This study looks at the former only).

- Reflection may encompass content, including specific reflection on events and process, including interpretation, questioning and re-evaluation (Mezirow).

- Reflective learning embraces several stages, moving from a need to resolve a perplexing aspect of experience, through an extended process of clarification to

resolution, self-improvement or self-confirmation (e.g., Steinaker & Bell; Progoff; Harvey & Knights).

- Reflection may involve an active process of bringing experience into consideration and the creation of meaning and conceptualisation (Brockbank & McGill).

- Evidence of reflective writing may involve dialogic reflection, i.e. 'stepping back', exploration of reasons and consideration of different viewpoints (Hatton & Smith)

These formed the basis for the subsequent analysis of the students' journals.

The second stage: developing an analytical tool.

Initially the intention was to pursue a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967) and the first read was the *'initial attempt to develop categories which illuminate the da*ta' (Silverman 1994:46). The students' accounts were read, noting general content, how they characterise themselves and the nature of experiences described. However, the approach was inconsistent with a purest view of grounded theory, where there is no a priori determination of themes but in order to remain sensitive to the distinctive features of the writing, content analysis was also inappropriate. The oscillation between a priori items and the features discoverable in the text, became consistent with 'template analysis', as developed by King (1998).

The analytical framework (template) was refined through several phases. The **first phase** was concerned with checking whether it was possible to identify students learning styles from the data. Journals were labelled, according to whether a learning style was evident using Honey & Mumfords (1992) Learning Style Descriptors. In some cases it was possible to identify one strong style, in others there was evidence of several. At this stage, a colleague, who was familiar with the Learning Style

Descriptors, read the journals to see if he could perform a similar activity, our interpretations matched closely. The predictions were checked against students learning style scores and found that they were fairly accurate. This exercise confirmed that we might pursue a line of inquiry that suggests there is a relationship between learning style and how students undertake the reflective task. However this was later abandoned when further tests proved inconclusive and highlighted issues concerning the validity of the Learning Styles Questionnaire.

Phase Two was designed to refine the framework developed from the literature review. This involved grouping together the characteristics identified on the basis of, '**levels of reflection'**, the '**processes**' and the '**outcomes**'. This provisional analytical framework provided a sensitizing device for rereading the journals.

The third phase involved checking a revised framework against the data. The notion of **levels** was useful but it soon became apparent that Hatton & Smith's classification was difficult to operationalise because of its interpretation of '**dialogic**'. A review of their examples, revealed that they used the term strictly to indicate differences of views, e.g. '*on the one hand…on the other hand..*'. There was not much evidence of this style in the data. There was however, evidence of a more sophisticated form of writing than the classification 'descriptive' allows for, e.g. '*I start with the death of my father…it was a heartbreaking experience, but also a significant learning experience. It has led me to ask what is important to me and how this experience relates to my career aspirations*'. Clearly this does not embrace a socio-political critique, and therefore, does not satisfy the criterion for '**critical**'. The closest match was Van Mannen's concept of '**Understanding through interpretation**, thus, 'dialogic' was replaced with Van Maanen's term.

'**Processes**' of reflection initially, included just two elements: '**Perplexity and questioning**' and '**emotions**'. Later '***standing back'*** and '***painstaking analysis'*** were added on the basis of Honey and Mumford's descriptor for a 'reflector'.

A further trial showed that '**Specific reflection'** and '**understanding through interpretation'** did not allow for differences between students to be captured adequately. The objects of reflection in the journals included **events**, **self**, and **task**, by including these, the focus of '**specific reflection'** was sharpened. In **interpreting events** some adopted a single focus others developed themes across a range of events, either from their own or others' perspectives and so the framework was adapted accordingly. In identifying this it seemed appropriate to include Dewey's notion of '**chaining**' to describe how events/themes were linked.

A further test against the data demonstrated that the framework accounted for just one **outcome**, '**critical reflection'**. The students exhibited a variety of outcomes in their journals and we needed to be more sensitive to this but handle them economically. A further section '**outcomes**' was thus, added to the framework.

The first iteration of the framework is presented in Appendix A. This version includes our early attempt to incorporate students' learning styles and allowed us to insert a 'y' for 'yes' on a spreadsheet, each time we found evidence of an aspect of reflection. Fifty journals were analysed using the template and the initial research related their learning to learning style. At the same time detailed analytical accounts of sub-sets of journals were constructed (an example is provided in appendix B).

The analysis allowed us to:

1. Evaluate the framework and consider how to reduce the complexity and provide guidance to students

2. Consider how to improve the learning experience so that students could achieve deeper learning.

Evaluating the application of the Framework and facilitating students' engagement with reflective learning

An effective analytical framework should enable lecturers to distinguish similarities and differences, capture these in a verifiable way yet, remain sensitive/faithful to, the meanings expressed by those being studied. The elements of the framework should not overlap but must also provide economy to facilitate the ordering of complex data, while still allowing for sensible comparisons to be made. The initial framework succeeded in displaying common features that allowed systematic similarities and differences to be determined. However, some of the elements were not sufficiently fine grained to differentiate differences of approach and in some cases it was necessary to devise a way of distinguishing these. For example 'painstaking analysis' might have been better elicited by drawing out a continuum rather than simply noting that it was evident.

Comments on our analysis are presented below under the main headings deployed in the framework. The results informed changes to the learning and teaching and these changes are also presented.

Levels of reflection

The analysis demonstrated that all students were able to engage with the reflective task and very few students displayed merely descriptive writing. However, while evidence was provided of 'specific reflection', students generally found 'interpretation', more difficult and many students, engaged in reflection from what we could only describe as the 'inside out', that is they interpreted events from their own perspective and did not seek to validate their interpretation. They also left important questions unanswered and made statements such as '*I won't go into this'*.

The experience of working through the qualitative data with a colleague confirmed the value of engaging in dialogue as part of the reflective process. We decided to introduce the concept of a 'critical friend' (Hatton & Smith) in the learning process. This has now served to widen the perspectives adopted and encouraged students to explore issues and challenge blocks (Francis 1995), before they close down.

Few students initially engaged in the higher level of critical reflection identified by writers (Barnett, Habermas, Van Maanen) but this was not surprising given that it was not explicitly suggested to them. The introduction of more critical perspectives into the learning & teaching has now encouraged this and clearer examples in lectures, have helped them acknowledge the wider social/political/historical structures. We have also introduced asynchronous computer conferencing discussions to extend the learning from lectures and to allow for more critical debate to be introduced.

Processes

In deploying the framework the analysis of 'chaining of events/perspectives' and 'perplexity and questioning' could have benefited from finer distinctions. This would have

simplified the process of recording and analysis and made the framework easier/more economical to use.

Some students limited their reflection to one event; others considered several events but limited their consideration to their personal perspective. Fewer students were successful at 'chaining events' but some did this very well, weaving an account across complex timeframes and demonstrating 'painstaking' analysis. We realised that we needed to give clearer direction in the introductory lecture and early seminar exercises. This has brought about some improvements, as has the introduction of a 'Frequently asked questions' section on the Learning and Teaching Web-site.

Whilst the expression of 'feelings' was explicit in some of the journals, several quickly passed over experiences that carried an emotional weight, leaving the significance unexamined and a sense that emotions remained unaddressed. It would seem important that students are provided with a framework that enables them to vent feelings but also allows some focus (Hoover 1994). Some students reveal issues in their journals that are sometimes personally painful and developments are required to ensure that this is supported sensitively. We are currently researching the counselling literature further, to find strategies to accomplish this. Providing guidance for the 'critical friend' role would also seem appropriate.

Where students explore the personal and private, it is very important that assessors are sensitive, respecting the rights of students not to disclose. The extent of personal disclosure also raises questions about the assessment of reflective writing. Does one favour rigorous analysis and objectivity in reflection over sensitivity, creativity and personal insight? Is the incorporation of theory valued more than practical experience?

Is taking risks by exploring very personal issues to be valued more than critiquing the academic?

Outcomes

The outcomes for some students were limited in as much as their reflection served to confirm that which they already knew, offering no further perspective. Many students stressed the practical outcomes of reflection whereas slightly fewer emphasised 'transformatory' outcomes, in the personal sense. In analysing evidence of 'transformation' it became apparent that for some individuals the experience had radically changed their way of thinking about themselves and management. 'Transformation' therefore, should allow for this but should distinguish between this kind and radical transformation in the socio-political sense, of which there was less evidence.

Assessment of reflective learning also raises the issue of whether the 'outcome' is contrived for the recipient with the power to assess, rather than an honest account. An analytically neutral stance was adopted in respect of the veracity of accounts but as one student raised the question of impression management, it is important to ask whether students consciously adopt a style that they think is expected by the lecturer. And does this matter? While we would to encourage students to explore the transformatory potential of their reflection, we have subsequently adapted the framework to accommodate a variety of outcomes under the heading of, 'learning and change.'

Features identified that were not anticipated by the original framework

Approaching the task

A number of systematic differences were noted in the way that students tackled the task. These have informed changes to delivery.

In the first implementation many students commented on the '*difficulty*' of reflection and '*not knowing how to write*' in an '*unstructured form*'. Some students however, did not convey any sense of difficulty in addressing the task, or of problems with this kind of writing. If they mentioned the task at all it was to summarise '*what it is'* and then they started their account. These students did less well than those students who explored the problematic of the task, demonstrated 'perplexity and questioning' and went on to engage in deeper reflection.

Our response has been to provide structured opportunities to practice reflection, and to give the students earlier experience of reflective writing. In developing the teaching we now provide illustrative examples of journal extracts. A critical feature of those who did well was not just their ability to stand back and carefully analyse their experience, but they were able to reveal new learning, through the analysis and synthesis of a variety of experiences and perspectives. They also sought evidence for their perspective. An example of how this might be achieved now provides useful guidance.

A minority of students displayed creativity in their narrative structures: creativity of expression has been facilitated, by encouraging students to consider different narrative forms and genres. We are attempting to introduce a range of writing techniques (e.g. double entry writing, letters to a friend, use of metaphors) and to encourage students to reflect on novels and films. This has enhanced creativity and recent journals have

incorporated artwork, photography, and the use of metaphor and experience depicted in map form. Students have also begun to explore techniques to incorporate comments of 'critical friends' in different coloured ink and fonts.

Characterisation of personality

A noticeable feature of the journals, not anticipated by the framework is the extent to they reveal personality features that resonate with Eysenck's (1982) work on extraversion and introversion. Many students identify shyness, confidence and fear of failure and then examine how these have changed. Words such as 'worry', 'nervousness' and 'fears' are frequently mentioned and the 'need for recognition' is a common feature. This contrasts markedly with those who stress the positive aspects of their personality, their outgoing nature and strong control of events. This will be subject to further research where reflective learning is correlated with personality types.

Using the framework for assessment

The framework was helpful in enabling students to gain a clear understanding of how reflection might be evidenced but we found it difficult to apply in the assessment context. There were simply too many elements to handle and check. We have subsequently reduced the elements to seven for assessment purposes.

The original framework has been used to help students to develop their reflective imagination, sensitivity to events and reflective writing skills. A reworked version of the framework was made available to students and has been used as a template for giving more explicit feedback (Appendix C). This simplified the process of assessment but still did not provide guidance on marking. In 2002 the criteria were developed and simplified further (Appendix D).

Further application of the framework has allowed us to identify a broader range of reflective writing practices and seek ways to enhance the support given to students. However, a tension needs to be maintained between providing more structure and enabling students to experience ambiguity and perplexity (Gibbs 1995). We have followed the suggestions of Morrison (1996) and attempted to introduce more structure in the early stages and less, later.

Our experience of reflective learning but specifically the journey between the literature and students' reflective writing has allowed us to incrementally refine and enhance. The journal evidence demonstrates that the approach is valuable and that, similar to other studies (Fitzgerald 1995), most students find the journal useful and '*welcome the opportunity to reflect on experience'* and write in a '*personal*' and '*non-academic way*'.

CONCLUSION

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

(T.S. Eliot (1944: 48) The Four Quartets)

This paper has presented a summary of research that aimed to explore reflective learning and the development of assessment criteria for reflective writing. As part of the investigation, through a process of conceptual and empirical work, an analytical framework was developed to capture the nature and structure of reflective writing. This

framework was successful in eliciting similarities and differences, in an informative and structured way. The framework and subsequent analysis have allowed marking criteria to be developed and have informed improvements to the learning and teaching experience.

Our research began as an exploratory investigation and the journey often raised more issues than it resolved. However, we have continued to learn and improve our practice. The learning journals provide evidence that the approach has been worthwhile. Students are developing real critical ability, have a much stronger sense of 'self' and a positive appreciation of the opportunity to engage with reflective learning. Many students comment on the value of the approach; some students find the experience transformatory, and most welcome the opportunity to explore creative forms of writing. Some students do find reflection painful and comment negatively on the process however, many of these come back after graduation and say that experience of managerial life has allowed them to fully appreciate what we are trying to achieve and the value of reflective practice.

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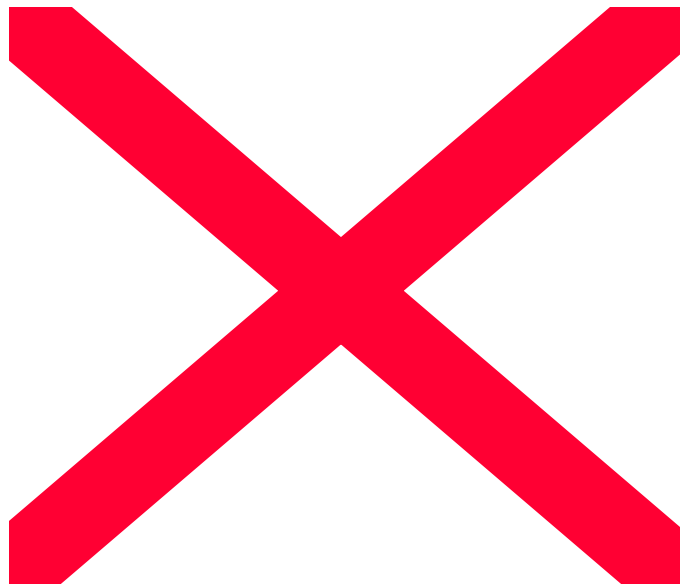
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Appendix A Original Framework

Appendix B: <u>Analysis of key themes elicited from the journals</u>
Group A
A common theme in these learning journals is the influence of specific experiences on personality. This is a key organising principle, a leitmotif informing their accounts.

Evident in all of these journals were concerns about shyness, confidence, needs for recognition and fear of failure.

 '*I always used to be a extremely shy and quiet person when I was younger'*.
'*Experiences that have influenced my view of management and career are the key points in my life which have contributed to my now more confident personality*'.

 '*I learnt so much about perseverance and confidence'* where previously she had had to deal with '*feelings of failure*' and the view that '*caution is my weakness'*

Four of the five journals start with a reflective comment on the nature of the task with which they are engaging. The comments indicate that the students are standing back from the task and characterising their feelings about it and sharing these with the reader. In so doing they are treating their own writing as an object, indeed one might suggest they are doing reflexivity.

A state of perplexity is evident in three of the journals while the other two refer to 'surprising discoveries', For example:

'*I was intrigued as to what had changed my aspirations'* and then goes on to explore '*how my father's experience was shaping my choices''* and puzzles over this.

The journals characterise events in the manner of a discovery experience.

 '*I had not realised my motivation for certain past events until now….'*

'*It has highlighted for me various stages…where my personality and career aspirations have been developed, before I was only subconsciously aware of this.*'

' *once I started reflecting on my current aspirations I was surprised what I detected….it was revealing to link this event* (father's redundancy) *in my learning experience to my attitude and aspirations and present self…'*

They also refer to a conversion experience with a transformation from a lack of confidence and shyness to confidence and sociability, as these quotes from different journals illustrate.

 '*My first appraisal highlighted how I had improved over the last six months. They had noticed how I held myself at work, how I approached people and how I got on and solved problems…Once I knew that people thought I was doing a good job this improved my confidence no end*'

'*I have never come across personal reflection before…and to be honest I was very sceptical about it, however, this exercise has made me realise that I have been looking back at myself and discovering things….'*

On average students explored 7-8 events drawn from different aspects of their lives. The events that bring about change are carefully explored. The chaining of interpretations is deployed within a systematic, integrated framework.

In most cases the accounts reveal aspects of their emotional state, such as '*nervous*', '*worried*', '*fearful*', '*less frightened'*. These are related to a variety of experiences but with the family

experience playing a dominant role, e. g. '*parents as teachers*', '*father's redundancy*', '*liquidation of father's company'*, father being '*a man I always looked up to and respected*' etc.

Discussion of outcomes, as can be seen in previous quotes, are primarily cast in terms of vocabulary of personal transformation, with some reference to practical learning.

Group B
Seven students were identified as being predominant activists.

At the start of their journal give only a brief consideration of the task, indeed one gets a sense of impatience from their writing, and then they describe specifically, what their focus will be:

'*When first asked to do this journal…I did not understand the whole concept and wondered what I would do it on…I am sick and tired of replying, 'I have no idea'* (in response to questions about career)*…I have therefore decided to reflect on what sort of career I may wish to follow*'.

'*When I was told I would have to prepare a learning journal, it took me back to when I was 13…writing the daily entry into my secret diary'* and then goes on to say she will now undertake a '*grown-up version'* in relation to career plans.

After the clear direction at the outset the journals expand on the theme specified.

In '*taking stock of life's experiences'* it is evident they tend to focus more on self and focus on a limited number of events (average 2 events per journal) interpreted mainly from their own perspective. In characterising their personality they emphasise positive attributes and their own agency, with the exception of the journal that achieved the high mark for the task.

'*If I were to reflect on my personality, which incidentally I will be, I would assess myself as being creative, thinking of new concepts and often challenging the perceived norm…..this is my chance to write how I want!*'

'*I would use words like extrovert, outgoing, possibly outrageous!'*.

'*I have a will of my own!… I have a burning desire….it was down to people like me to build new companies!'*

'*you'll be reading about my Leisure empire in the FT in 20 years time*!'
'*I am more independent and flexible than the majority of people…personality will get you somewhere in life!*

The use of exclamation and question marks would seem to indicate that they are conscious of writing for an audience and writing for effect. One gets a sense of extravert personalities who thrive on challenge in both the language they use and the events they describe: '*something I can flourish on… I have forged a view..'*
'*I found it impossible to sit at my desk all day…I have to be in regular contact with people…need to retain my interest…don't want to live a life like my mother'*
'*watching everyone have a great time and the thrill of knowing that if it wasn't for you they wouldn't be there*.'

'*I don't like feeling restricted…I've always thought the same thing- you only live once'* (whenever faced with a decision).

In considering events they tend to limit their reflection for example:
'*to cut a long story short*…'
'*I'm not trying to sound like*…'
'*but what did I really know then*? (no further exploration).

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Questions raised often remain unanswered and attempts to 'chain' events and perspectives are less apparent. The analysis tends to be superficial and there is no sense of perplexity as an animating force in the discussion. One student relates their personal experience to the wider social structure in a critical way and another mentions gender issues very briefly. Generally, feelings are not expressed or explored.

The process of reflection for two, is episodic and the outcomes they mostly describe are instrumental or inconclusive:

'*sporadic…short bursts ….the ability to reflect is the ability to self-appraise and if one has this ability there's no limit to ones potential development*.'

reflection is '*identifying that you have learnt something*' identifying '*mistakes in skills*'
.
Those who scored high marks
The two 'top' marks will be considered in detail, then general consideration will be given to the rest.
They both adopt highly original approaches to the organisation of their journal.
One draws on the symbolic aspects of money to reveal how his personal values have changed and he does this by identifying three 'lessons' which he has acquired through encounters with others. These lessons are chararcterised as '*interruption*s' causing him to question and reinterpret his framework. The interpretations are linked to *the 'power of a koan*' and values. He employs theory on reward and cites academic writers on the psychology of money.

His handling of timeframes is complex, moving back and forward, demonstrating how further insight allows him to reinterpret, exploring process as well as outcomes. Personal meanings are linked to world views (Zen), and there is critical awareness of the impact of social/political structures and insightful comments regarding work.- '*so often we build our world around our position, no matter how much you believe that your work is what you do to make your money, pour work makes you who you are, because that is where you put your time*'. '*a prisoner's way of counting days…the job would release him and pay him for his freedom*' (on retirement).

The approach and focus adopted in the other journal is described as having arisen out of the contrasting impact which two presenters had on their audience. The writer attributes the success of one presenter to the ability to create a '*dialogue*' and an interest in the use of language provides the organising principle for reflection. The events move from work to non-work and back again '*from the dojo to the office*' shifting from interpretation of theory, to practice, back to reflection on the practice and the identification of communication techniques that are related to manipulation and control.

The ability to establish perplexity and questioning is evident in these two and all the other 'high mark' journals. Another common feature is the high numbers of items they incorporate into their reflection and the way they link perspectives together to order complexity. They reflect on events, self and the task and explore feelings and issues from a range of perspectives, integrating theory with evidence of analysis and synthesis of experience, moving between theory and practice.

Three located their reflection in the wider socio-political structures.

Experiences often caused writers to go back and reevaluate earlier perspectives:
'*although the personality test confirmed my suspicions, it was through these experiences that I too could recognise them...*'

The ability to handle timeframes is a common feature. The outcomes of reflection for some are seen as the start of a process: '*I have begun to consolidate my thoughts and ambition*' but most provide evidence of transformation:

Appendix C
Simplified framework used for feedback
Adaptive Manager: <u>Learning Journal Feedback</u>

Student:	Comments:
1. Descriptive Writing	
• Of events	
• About self	
2. Specific reflection	
• On events	
• On self	
• On task	
3. Understanding through interpretation involving standing back	
a) one event/one perspective	
b) one event/multiple perspectives	
c) several events/one perspective	
d) several/multiple	
e) chairing of events/perspectives	
4. Critical reflection	
• Links perspectives to historic/social/political	
5. Processes	
• Painstaking analysis	
• Complexity and questioning	
• Talking of feelings	
6. Outcomes	
• Self confirming	
• Practical learning	
• Resolution – coming to terms	
• Transformation	

Appendix D: Most recent criteria for marking learning journal
The Learning Journal represents 35% of the mark
In marking your work the following criteria will be deployed:

- Reflection on a range of experience communicated effectively
- Development of themes and chaining of events
- Critical regard for evidence
- Thoroughness of analysis and level of interpretation
- Looking from the 'inside out and 'outside in'
- Locating personal biography in social/historical/economic/political structures
- Impact of reflection on learning and change.