

Group reflective diary

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Rationale

Assessment is an integral feature of the work of all higher education institutions. The importance of assessment as a high-stakes practice is increasingly recognized, with a movement towards alternative practices in addition to the widely used traditional assessment practices. In educational institutions, the most visible assessments are summative; specifically, assessment that attempts to summarize the learning outcomes at a certain point in time, usually at the end of a course. This method creates a measure that reviews the learner's achievements and has no other purpose but to describe what has already been accomplished: the outcome of learning.

Formative assessment is described as assessment *for* learning. It refers to all the activities performed by teachers and students, which provide information that can be used as feedback to adapt the teaching and learning activities. Formative assessment uses a variety of assessment tools. The tool must fit the type of assignment that the students are asked to perform (Pellegrino, 2010). Peer assessment and reflective journals are appropriate tools that offer students opportunities to participate not just in structuring the learning but also assessment. These forms of students' participation in assessment are based on dialogic and dynamic relationships between teachers and students and are referred to as 'shared assessment'. In these forms of assessment, the teacher's role is to clearly define criteria for success (with the students), and plan learning activities and assessment tasks in order to identify the learning outcomes. The students' involvement in their own learning assessment helps them to obtain descriptive feedback that allows them to improve their own learning processes.

A major challenge raised by ASSET experts relates to applying these assessment tools in large classes. The current work is aimed at suggesting renewed assessment tools (reflective diary) that can be used in IL and GE practiced learning environments with *large heterogeneous classes*.



Theoretical background

Reflective Diary

According to O'Farrell (2017), one of purposes of assessment can be defined as: Assessment AS learning: assessment that encourages students to reflect on their own learning and increase their 'meta' skills so that they become aware of how they learn. One active learning method to promote the development of 'meta' skills is a **reflective diary**, also referred to as **learning diaries/journals**, or **learning/response logs** in the literature.

The aims of reflective diaries are to express the observation of the learning process and evidence of reflection (Wallin & Adawi, 2017). An essential benefit of the learning- response log is the creation of an environment where students feel more free to express their concerns and to experiment with learning (Perritt, 1997). The goal is to encourage students to explore their thoughts. Also, reflective diaries are helpful in integrating the material of learning – such as that from different modules or theoretical and practical learning. They allow students to reflect on their beliefs, values, experiences, and assumptions that influence their learning, as well as their development and progress over time (Minott, 2008). Reflective diaries can focus on learning content or learning behavior (Fabriz et al., 2014), which can be translated into activity prompts and self-monitoring prompts (Davis, 2000). While activity prompts help students to improve their work, self-monitoring prompts help students to think about their learning approaches and processes, and thus make them visible (English & Kitsantas, 2013; Wallin & Adawi, 2017).

A reflective diary may be: structured, semi-structured, or non-structured. It depends on the subject and the aims of teaching and learning. The potential problems for application of the reflective diary as a formative assessment tool are mainly related to teacher workload and the time that they have to invest in checking and feedbacking such assignments when a large group of students are involved. To tackle this challenge, it is recommended to ask the students to submit a full journal and request that they identify only 2 to 3 entries, which would be marked (Farrell, 2007). As a conclusion, applying reflective diary in pedagogical practice in HEI helps students to analyze their own learning process, identify gaps, and plan for improvement. Step by step, students improve metacognitive and self-regulation skills.



A good overview of practical approaches and factors to consider when implementing reflective diaries is provided by Moon (2003). The purposes of reflective diaries are:

1. To record experience
2. To facilitate learning from experience
3. To support understanding and the representation of that understanding
4. To develop critical thinking or the development of a questioning attitude
5. To encourage metacognition
6. To increase active involvement in, and ownership of, learning
7. To increase ability in reflection and thinking
8. To enhance problem solving skills
9. As a means of assessment in formal education
10. To enhance reflective practice
11. For reasons of personal development and self-empowerment
12. For therapeutic purposes or as a means of supporting behavior change
13. To enhance creativity
14. To improve writing
15. To improve or give 'voice'; as a means of self-expression
16. To foster communication; in particular reflective and creative interaction within a group
17. To support planning and progress in research or a project
18. As a means of communication between one learner and another.



Learning environments

Reflective diaries are appropriate methods to promote learning in learner-centered courses in HEIs fostering students' participation and learning activities. Thus, these methods are in particular fruitful, to be used in various learning environments employed by GE and IL HEIs, such as: Problem-based learning (PBL), or Project-based learning (PjBL). The following is a concise background of each learning environment.

1. Problem-Based Learning

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a teaching-learning method based on the idea of using problems as the starting point of acquisition and integration of new knowledge (Walker, Leary, Hemlo-Silver, & Ertmer, 2015). This is not a new teaching method. Some claim that it is an updated version of the dialectic method which is attributed to Socrates and Plato and includes characteristics of inquiry-based learning based on Dewey's experiential learning pedagogy. The goal of PBL is to place the learners at the center of the teaching-learning-assessment activity and to give them full responsibility for their learning. The students become independent learners who integrate experience with multidisciplinary knowledge acquisition. The learners are active partners in the learning process, initiate it, and contribute to its content.

Although there are a number of models to applying PBL, several basic principles that characterize and define this approach are recognized (Walker & Leary, 2009): (1) Presenting the learners with an ill-structured problem that encourages them to think about possible reasons for it and various ways to solve it; (2) PBL is a learner-centered approach, in which the learners are partners in determining the learning needs. The learners identify the central elements of the presented problem, understand the gaps between the knowledge they have and the knowledge required to solve the problem, and acquire the missing knowledge to complete the task; (3) The teacher's role is to guide the learning process. At first, the teacher guides the learners with meta-cognitive questions, but this diminishes with the progression of the process. Teachers can also provide lessons and content that focus on shaping the learning process, in which the learners need to continue



the task successfully; and (4) The problem must be authentic and connected to field-related praxis or to events that happen in the 'real world'. These problems are by nature multidisciplinary, and the learners are expected to investigate many topics related to a variety of areas in order to reach a sustainable solution and to discuss the content from multi-perspectives.

2. Project Based Learning

In this form of learning, students are provided with opportunities to construct knowledge by solving real problems through asking and refining questions, designing and conducting investigations, gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information and data, drawing conclusions, and reporting findings. PjBL immerses students in a teamwork environment, where they work in cooperation towards commonly agreed upon goals (Blumenfeld, Fishman, Krajcik, Marx, & Soloway, 2000).

Bender (2012, pp. 65-66) described six steps that provide a structure for a teacher's initial foray into teaching via PjBL:

1. Introduction and team planning the project: review anchor and reflection on a driving question; class-wide brainstorming on specific research questions; assign teams for the process; set goals and develop time lines; division of labour on research questions (everybody has a role); assignment of required artefacts and products.
2. Initial research phase: gathering information from various sources such as the Internet, interviews with locals, newspapers, books, media; specific topics might be offered; evaluation of information.
3. Creation, development, initial evaluation of presentation and prototype artefacts: storyboard development; begin downloading videos, images; develop prototype (initial) presentations and artefacts; group evaluation of the prototype; formative evaluation of prototype artefacts.
4. Second research phase: seek additional information to develop prototypes more fully; mini-lessons or specific topics might be offered; revisions of prototypes and storyboard with new information.
5. Final presentation development: storyboard revision/additions.
6. Publication: final class-wide evaluation (peer-evaluation); publication of project or artefact.

Target audience: undergraduate, graduate students.



Tool description

How to use a reflective diary/group reflective diary in PBL or PjBL

Prompt Questions Bank

The prompting questions in Table 2 are based on the work of the Learning to Learn Project (2002). The dimensions and items were elaborated by this ASSET group (of “learning to be”). This tool can be easily adapted to group reflective diary by using the appropriate items or by adjusting them to a group assignment. The bank is organized according to the following dimensions:

- **Awareness** of one’s learning experience
- **Evaluation** of the experience
- **Regulation** in attitude and behavior for better performance and more fruitful experience

Awareness of one’s learning experience

Awareness of the current state is a necessary prerequisite of any conscious improvement. Students often do their study without knowing much about their current state of learning (e.g. how they learn, why they learn, etc.). A reflective learning journal is a good place for one to start noticing one’s learning experiences.

Evaluation of the experience

Between being aware of one’s learning experience and taking steps to do better is a stage where judgements must be made. An evaluation of the current state identifies problems and creates a felt need for change. It is sometimes useful to provide some criteria for evaluation. For example, in the prompt question “Do I understand what I have learned”, *understanding* is a criterion for the evaluation, in contrast to *memorization* that some students believe. (To specify criteria, we could refer to studies, which grasp the process of learning (e.g. Kärner & Kögler, 2016), referring to emotional and motivational states, and perceived socio-psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000) etc.

Regulation of one’s attitude and behavior

Knowing how one is doing does not lead to improvement unless one is willing to make some adjustments accordingly. This is where remedies are generated and alternatives considered. Writing the plans down also helps students commit to doing them. Questions at this stage are very important, as they help students look



at the situation in a positive light, rather than leaving them in despair which the discovery of problems at the evaluation stage has created.

In the Prompt Questions Bank, the Learning to Learn Project (2002) provides two sets of focuses: one explores the learning experience itself, the other thinks about the learning experience in relation to one's academic, professional and personal development. This work elaborates on the previous tool by adding a third set of focus: "**Think of the assessment experience**". The description of the sets is provided below.

The first set "**Explore a learning experience**" deals with the specific and the immediate. This helps improve their performance. The focuses of reflection were elaborated and revised to include the following dimensions:

- **Cognitive**: with relation to: **Content** – of the learning experience, and **Reasons** – for the learning experience;
- **Behavior** - during the learning process;
- **Emotion** – during the learning experience.

The second set "**Think of a learning experience in relation to...**" concerns long-term issues and widening the perspective of students, helping them see the relevance of and appreciate what they are learning. It engages students to think of a learning experience in relation to their:

- **Academic development**
- **Professional development**
- **Personal development**

The third set of questions "**Think of the assessment experience**", relates to the process of assessment and to the students' reflection about this reflective activity.



Table 2. Reflective diary prompting question taxonomy

| Dimension 1 | Explore a learning experience... | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Awareness | Evaluation | Regulation |
| Cognitive | <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What have I/we learned? - What were the topics of the activity? - What were I/we required to do? <p>Reason</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why should I/we learn this? (What was the purpose of the activity/lesson?) | <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do I/we understand what I/we have learned? - What else do I/we need to learn? <p>Reason</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do I/we think about these purposes? - What other purposes can be suggested? | <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What can I/we do in order to gain a better understanding? -Where can I/we find more information? <p>Reason</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What experiences can I/we gain from this activity to improve my/our learning skills? Were my/our learning milestones and goals mostly met, and how much did I/we deviate from them if any? |
| Behavior | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did I/we learn / do it? What strategy have I/we used in learning this topic? (wrote everything down, learned with others – in a group) -How have we worked as a group? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How effective is this strategy? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Is the way I/we do it is the best way? -How can I/we make this strategy more effective? |
| Emotions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did I/we feel during the activity? - What did I/we like or dislike? - How did my group feel in my opinion? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Why did I/we feel this way? -What has contributed to these feelings? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How can I/we improve my feelings towards the activities? - Who can I/we approach to manage my feelings? |



| Dimension 2 | Think of a learning experience in relation to... | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Awareness | Evaluation | Regulation |
| Academic development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What obstacles have I/we encountered? -What have I/we found easy to do? -What can be related to prior knowledge I/we have gained? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What is the source of the obstacles? -How have I/we linked this activity to my prior knowledge? -What can be done to better relate the activity to the students' prior knowledge? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How can I/we remove those obstacles? -What techniques can I/we use to link my/our learning to prior knowledge and skills? |
| Professional development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can I/we transfer the knowledge and skills you learned during the activity to my/our professional work? What knowledge and skills will be useful in my/our professional work? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How the knowledge and skills I/we learned can be adapted to my professional work? (What should be added/omitted?) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What experiences can I/we gain from this activity to improve my/our professional development? |
| Personal /group development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What have I/we learned from the activity in the personal level – about myself? -What did I/we learn were my greatest strengths/ areas for improvement -What moments was I/were we most proud of my/our efforts? -What personal/group characteristics have I/we discovers? -What challenges have appeared in this regard? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What does this learning experience tell me/us about my/our potentials, and myself as a person/ ourselves as a group? -What's the one thing about myself/our group above all others I/we would like to work to improve? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How can I/we use these insights for my/our future personal/group development? |



| Dimension 3 | Think of the assessment experience | | |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <p>-Now that it's over, what are my/our first thoughts about Reflective Diary? Positive or negative?</p> <p>-If positive, what comes to mind specifically?</p> <p>-What were some of my/our most challenging/powerful moments?</p> <p>-What most got in the way of the progress of writing, if anything?</p> <p>-What were some of the most interesting discoveries I/we made while working on this Diary?</p> | <p>-Why some moments were challenging/powerful?</p> <p>-How can I/we improve my/our self-assessment by using a reflective diary?</p> <p>When did I/we realize that I/we had come up with my/our final Reflective Diary? (How did I /we evaluate the diary?)</p> | <p>How will I/we incorporate this assessment experience in life?</p> |

According to the Learning to Learn Project (2002), it is important to motivate students to engage in reflective journal keeping; it is important to show them that the teacher cares and the department supports this continuous assignment, and that it is a worthwhile thing to do. A few suggestions are provided:

- Clearly explain what a *reflective* learning journal is.
- Mention the benefits of keeping such a journal.
- Give them a briefing in the administrative particulars of this exercise, e.g. length per entry, assessment criteria, etc.
- If resources allow, provide students with a nice simple binder to keep their journal entries.

Assessment of the reflective diary

The assessment of the reflective journal is a struggle between giving the freedom of writing and guaranteeing the willingness to write. Some teachers resolve this by checking for completion rather than in-depth grading. If a grade is to be given, a protocol of assessment would be a useful guide for students. An example of such a protocol has been provided by Moon (2003).

The learner demonstrates awareness and understanding of the purpose of the journal, using the purpose to guide, selection, and description of the event / issue on which to reflect.



The learner identifies her or his own purpose for the journal or journal entry.
The description of an event or issue is present and provides an adequate focus for further reflection. It includes: 1) a statement of observations- comment on personal behavior; 2) comments on reactions / feelings.

Additional ideas: Comments on context are present. The learner demonstrates:

- 1) the introduction of (any) additional ideas to the description;
- 2) further observations;
- 3) relevant other knowledge, experience, feelings, intuitions
- 4) suggestions from others;
- 5) new information;
- 6) formal theory;
- 7) other factors such as ethical, moral, socio-political context.

Reflective thinking is present.

The learner demonstrates:

- 1) the ability to work with unstructured material;
- 2) the linking of theory and practice;
- 3) the viewing of an issue / event from different points of view;
- 4) the ability to 'step back' from a situation.

Students' perceptions of the reflective diary (Farrah, 2012)

(For quality assurance purposes)

In this questionnaire the student indicates the extent to which he/she agrees with the following statements regarding his/her views about journal writing by putting a tick in the appropriate box using a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree.



The items:

1. Reflective Journal writing helped me to talk about my experiences.
2. Reflective Journal writing helped me to express my ideas and opinions.
3. Reflective Journal writing helped me to respond to my thoughts and feelings.
4. Reflective Journal writing stimulated my critical thinking skills.
5. Reflective Journal writing was a way of thinking to explore my learning.
6. Reflective Journal writing was an opportunity to gain self-knowledge.
7. Reflective Journal writing helped me understand what I am learning.
8. Reflective Journal writing allowed me to describe what I understood.
9. Reflective Journal writing offered me a chance to develop and reinforce my writing skills.
10. Reflective Journal writing enhanced my communication skills.
11. Frequent journal writing increased my creativity.
12. Journal writing motivated me to write more.
13. I did not understand what I was supposed to write in my journal.
14. I did not have enough time to write in my journal.
15. Reflective Journal writing is a waste of time.
16. I find it easy to write in my journal.
17. Reflective Journal writing should be encouraged/continued.
18. I would like to share with the class what I wrote in my journal.
19. Overall, this was a worthwhile experience.



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Appendix 1

Formative assessment tool Reflective Diary

Students do KWL before and after each lecture in their own diaries and at the end of the course, they answered the following questions, which were read and answered by the teacher:

Self-Reflection Questions for Learning

Now that it's over, what are my first thoughts about Reflective Diary? Positive or negative?

1. If positive, what comes to mind specifically? Negative?
2. What were some of the most interesting discoveries I made while working on this diary?
3. What were some of my most challenging moments and what made them so?
4. What were some of my most powerful learning moments and what made them so?
5. What is the most important thing I learned personally?
6. How will I incorporate this experience in life?
7. When did I realize that I had come up with my final Reflective Diary?
8. How do I feel my solution relates to real-world situations and problems?
9. What most got in the way of my progress, if anything?
10. How did I help others during this process? How do I feel I may have hindered others?
11. Were my milestones and goals mostly met, and how much did I deviate from them, if at all?
12. What did I learn were my greatest strengths? My biggest areas for improvement?
13. What would I do differently if I were to approach the same problem again?
14. What moments was I most proud of my efforts?
15. What's the one thing about myself above all others I would like to work to improve?
16. How will I use what I've learned in the future?



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