

STUDENTS' LEARNING THROUGH REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

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The aim of the article is to get acquainted with the types of journals used in education to help students to learn. The paper presents some ways of fostering student's learning through reflective journaling. It also describes the key aspects of a new method ARRIVE cycle in connection with teachers preparation to use reflective journals in a classroom. The article also presents self-assessment in reflective journaling and students' need to self-evaluate their learning process. Reflective journaling as central to students' self-evaluation is described as a means of fostering metacognition.

Keywords: reflective journaling, reflection, self-assessment.

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Introduction

In Lithuania there has been a great interest expressed in the implementation of self-directed language learning. However, there has been much disappointment in this field as the lack of teacher's control and too much independence lead students to dissatisfaction with their own studies and unstructured learning. That is why **the object of the research** was students' learning through reflective journaling. Having chosen this object, **the aim of the research** was to find out how reflective journaling can help to improve the learning process. **The methods of the research** include the analysis of methodological references, a quantitative research, statistical data analysis (SPSS- statistical package for social sciences). The paper explores **the problem** of fostering learning a foreign language using reflective journaling. Therefore, the main **task of this article** are: 1) to present the main types of journal used in learning a foreign language; 2) to describe the reflective teaching cycle which is called ARRIVE; 3) to present examples of reflective journaling used to foster students' learning.

There have been some definitions of "a journal" discussed in a teaching/learning environment. One of them offered by Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2001): "a record of experiences, ideas or reflections kept regularly for private use" will be used in this article. In education the idea of using journals for private use could be argued. Writing a journal can have a few reasons: personal development/learning and teacher's control/assessment. Learning journals could be of various shapes and size: tapes, video, electronic form, paper. Generally speaking what distinguishes a learning journal from other writing is that it focuses on ongoing issues over time and there will be some intention to learn from either the process of doing it or from the results of it. This suggests that it is not, simply, an events diary or a record or log. Very often a learning journal is described as a tool for reflection. We think that we reflect all the time but in language learning reflection on a specific topic or task leads to better understanding and memorization.

Types of journals used in education

Amy Whited (2005) cited the following types of journals:

1. A reflective journal – reflection -on-acti-on.
2. A speculation about effects journal-reflection-for-action.
3. A double entry journal- writing quotations from a text and responding to them.
4. A metacognitive journal – discussing one’s own thinking and learning.
5. A synthesis journal – application in a practical setting of what was learned and done.

Angela B. Peery (2005: 101) adds a free writing journal in which a person writes in a stream – of consciousness style in response to a prompt or other stimulus. The author also supplies this list of journal types with a collaborative journal in which different people make their own entries. The latter type is especially useful for the development of a positive classroom atmosphere and collaborative work with the emphasis on learner’s autonomy, responsibility and self-directed studies.

There are some learners who reflect only when there is an incentive to do it or when guidance or conditions in their environment are conducive to reflecting. What are the main reasons for writing this kind of journal? There could be as many answers as tasks. In terms of purposes for journals, a perusal of the literature might suggest that every time a learner chooses to write or is asked to write a learning journal, a different purpose for the process is given. In a review of over a hundred papers on journal writing (Moon 1999) found around eighteen purposes for journal writing. It is important to note that most journals will fulfill more than one purpose, and that the purposes set by a tutor are not necessarily the same as those that will be fulfilled or perceived by a student.

Firstly, students learn because journal writing is a process that accentuates favorable conditions for learning.

It produces intellectual space in which they can think.

- It also encourages independent learning – learners have to write their own journal and they can monitor the process and do it at their own pace.
- Writing a journal also provides a focusing point, an opportunity to gather thoughts and to see the whole system of the gathered information.
- Learning from a journal enhances learning skills because it forces the learner to cope with piles of information or material.

Secondly, journal writing encourages reflection and reflection is associated with deep approaches to learning, or with deep learning. In deep learning, the intention of the learner is to develop a personal understanding of the material and to relate it to what is already known. The freedom of journal writing can support the learner’s attempt to understand.

Thirdly, writing in a journal encourages metacognition, it develops metacognitive skills which are generally divided into two types: *self-assessment* (the ability to assess one’s own cognition) and *self-management* (the ability to manage one’s further cognitive development) (Rivers 2001). Successful learners employ a range of metacognitive skills and effective teachers of young adults attend to the development of these skills. Hacker (1998) concludes that definitions of need include “knowledge of one’s knowledge, processes and cognitive and affective states” and “ability to consciously monitor and regulate one’s knowledge, processes, cognitive and affective states”. It is likely that much free writing in journals will contain some metacognition and if journals are structured, then metacognition can be built in.

Lastly, the act of writing is associated with learning or the enhancement of learning. There is a considerable literature on the relationship of writing to learning, how it forces a learner to clarify his or her thoughts, how it is a powerful form of feedback to the learner, how it focuses

attention and tells the learner if s/he does or does not understand.

A new method to foster reflective journaling

The enhancement of learning through reflective journaling has been facilitated by introducing the reflective teaching cycle which is called ARRIVE. This model has been identified by Burke and Short (1991) and includes bringing life experiences to one's writing; having uninterrupted personal engagements with reading/writing, collaborating, reflecting, revising and presenting; examining one's own learning; and then getting involved in other personal engagements. The word ARRIVE has been chosen by Angela B. Peery (2005) to mean the very beginning of any process- arrival at school, arrival at the goals we have chosen, and etc. The letters ARRIVE stand for:

A – ASSESS

In this stage you as a teacher have to assess not only the students' learning, but your own teaching as well.

R – RESEARCH

The teacher researches the problem. It is advisable for a teacher to have a menu of research methods from which to choose to determine students' needs.

R – REFLECT

The teacher must evaluate everything new she has been exposed to and determine what she is ready to tackle in the classroom before entering it.

I – INNOVATE

The teacher identifies how she is going to change instructions. These changes are often based on the researches that have already been carried out, on the teacher's own feelings and needs.

E – EVALUATE

This is the last stage, the stage of evaluation. At this stage the teacher evaluates her work, the application of some particular methods and makes a SWOT analysis. Journal may take place

at any step in the ARRIVE cycle. The most usual forms used recently are: electronic journals, verbal journals (meetings in which people speak in turn on a specific topic).

There are a lot of techniques used to describe the implementation of learning journals to facilitate reflection. Of particular use is the list of the different purposes of using writing journals, including ideas such as:

- To record experience;
- To develop learning in ways that enhances other learning;
- To deepen the quality of learning, in the form of critical thinking or developing a questioning attitude;
- To enable the learners to understand their own learning process;
- To facilitate learning from experience;
- To increase active involvement in learning and personal ownership of learning;
- To increase the ability to reflect and improve the quality of learning;
- To enhance problem-solving skills;
- As a means of assessment in formal education;
- To enhance professional practice or the professional self in practice;
- To explore the self, personal constructs of meaning and one's view of the world. To enhance the personal valuing of the self towards self-empowerment as a means of slowing down learning, taking more thorough account of a situation(s);
- To enhance creativity by making better use of intuitive understanding;
- To provide an alternative 'voice' for those not good at expressing themselves;
- To foster reflective and creative interaction in a group.

Usually reflective journaling is used for the purpose of the improvement of learning which is considered a formative assessment and sometimes as a summative assessment for the purpose of assessing students' made progress. Journaling could be a register of the subject

knowledge as a file compiled by an individual for the particular subject but it could have the form of registering the experience, knowledge and assessment of all subjects, if this form is acknowledged at an institution. On the other hand, journals as self-reports could include all the forms of progress registers described above, learning journals, logs, learning contracts and reflective diaries. Journaling stimulates critical thinking and helps students clarify ideas through discussion and debate. The level of discussion and debate within groups of three or more and between pairs is substantially greater than when an entire class participates in a teacher led discussion. Students receive immediate feedback or questions about their ideas and formulate responses without having to wait for long intervals to participate in the discussion. This aspect of collaborative learning does not preclude whole class discussion. In fact whole class discussion is enhanced by having students think out and discuss ideas thoroughly before the entire class discusses an idea or concept. The level of discussion becomes much more sophisticated.

Entries in a journal can be made on a regular basis and the length of an entry doesn't mean the significance or quality. There could be various questions that help you to start a journal and reflect on your learning process or the progress that has been made. These are only examples presented in the webguru online to be used in fostering a student's reflection:

- Briefly describe a situation that occurred in lab this week that affected you as an individual or your team (if relevant) as a whole.
- Why are you describing this incident - did you experience challenges in meeting it? Did you exhibit strengths? Did you learn something?
- Is there an overarching issue or problem here? What is the potential value here?
- What were you feeling at the time of the incident?
- What were you thinking at the time of the incident? Did you have any preconceived ideas? New insights?
- What was good or bad about the situation?

Table 1. Student progress report (cited in *Teacher's Forms and Letters*. © Prentice-Hall, Inc)

Student Progress Report
Name _____ Date _____ Class _____
1. Since the last assessment, this student's attention in the classroom has _____
2. This student's homework has _____
3. This student continues to have trouble answering the following type(s) of questions that were on the last assessment: _____
4. When working in cooperative teams, this student's attitude and work is _____
5. This student's classroom participation has (increased/decreased) recently and shows _____
6. This student's (long-term projects/portfolio/journal) reflect the following. _____
7. This student needs more help at home in the following areas: _____
Comments: _____ _____
Signature _____

- (How) Has this experience challenged your assumptions, prejudices, or biases?
- What specific possible solutions have you been able to identify to the problem?
- (How) will this experience alter your future behavior, attitudes, or career?

Reflective journaling can take place at any step in the ARRIVE cycle. Table 1 is an example of a student's progress report made by a teacher. As it has been mentioned, the shape and form of a journal could vary from faculty to faculty, from institution to institution and even from teacher to teacher. Students can have any form of reflective journaling that is acceptable for them. As assessment is the formal outcome of learning process, the reflective journaling is considered here as a form of formative assessment not summative because they are described in the context of the improvement of learning. When keeping a learning journal, the emphasis is on making explicit and recording the learning that occurs. Reflective journaling, as the name suggests, is more concerned with demonstrating reflection on an experience.

Conclusions

Reflective journaling may accompany a programme of learning, work, fieldwork or placement experience or a research project.

Reflective journaling and portfolios are increasingly used in higher education as

means of facilitating or of assessing learning. They have many different purposes and the structure that is introduced needs both to relate to their purpose and to the style of the learner.

Reflective journaling used in ARRIVE cycle is a means of learning a language in a different way.

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STUDENTŲ MOKYMASIS PILDANT REFLEKSINIUS ŽURNALUS

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Reikšminiai žodžiai: refleksiniai žurnalai, refleksija, savęs vertinimas.

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