JOURNAL WRITING: IMPLICATIONS FOR FACILITATING REFLECTIVE LEARNING

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Abstract :

The act of reflection is the outcome of our efforts to comprehend the significance of what we have learned, the reasons behind our learning, and the process through which our knowledge has advanced. Furthermore, reflection is the process of connecting a particular learning unit to the larger picture of learning by utilising both their metacognitive (intuition, self-awareness) and cognitive (reasoning, knowledge) skills, and learners create their own meaning regarding situations. An organised reflection offers support so that the person may draw connections and make sense of their experiences.

A journal is a workable, organised, and intentional collection of pieces chosen work to reveal details about a person's mindset, development stage, and advancement rate over time. Students can write down their ideas and reflections regarding their individual learning experiences. Writing is the primary focus of journaling. This approach helps students become competent in taking care of their own learning and eventually grow into autonomous lifelong learners. Additionally, it promotes students to assess and reinforce their knowledge, appraise their achievements, and strategize future learning endeavours by drawing from previous learning encounters. An efficient way to encourage reflective thinking and learning is to write thoughts on learning and compile them into a personal learning notebook, often known as a reflective journal.

This paper examines the importance of journaling/ reflective journal writing in context of the academic life of students and facilitators to facilitate being an autonomous lifelong learner through a reflective learning strategy.

Index Terms: Journal, Reflection, Reflective Learning Journals, Facilitating Reflective Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Educators worldwide have recognized the richness of journal writing as a significant instrument for learning and assessment. Academic journals have undergone introduction, implementation, and modification in classrooms, resulting in their definition and redefinition as a repository of evidence pertaining to student achievement and learning journey. They are increasingly perceived as a medium or framework for examination, contemplation, and, most importantly, dialogue around students' work.

Reflection enables us to comprehend the knowledge we have acquired, the reasons for our learning, and the process by which we gained that specific increment of knowledge. Furthermore, reflection involves connecting a single instance of acquiring knowledge to the wider context of learning. Learning can be understood as a complex interconnection of thoughts that exist together (Moon, 1999). Learners derive their understanding of situations by utilizing their cognitive abilities (such as reasoning and knowledge) as well as their metacognitive abilities (such as intuition and self-awareness). A structured reflection offers a framework for individuals to comprehend their experiences and establish connections. It has the function of facilitating individuals' critical thinking regarding their learning process.

A reflective journal is a written composition that enables students to document their ideas and observations regarding their educational journey, which serve as a means of introspection, comprising a methodical and intentional compilation of chosen work that offers insights into one's mindset, progress and advancement over a specific timeframe. The primary emphasis of the reflective journal is on written composition.

Reflective journal writing fosters students' engagement in reviewing and reinforcing their knowledge, assessing their progress, and strategizing their future learning endeavours, empowering them to become self-directed learners and ultimately cultivating a lifelong learning mindset. Developing a personal learning diary (or journal) via the practice of writing reflections on learning is a highly successful technique for fostering reflective thinking and promoting learning.

The main focus of the writing journal is to reflect on one's learning journey in writing. This writing is in three different dimensions, viz. Describing, Analysing and Reflecting. In other words,

> We describe – what,
> Analysis – so what, and
> Reflect – then what

This demonstrates the continuous cycle of writing for learning and teaching that motivates students to assess their performance, plan their future education based on their prior experiences, and review and consolidate their prior knowledge in order to become self-directed learners who will eventually become independent lifelong learners. Reflective thinking and learning can be effectively promoted by writing reflections on learning and compiling them into a personal learning journal (or portfolio).

II.   REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Thinking of learning as a network of coexisting ideas, reflection serves as a structure for it (Moon, 1999). Learners create their own meaning about situations by utilising their metacognitive (intuition, self-awareness) and cognitive (reasoning, knowledge) skills. When learning something new, the student pulls from past experiences and attempts to relate it to the preexisting cognitive or metacognitive network of concepts. In addition to giving these connections structure, reflection helps us make meaningful and possibly unique distinctions between the significance of learning, salient characteristics, and background. Laurillard (1993) distinguishes between non-mediated (experiential) learning and mediated learning (with the assistance of a teacher). Through assisting the person in drawing connections between the theory and the constructs they have already learned, reflection can support mediated learning. By giving an individual a structureed framework to "unpack" experiences and think through the implications of what has happened, reflection can also improve unmediated learning. Deconstructing an experience and coming up with an explanation for what transpired is made easier by the structure of reflection. Students are assisted in reflecting and organising their understanding by structures in the form of thought-provoking questions.

The idea of reflection is not new. Dewey was among some educationists to explain about reflection on experience was Dewey (in Hughes, 2001), who described it as "looking back on what has been achieved to obtain meaning in order to intelligently deal with further experience" (Klopper, 2000). Dewey wrote about reflection and implication on experience as early as 1933. Boyd and Fales (1983), further says "reflective learning is the process of critically analysing and delving into a problem that has been brought about by an experience, which clarifies and creates meaning for the self and leads to a shift in conceptual understanding".

Proponents such as Schon (1991) contend that learning and teaching reflection are possible. There are numerous ways to instruct and enhance the reflective process. Writing and maintaining one's learning experiences in a journal (Atkins & Murphy, 1993) or a reflective diary (Schon, 1991) are the most widely recommended techniques. This would allow students to clarify the knowledge that guides their behaviour. According to numerous reports, reflective journals are a useful tool for helping students think back on their experiences learning across a variety of subject areas (Fonteyn & Cahill, 1998; Davies, 1995; Baker, 1996; Hughes, 2001).

This explanation is analogous to the one presented by Boud and Walker (1991), who perceive reflection as a perceptive and practical procedure employed by individuals to scrutinise their experiences with the aim of cultivating novel viewpoints and comprehensions.

Thus, reflection can be understood as involving the self as well as a new understanding or altered conceptual perspective.

Reflection can be of three types, such as:

- Reflection - in- action,
- Reflection - on - action and
- Reflection – with - action.

When students engage in reflection-in-action, they question presumptions about their work, analyse their actions in the moment critically, and test out different options that might change what they are doing

as they go (Carkhuff, 1996). The person can use their knowledge and experience to guide their professional judgements and decisions while reflecting while practicing. Through the process of reflection-on-action, students examine past actions and events, critically analysing and assessing them to create a fresh perspective for later use (Schon, 1991; Atkins & Murphy, 1993). Making sense of an experience through reflection on action can lead to learning (Mashaba and Brink, 1994; Hughes, 2001; Carkhuff, 1996; Andrew, 1996). Dialogue, discourse, and narratives are used in reflection-with-action, which emphasises the growth of thinking abilities.

Using reflection to cultivate deep learning Deep learning is maximised and surface approaches are minimised through reflection. The choice of language employed in introspection is closely associated with a profound approach, as exemplified concisely by Moon (1999). Reflection not only enhances the acquisition of comprehensive information in a particular subject, but also aids in the development and utilisation of a repertoire of skills.

Furthermore, the reflection addresses the "why?" in addition to cognitive abilities like "how?" and "when?" Doubts and feelings of inadequacy are likely to arise as we reflect on the knowledge we do and do not possess. It's awkward to admit we don't know something, especially in front of our peers, but in order to move on, we must address these emotions. According to Eraut (1994), there are three categories into which we should divide evidence of capability:

- The cognitive processes encompassed in professional thinking;
- The personal abilities and attributes necessary for a professional approach to work;
- The acquisition and comprehension of the concepts, theories, facts, rules, and procedures that form the foundation of contemporary practice.

The personal skills are the ones we tend to overlook. Kolb (1984) makes a similar argument, saying that when designing programmes, content, learning preferences, and goals for creativity and growth should all be taken into account. "It is common for reflection to be treated as if it were an intellectual exercise - a simple matter of thinking rigorously," contend Boud and Walker (1998). But contemplation is more than just thinking; feelings are at the core of all learning. Reflective practice is centred on assisting students in recognising, trusting, and utilising their intuition as well as their emotional responses.

Research in the field of literature has shown that offering prompt feedback on student diaries might motivate students to engage in more introspective writing in their subsequent journals. Consistent feedback and supervision can enhance students' reflective practice as it progresses. Following repeated feedback, individuals can engage in more comprehensive journaling (Dyment & O'Connell, 2011; Kim, 2013; Power, 2012; Threlfall, 2014). Apart from, formative feedback empowers students and holds them accountable for their education, since tutors offer a supportive structure (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Ramsden, 2003). The impact of this factor on students' monitoring of their engagement in classroom activities and assessment of their academic performance and advancement over a period of time is likely to be significant (Todd & McIlroy, 2014). The development of students' ability to study independently necessitates the assistance of ongoing feedback mechanisms in the beginning stages of the writing reflective journal (Kim, 2013).

Although, formative feedback benefits are well acknowledged, the same cannot be said for the methods used to put it into practice, which differ in terms of how much structure is used, how often standards and guidelines are cited, and how much weight is placed on the reflective practice's emotional component. In fact, a number of writers have criticised a shift towards a limited interpretation of reflexivity that ignores the emotional dimensions (Ruch, 2002); additionally, Clegg, Tan, & Saeidi (2002) have labelled this as a "cognitivist strain" that distances reflective practice from Schön's concept of "professional artistry" by making it mechanical and externally subscribed (Finlay, 2008). The goal of this change, according to Kim (2013), is to "encourage cognitive reflection on key subject issues rather than emotional reflection and personal learning experiences in general" by basing feedback on assessment criteria.

III. MODELS OF REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Dewey's 1933 work is considered the cornerstone for the examination and application of reflection. Dewey defines reflection as a cognitive process when an individual consciously focuses on a particular problem and engages in deliberate and thorough contemplation. The process is goal-oriented as it entails the manipulation and reprocessing of knowledge to attain the intended result. When confronted with ambiguity or difficulty, individuals engage in cognitive processes to resolve the perplexity, ultimately leading to the implementation of action-based testing. Dewey posited that the objective of a productive reflection-based education is to comprehend the world, and so, experience holds significance. Dewey categorises experiences into two types: primary experiences entail immediate engagement with the physical and social surroundings, while secondary

experiences require reflective contemplation on the world as the object of reflection. Dewey's reflective thought model as presented by Miettinen (2000) is depicted in Figure 1.
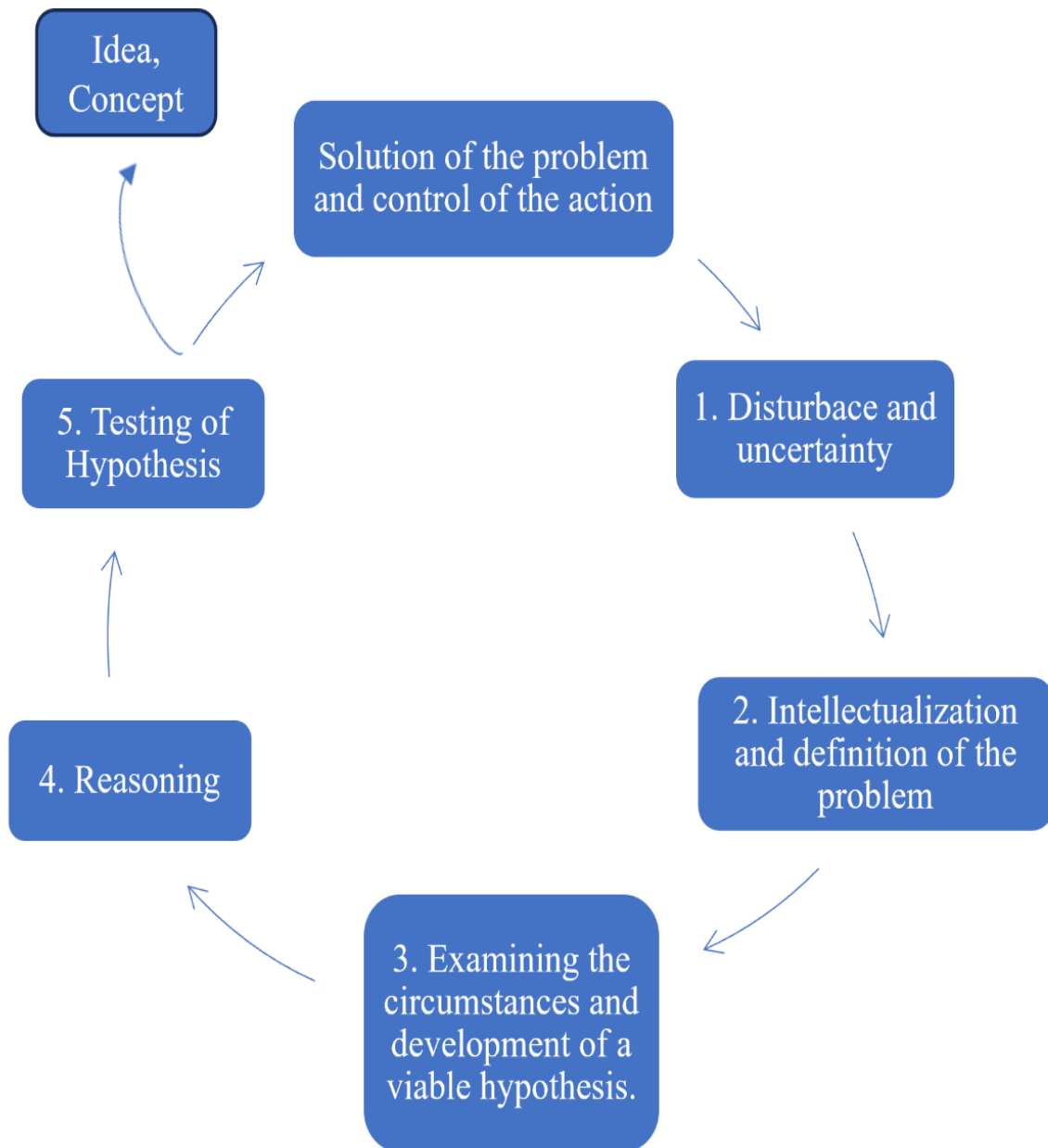

Figure 1: reflective thought and action model (Dewey)

Figure 1 illustrates Dewey's theory of reflective thought and action consists of the following five stages: i) disruption and uncertainty, ii) intellectualisation, iii) formation of hypothesis, iv) reasoning, and v) testing of hypothesis. As a result, problem identification, hypothesis development, and practical testing are all aspects of reflective learning. Since reflection and environment reconstruction are closely linked, Dewey's ideas serve as the cornerstone of constructivism in education since thought both creates and expresses the unique environment combination.

3.1 Learning Cycle of David Kolb (1984)

Kolb contends that reflection is a significant element of learning and that we all learn from our experiences in life, even on a daily basis. Kolb (1984) asserts that there is a pattern or cycle to the learning process that has four stages.
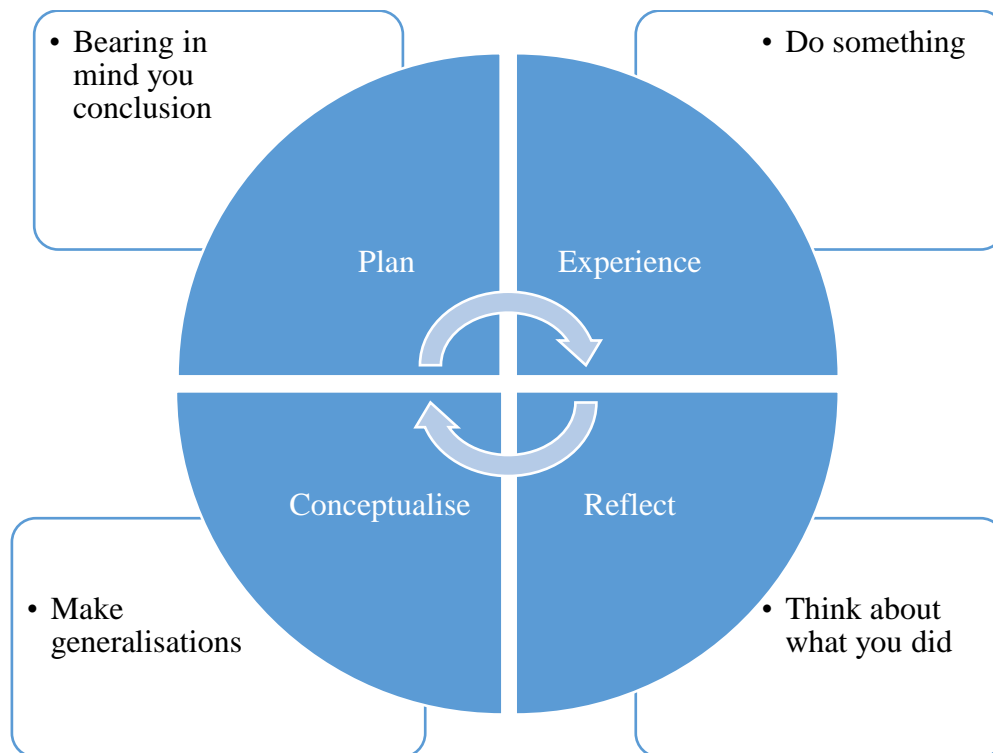
- Bearing in mind you conclusion

- Do something

Plan

Experience

Conceptualise

Reflect

- Make generalisations

- Think about what you did

Figure 2: Kolb's learning cycle

3.2 Van Manen's Type III Mode of Reflection (2002)

In this model the networking of reflection focused on three types namely recollective reflection, active or interactive reflection, and anticipatory reflection. Here the learners are encouraged to mine the past experiences to evolve deeper and new insights and to indulge in discussions during learning process which culminates in the framing of action plans with a vision of its future consequences.
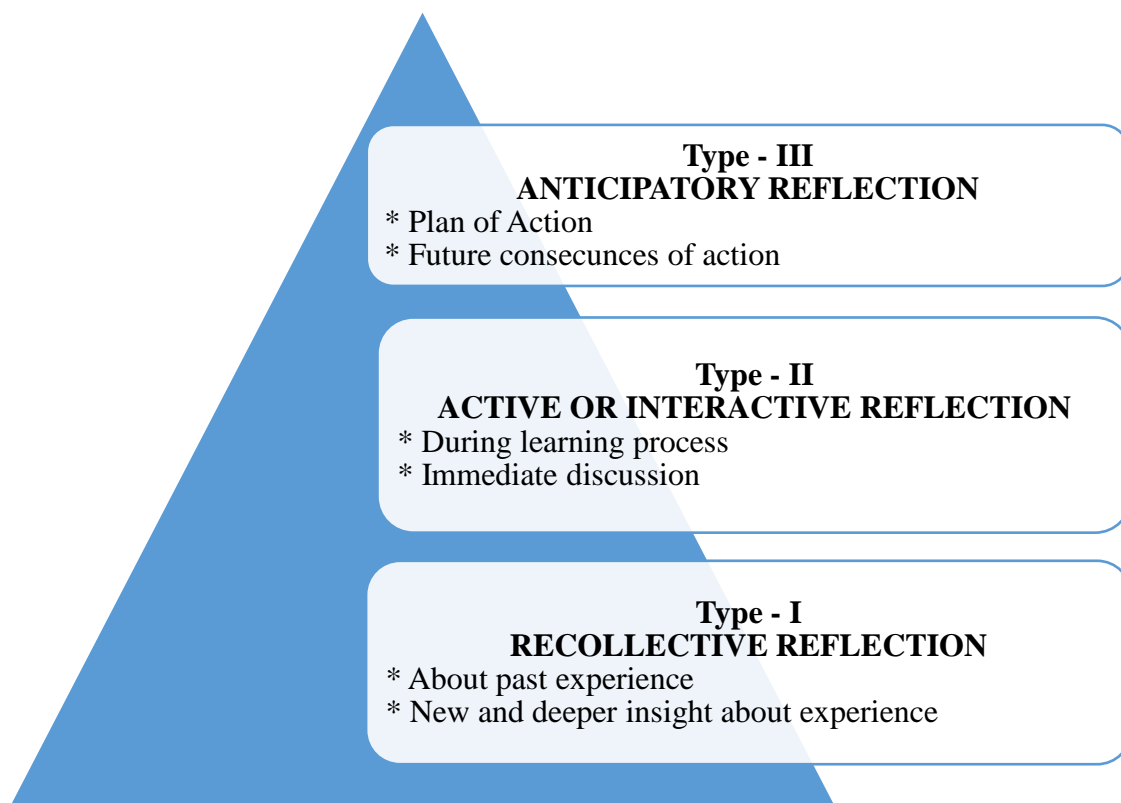
Type - III
ANTICIPATORY REFLECTION
* Plan of Action
* Future consecunces of action

Type - II
ACTIVE OR INTERACTIVE REFLECTION
* During learning process
* Immediate discussion

Type - I
RECOLLECTIVE REFLECTION
* About past experience
* New and deeper insight about experience

Figure 3: Van Manen's Type III mode of Reflection

3.3 Scanlon and Chernomas (1997)

Atkins and Murphy's (1993) research served as the foundation for the reflective learning model that Scanlon and Chernomas (1997) presented. Three stages of reflection are suggested by this model.
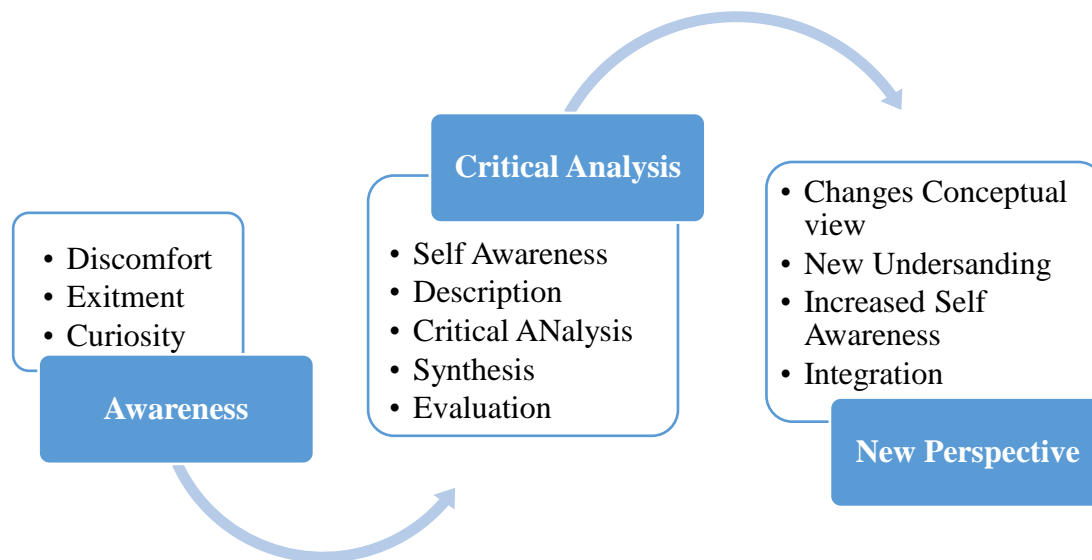
Figure 4: Scanlon and Chernomas model of reflective learning

IV. JOURNALS AS A REFLECTIVE LEARNING TOOL

Journaling and dialogue journals are two reflective practices that have been identified in the research as effective tools for facilitating students' reflection on their learning experiences (Fonteyn & Cahill, 1998). Journal writing facilitates objective reflection on experiences by enabling the writer to distance themselves from the circumstance and discern between factual events and their subjective interpretations (Patterson, 1994; Hughes, 2001; Wong, et al., 1995).

Reflective journaling has been proven to be useful in promoting learning in the following manner:

4.1 Showcases Learning progress over time

Students focus better when they realise that their journal serves as a record of their skill or development. They become more critical of themselves and create goals for their own growth. They give weight to their prior experiences and successes. Because they track students' progress and progression towards attaining curriculum goals and standards and contain applications of content abilities, reflective learning journals provide a far deeper and more detailed picture of the student as a learner. Through the process of writing reflective journals, students actively participate in learning and sharing their knowledge across grade level curriculum areas.

4.2 Communication to stakeholders

Students are better equipped to critically evaluate their own work when they receive ongoing, constructive criticism on the calibre of their artefacts. They start to feel at ease asking for peer review because they understand the value of peer support. Students get a greater appreciation for the time they spend together when their professors engage in close proximity and engage in discussions regarding the organisation and design of their individual learning journals, as well as the selection of appropriate items to include.

4.3 Enhanced Self-Assessment

Students who choose and explain the best examples of their work also develop their self-assessment skills. When students are required to "select artefacts for a particular purpose, justify their choices, and make connections across multiple examples, instances, or realms of experience," they gain knowledge about both themselves and the subject matter they are studying (Catalyst, 2007). Students who actively engage in reflective journal writing naturally want to know more about the format and grading of assignments in order to produce their best work. Students who have developed a greater sense of responsibility in assessing their own performance are more inclined to employ synthesis and reflection when tackling difficulties that require the utilisation of advanced cognitive abilities. Additionally, they are more inclined to utilise their analytical and imaginative faculties to select objects that most effectively showcase the resolution of a difficult problem.

4.4 Positive Influence on Learning

The benefits of reflective writing can be seen as highlighting students' best work has a positive effect on students' learning. Students do, however, become more selective about which of their works will be

included in the portfolio as a result of the process of reflection on standards and goals. As per Sweet's (1993) assertion, "portfolios, or reflective learning journals) become an effective way to get them to think about how they could improve future work and take a second look."

The advantages of using classroom portfolios may be illustrated as:

Benefits of Using Reflective Learning Journals

- ✓ Learning can be clearly represented as it progresses throughout time.

- ✓ Highlighting pupils' outstanding work has a beneficial effect on learning.

- ✓ Comparing a student's work against that of others does not motivate them as much as comparing current work to previous work.

- ✓ Students who choose and explain the greatest examples of their work also develop their self-assessment skills.

- ✓ Learning journals allow for individual characteristics to be taken into account.

- ✓ Learning journals let parents, teachers, and other stakeholders know how pupils progress academically.

- ✓ The Learning Journal provides a detailed and impartial assessment of students' development.

Adapted from *Belgrand S., Burke, K., and Gogarty R. (2008). The portfolio connection: Students work linked to standards, 3rd Ed. Corwin Press. Thousand Oaks. pp. XVII*

V. EVALUATING REFLECTIVE JOURNALS

Assessment through reflective journal is considered an innovative alternative method to facilitate student-centred learning by encouraging students to engage in critical thinking about the learning process and establish a deeper connection with the material (Boud et al., 1985, Epstein, 1999, Mann et al., 2009, Schon, 1983). The primary conventional frameworks (Bound & Walker, 1998; Kember, McKay, Sinclair, & Wong, 2008; Mezirow, 1991; Wong, Kember, Chung, & Yan, 1995; Dyment & O'Connell, 2011) serve as the foundation for all evaluative techniques in journaling, despite their significant variations. Because of the nature of student-centred learning, the reflective journal method put emphasises the actions and reasoning behind them rather than only following the teacher's instructions. This stands in contrast to a teacher-directed approach (Biggs, 1999). Through the practice of keeping a reflective notebook, students are able to raise inquiries, contemplate their personal educational progress, and establish connections between their theoretical understanding and real-life encounters (Woodward, 1998).

It is important to acknowledge the need for establishing indicators to evaluate reflective practices in written texts. It is also agreed upon that the various degrees of reflection should be clearly and unambiguously stated (Kember et al., 2008). Bruno, Galuppo, and Gilardi (2011) proposed a paradigm that characterises reflective practice as the methodical examination of one's own and others' acts in relation to their psychological states. These include cognitive mental states such as beliefs, reasoning, and conclusions, as well as non-cognitive mental states like desires, intents, and feelings.

Contrary to Schön's conventional practices described in his work from 1983, that defined reflexivity as a dialogue with the situation, the psychoanalytic perspective function of reflection (Fonagy & Target, 1996), and the theory of mind (Milligan, Astington, & Dack, 2007), research results support an approach that emphasises the non-automated nature of reflective practice.

VI. CONCLUSION

Reflection maximizes deep learning and minimizes surface approaches, focusing on cognitive skills, personal skills, and cognitive processes. However, the implementation of reflection can be influenced by factors such as structuring, standards, and emotional aspects.

Journal writing is a valuable tool for facilitating reflective learning, as it helps students connect their learning experiences to the larger context of learning. This approach helps students become competent in taking care of their own learning and grow into autonomous lifelong learners. Reflective learning journals

enhance self-assessment skills by encouraging students to select the best samples of their work and justify their choices.

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