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Journal writing can be used for teaching and research in higher education in both on-site and distance-education modes.

Journal Writing in Higher Education

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Issues of teaching and learning, long accepted as important within adult education, are rapidly becoming significant in higher education. Nevertheless, journal writing, often referred to as a learning diary, is a teaching and learning technique that has not received a great deal of attention in the literature of higher education, despite the fact that diary writing is an old and established practice. In fact, in a rather rapid survey of the current higher education literature, I found very few articles on the subject; among the exceptions are those by Morrison (1996), Bush (1999), and Jasper (1999). Naturally, I refer to these works, but a great deal of what I discuss here is drawn from my own professional experience.

Before I became an adult educator, I was a teacher educator. It was in the early 1970s, in an early phase of my academic career, that I began to introduce reflective writing on practice to my own students. It is something that I have encouraged in different ways, at different stages, since that time. Journal writing, however, is useful inasmuch as it “may help adults break habitual modes of thinking and change life direction through reflective withdrawal and re-entry” (Lukinsky, 1990, p. 212). Jasper (1999), however, does point out that some students who keep reflective learning journals have found this process threatening; consequently, the introduction of this teaching and learning technique, as Fenwick points out Chapter Four, should be undertaken with some sensitivity.

Journaling can be used more widely than as reflective practice; it can be a teaching, learning, and research instrument in the fields of higher education. My own concern with this form of practice was based on necessity, since as a teacher-educator, I was expected to supervise students’ teaching practice in schools in the geographic catchment area of the college at which I taught. Academic staff were expected to observe students teach at least twice a week

during their eight weeks of teaching practice in their final year, and each member of staff usually had about four students to supervise. However, staff were also teaching the students in the other years of the college program. This meant that while the students were teaching in schools, academic staff's visits were curtailed. In fact, I was able to observe only a maximum of about two lessons a week for each student, which provided very little basis on which to assist them with their teaching skills or to assess their ability to be a teacher.

The college expected the students to provide a lesson plan, setting out aims, objectives, content, methods, and evaluation, for each lesson that they taught. It was from these plans that I got the inspiration to ask students to write about their practice. I asked the students for long, detailed evaluations of their teaching sessions rather than the short, cursory evaluation notes that they frequently made. Students had traditionally placed the emphasis on their preparation rather than their reflections.

I explained to these student teachers that although I would observe them teach twice a week, I would not always have the time to read their lesson plans thoroughly before they taught. Rather, I would read them after the lesson, and I would place greater emphasis on their own extensive evaluation of each lesson they taught. In other words, their notes formed the foundations for supervisory tutorials. Instead of my writing a few lines of evaluation, I was asking the students to write pages of self-evaluation. I asked them to evaluate every part of their lesson in terms of their practice and the plans that they had prepared. I asked them to write about what was good as well as what was not so good, how they had handled difficult situations, why they deviated from their planned lesson, and so on. As students began to write more, their evaluations gradually got sharper, and the tutorials became lively affairs. In fact, long before the ideas of learning journals or even reflective practice became the vogue, these students were writing their own learning journals.

Because the School of Educational Studies at the University of Surrey, where I teach, has always had an initial training course for educators of adults, I continued to use reflective practice whenever I trained them. We worked with a variety of professional groups: traditional adult educators, nurse and midwifery educators, and even teachers of young adults.

Reflective practice found its way into the educational vocabulary with the publication of Schön's *Reflective Practitioner* (1983), a book that has changed the way many people think about their practice and has led to many innovations in teaching and research. At the same time, my own very early experience with long evaluative reports written by the students about their own practice was the time in my own academic career when I began to question the traditional relationship between practice and theory. This eventually led to my writing *The Practitioner Researcher* (Jarvis, 1999), in which I tried to work out something more about this relationship—but this happened only after I had begun to get students to use learning journals in their own doctoral research.

Journals in Undergraduate and Postgraduate Education

Morrison (1996) notes that since 1990, the University of Durham has required students to keep their own learning journal throughout the whole of their academic program at the university, although his own research was conducted with higher degree students. Indeed at Durham, the learning journal must be used as part of a compulsory assignment, requiring students to draw on data from the journal and reflect on them in terms of their own actions and their personal and professional development, although the contents are always confidential to individual student. The journal serves two reflective purposes. First, it helps students to become reflective learners, recording data about reading, study habits, and attitudes. Students are also invited to write about their own personal development; that is, they can record information about their increasing knowledge and their increasing ability to identify and articulate issues, and they can reflect on important decisions that they have taken since they enrolled in the program. Second, students can examine their own self-development and their own feelings of empowerment. In this regard, Morrison (1996) cites the work of Prawat (1991) to demonstrate this fact. Morrison notes that when reflective practice prospers, "it is seen as by many students as a major significant feature of their development in all spheres" (p. 328).

Bush (1999) records that he kept a journal while teaching adult student nurses about "spirituality and spiritual care in nursing practice" (p. 20). His entries, which were made within six hours of teaching and reexamined within two days, illustrate how he was grappling with both the teaching of the subject and the mature learners whom he was teaching. He recorded his thoughts about the teaching and the participation of students in this rather emotive but significant topic and concluded, "The keeping of a journal provided the educator with an opportunity to connect thoughts, feeling and action and relate them to what was happening now, as opposed to writing about what has already happened. . . . It encouraged the author to trace the development of any emerging interest and provided a personal account of any growth with a factual reference, that was repeatedly examined in order to create some personal meaning" (p. 26). As a result of his experiences, Bush (1999) has decided that in future courses, he will also ask students to keep their own journals about the program.

Jasper (1999), in a research project on the use of journaling that used grounded theory, discovered that all the students who used journaling thought that they had changed and developed as a result. However, she also discovered that one could not assume that students knew how to write a reflective journal; these skills had to be taught. Once the students had acquired the skills, however, journal writing could be used as a learning strategy, and it became an instrument for both personal and professional growth.

The Personal Use of Journals in Postgraduate Distance Teaching

I have been involved with learning journals in distance and mixed-mode delivery professional education. The first use is based on the idea of reflective teaching and learning through the medium of traditional distance education, and the second is about relating practice and theory in mixed-mode delivery, professional, continuing education.¹

One of the traditional criticisms of distance education is that there is a tendency for the delivery of the teaching materials to be didactic, and much of it is. However, it is possible through the use of journals to make the course reflective and almost interactive. The department in which I work at the University of Surrey introduced distance-learning master's degree programs internationally in the early 1980s. They followed what has now become a rather traditional format of textbooks, study guides, and assignments, but more recently in my own courses, I have introduced the learning journal. I have used the learning journal in two different ways: to help students see how their own ideas are changing and developing as the course proceeds and to test their practice against the theoretical ideas to which they have been introduced.

Both the prescribed textbooks and the associated study guides are provided by the School of Educational Studies, although learners are encouraged to read more widely. At the beginning of the course, I suggest to the students that they start a learning diary, and I inform them that they will be given exercises and activities that can be usefully undertaken in such a learning journal. Two examples will suffice here. First, in a module on theories of learning, students are asked at the start of the course to record in their learning diary their own definition of learning; they are informed that they will refer to this definition frequently. As the students examine different theories and theorists, they are asked at different stages to write down their current definition of learning or to revisit their original definition and revise it in the light of their current understanding. In this way, students can trace their own learning through the program, becoming critically aware of their initial assumptions and developing other insights.

Second, since the department has students from around the world, we try not to be culturally imperialistic and expect learners from other cultures to accept Western scholarship unless it is valid in their own situation. Consequently, students are told that they should not accept uncritically what they read; when we give them activities or ask them questions about the Western theories they are studying, they should be critical and try things out in their own practice. If they work, then they might discuss in their learning diaries why they are valid. If the ideas do not work, their practice is not necessarily wrong, but they might want to consider the reasons that the Western theories seem inappropriate for their own practice. In this second exercise, the relationship between theory and practice is problematized

because there is no assumption that a Western theory has any validity for non-Western societies. Naturally, this view brings into question the traditional Western assumption, prevalent since the Enlightenment, of a universality of knowledge. It also acknowledges Foucault's idea of the power of the dominant discourse (Sheridan, 1980) of Western theoretical approaches.

In both examples, the journal is a reflective learning tool based in the cognitive domain. However, in a recent professional continuing-education course, for a master's degree for management consultants, the learning journal was used in a different manner. This course has a mixed-mode delivery in which there is a set textbook, but the study guides are written for each module of work rather than based on the textbook. In this situation, the practice becomes the foundation for study, because the study guides are written by practitioners, although they contain a great deal of theory. In addition, the learners are professional practitioners who have had considerable professional experience and are taking this course in their spare time while they work. They were asked to base many of their reflections on their practice. This example of work-based learning uses journals as one means of learning in practice. However, practice is not merely cognitive; therefore, the learners are asked to include attitudinal and emotive dimensions in their reflection. The journal helps practitioners to focus on the wider aspects of their practice, such as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998), beliefs, and attitudes. Because this was a mixed-mode delivery course, the learners had occasional face-to-face study days in which they were asked to bring their journals and raise issues that had occurred in their practice and their studies. Their journals, however, remained entirely private; they were not seen by academic staff or fellow students unless the writers privileged others with access.

The Use of Journals in Research

As qualitative research is gaining acceptance in research in the education of adults, the use of the journal in the research process is becoming more widely recognized. For instance, in all forms of anthropological studies, researchers have always had to keep field notes (see Tandon, 1981, as an example of how the journal might be used), and I have had educational students conducting doctoral research in different societies and with people of different cultures. Their field notes form the record of their research findings. Moreover, action research (Carr and Kemmis, 1986), participative research (see Eldon, 1981, as an example), and practitioner research (Jarvis, 1999) are approaches within the qualitative domain of research that doctoral students increasingly are using. Their own record of the events becomes part of their research data. Practitioner researchers are frequently using their own practice as a research site, and their own involvement is part of the research process. In recent years, I have had doctoral students using journals in a variety of research situations.

A nurse educator who worked with me tried to understand how the subject of care might be taught to nursing and midwifery students. As part of her research, she spent twenty days as an observer in different types of care situations. She also was encouraged to keep a journal of her observations and reflections on the caring processes during this period. Her notes became the basis for the subsequent interviews that she conducted with the carers, so that she could ask quite incisive questions about specific care situations. In this way, she was able to probe the carers' understanding and reasons for what they were doing. She kept notes of the interviews as well, and by synthesizing her journal and the notes that she took during her interviews, she was able to understand more about the carers' own understanding of the relationship between practice and theory, more about reflective practice itself, and begin to understand how care can be learned, if not taught, in a formal mode. The journal became a significant part of her research data in the final presentation of her thesis. (In Chapter Five, Gillis gives other examples of how the nursing profession is using learning journals.)

Keeping a journal also became very important in a piece of action research relating to the teaching of art to adults that another doctoral student undertook. Many adults come to art classes to learn to draw and paint through copying already produced works of art rather than learning to become creative artists themselves. Trying to get them to change their approach to art is a difficult process, especially since these classes have to be financially self-supporting. Losing dissatisfied students can put the classes' viability at risk. But merely teaching students to reproduce other people's art can be less than satisfying for art teachers; consequently, some give up teaching. A doctoral student, who was also the head of an art department, kept a journal about the way that a creative art degree was introduced and the cognitive and emotive reactions of the students and his own staff involved in the process. A full learning diary was kept, both of his own experiences and those of his students and staff that he was able to ascertain over the period of many months. These entries became data on which interviews with staff were conducted and also the issues on which a focus group of art teachers concentrated. This approach highlighted many problems that are prevalent in adult education in the United Kingdom at this time, but since this in-depth piece of research focused on one college, he was only able to frame hypotheses about teaching adults art in the wider society.

The final piece of research to which I want to refer here is another doctoral study. Seeking to understand more fully all the aspects of the role of human resource development personnel, another of my doctoral students kept a journal of everything she did and everything people said to her about human resource development in the performance of her professional role. This study entailed far more than merely arranging training courses. The journal highlighted the amount of time she spent performing roles as diverse as needs analyst, strategist, administrator, consultant, counselor, and

even spokesperson for management. Her journal not only helped her to understand more fully her role in her own doctoral research, but it became the basis of a handbook on human resource development that she and I subsequently wrote (Hargreaves and Jarvis, 2000).

In all of the research that I have described, the phenomenon under investigation is not some object lying outside the being of the researcher; rather, it is about making meaning of lived experience that cannot be replicated. The researchers are either recording and making meaning of their own experiences or interpreting the experiences of others. In all of these cases, the researcher is an interpreter and the reflective journal a means for recording and analyzing data; it is both research and lived experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Conclusion

Although this chapter contains a great deal that is autobiographical, it nevertheless reflects the practices of others with whom I have discussed the education of adults, and it is also in line with the literature on the subject.

In higher education in the United Kingdom, there is an increasing emphasis on record keeping, especially records of students' progress. Although the purpose is often portrayed as managerial, there is another sense in which such records might form the basis for some academic staff to keep their own journals. However, the fact that this approach is perceived by many to be a managerial exercise and a paper chase might inhibit the development of reflective journal writing among faculty.

Writing full, reflective journals is a time-consuming process, and the lack of extra time of many academics might also inhibit this development. There is little record in the literature regarding the amount of time that needs to be invested in this process, but I recall from my earliest experiences that students lacked the time to write the full evaluations for which I was asking. It is significant that Jasper (1999) does not mention time as an important issue in writing reflective journals, although this was not the focus of her research.

Nevertheless, keeping a journal is not only a useful learning exercise; it is essential to some forms of research. Keeping journals illustrates that the relationship between practice and theory is problematic and encourages critical reflection in different approaches to teaching and learning. Using reflective journals might be even more useful in lifelong learning as data are now being downloaded from the Web in greater amounts, without any guidance as to their validity.

Above all, writing learning diaries is an invaluable tool that can lead to personal and professional enrichment and empowerment. It should be practiced and taught much more widely in higher and continuing education.

Note

1. This approach to learning practice reflects ideas that have been developed by the Human Potential Development Group in the School of Educational Studies, a member of which I worked with in the development of this course.

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