



assessing group practice

How guided reflection can enhance group work

This paper was published in *Improving Student Learning: Theory & Practice*, (2002) Ed. C. Rust, Oxford Centre for Staff Development, pp316 - 325

I developed the notion that community could be a practice, rather than an entity. It is something about the responsibility of the individual to the whole group. By responsibility I don't necessarily mean 'taking care' of the whole group – it is more like each person in the group having a commitment to the individual experience of every member of the group, including themselves.

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Abstract

It is widely acknowledged by employers and academics, especially within the performance arts and art and design areas, that group skills are highly desirable for employment as well as for multifarious life situations. These group skills are, however, rarely defined precisely and consequently, seldom awarded academic credit.

This paper explores group skills and how they might be assessed in different contexts, focusing particularly on reflection as the means for students to record and assess their contribution to the group process.

When attempting to assess group practice, it is helpful to consider three distinct phases: preparation; performance or artefact; and reflection on the whole process. This paper focuses primarily on the third phase and explores how we might encourage students to become more reflective about their own and their peers' work in order to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which they have operated and functioned as a group. This process, it is argued, will enable students to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and thus empower them to determine which skills they need to develop.

We shall draw on existing theories of reflection on learning and apply these to our own research findings from *Assessing Group Practice*, a three year HEFCE funded project, in an attempt to offer some examples of successful practice which might be developed further within the project.

Introduction

Within the performing and creative arts, collaboration is, and has always been, common practice. Working together to create a cohesive 'whole' is the very nature of what drama, dance and music is about. However, in higher

education we have not fully capitalised upon the invaluable collaborative skills which performance arts students acquire through their study. We know from our daily experience and from surveys of post graduates that performance arts students develop complex collaborative skills which equip them for careers in a wide range of professions and for business.¹ Perhaps it is partially because we are confident that collaborative skills are developed and acquired by our students that we have neglected to define them and consequently ignored the potential learning opportunities to be gained from their assessment. More importantly, we have failed to make public the case that *arts education is the leader in developing these highly sought after transferable skills*. In an area of education which has always had to fight for its share of resources, particularly in times of 'cut backs' and recession, we appear to have held back our trump cards.

It is to the performing arts that management consultants and business colleagues turn for their role-playing and team building simulation exercises. *They* know the value of performance arts exercises and that there is no real substitute for experiential learning where collaboration is concerned. Team skills are not only valued by employers, they are also highly prized for life-long learning and for effective citizenship.

As educators and performers we are reflective artists. We need to champion this within higher education and reclaim our place as leaders in the field of collaboration and reflective practice. One way in which we can move closer to this goal is to award academic credit for the collaborative skills our students acquire.

Although this paper focuses on the reflective process, (and some would argue, one has to have 'done' something in order to be able to reflect upon it) we shall also discuss examples of successful practice where the reflective process has been directly linked to the preparatory stage of work when objectives are negotiated and agreed. In this sense, reflection also encompasses planning and thinking about where one is going, before assessing and evaluating how well one achieved the objectives.

Most issues identified by the project team have also been addressed elsewhere by education researchers and some of the more pertinent contributions are discussed here. However, practitioners who have used methods of reflective learning with their students for some time, often bring a new or original perspective to familiar problems. Since Boud and Walker make a strong case for reflection being highly context-specific (Boud and Walker, 1998), this project offers a unique diversity of expertise from within the performing and creative arts. The project team encompasses 'experts' drawn from a number of broad based disciplines, who have the potential, through working collaboratively, to yield innovative solutions to common problems associated with assessing group skills.

1. Longitudinal study of post graduate performance arts students conducted by Middlesex University in 1997.

In *Assessing Group Practice* we have defined assessment in its broadest sense to include feedback of any sort (i.e. oral, written, self, peer and tutor generated) as well as grades allocated to groups and individuals.

What are collaborative skills?

Collaborative skills are the skills which students develop in the process of group work, some of which are discussed here. Whilst there are some generic group skills, others are context specific and therefore need to be determined at the outset of any project. Our research revealed a diversity of ways in which collaboration takes place within the performing and creative arts. It revealed few examples, however, where these collaborative skills were specifically graded (Bryan, 2001).

Effective collaboration is likely to encompass various communicative and interactive skills. These include the subtle differences between for example, directing, instructing, requesting, suggesting, clarifying and confirming and students need to learn when and how to use each. Successful collaboration may require some members to employ skills of persuading, reassuring, motivating, involving, questioning and disagreeing and criticising. Depending how well these interactive skills are developed and employed will, to a large extent, determine the success of a project.

If we look to the literature of management and business, Adair identifies four key stages in group formation – forming, storming, norming and performing (Adair, 1989). With a sound understanding of these stages, he argues that students are empowered to make their own groups work most effectively by taking the necessary action to counter the challenges as the group moves sequentially through the four stages. Belbin suggests eight key roles for successful groups and provides team members with an inventory to assess their best team roles (Belbin, 1981). With an understanding of their own strengths, students and tutors can choose whether the context requires individuals to play to their strengths or whether it is an opportunity to gain experience and exercise some of their less well developed group roles, thus broadening their personal raft of transferable skills.

In the performance arts we have no need to set up simulation exercises, our work requires collaboration most of the time. The mode of creating a sense of group and complicity is practical, drawing from theatre improvisation or games physical theatre or dance practice e.g. weight sharing, physical trust work etc. Within these 'safe' practices and boundaries a courage to commit fully to the group is developed. Perhaps we need to make more explicit the collaborative skills which are developed and find ways in which they might be assessed. Self reflection as well as peer observation and feedback are ways in which the collaborative process can be foregrounded, especially when the tutor is not present.

“Reflection is a mental process with purpose and/or outcome in which manipulation of meaning is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured

ideas in learning or to problems for which there is no obvious solution.”
(Moon, 1999, p161)

This is the definition that Jennifer Moon uses by working through an identification of the nature of reflection and the processes of learning. Her definition is helpful for our purposes as it can encompass all sorts of reflection, both individual and group reflections, on diverse learning situations and contexts.

Reflection on performance or product and on process is common practice within the performing and creative arts and frequently contributes to formal assessment of group work. In our research, we found evidence of varieties of diaries, reflective journals, critical reports and essays being used. These were quite often used as the basis for individual vivas, where students might be asked to elaborate on some aspect of their rehearsal, performance, its reception by others etc. (Bryan, 2001).

Barnett observed, some 25 years ago, how the notion of reflection was superseding that of criticism within higher education. He argues that this is because reflection carries reflexive and self-monitoring connotations. He warns of the danger of reflection becoming an ideology that requires reflection only at interpretive levels and disregards the potential for empowerment and emancipation. He, like Moon and others, suggests that the reflective process brings to bear a focus upon the individual's own thought and learning development in ways that so-called objective criticism does not. Reflection can thus enable students to reach a state of what he calls 'critical being'. It is from this state of critical being that students can identify their own strengths and weaknesses and thus be empowered to develop and move forward (Barnett, 1977).

It is interesting to note here that 'the criticism' as a mode of assessment is usually only found in the more vocationally oriented courses where criticism in the theatre and film world is publicity (Green, 2001).

Moon (1999) draws on Dewey and on Habermas as 'backbone philosophies' and on Schon's work on professional practice. Brockbank and McGill (1998), after reviewing various educational philosophies and styles of learning, advocate certain conditions for reflection as a contribution to transformative learning of students. (pp 18 – 69). Brockbank and McGill argue that the key requirements for reflection or reflective practice to prevail are dialogue, intention, process, modelling and the notion of personal stance (p.56). This final requirement of personal stance is similar to what Barnett calls critical being and is one of the qualities that Moon also advocates citing how personal development will lead ultimately to empowerment and emancipation of self from the constraints of social and personal histories (Moon, pp 88 and 157). There is some agreement, then, that reflection should not be a mechanistic exercise, but rather, a means of deepening understanding of self in relation to differing contexts E.g. other's perceptions, environment, occasion etc.

Brockbank and McGill argue that the teacher must a) be aware of process and intentionality about that process and b) possess an awareness that s/he is modelling the process used. (p.69) This places considerable responsibility on the teacher as facilitator of student reflection and implies a degree of familiarity with and competence in techniques for enabling structured reflection and creating safe learning environments. When exploring the deeper realms of personal feelings and beliefs, there is a need for clear boundaries to be drawn and adhered to. Clear guidelines for structured reflection can go some way to provide a framework, however, teachers should not underestimate the potential dangers of individual and group reflection on those with low self esteem.

Maclellan's action research with post graduate trainee teachers concludes that if students are to be autonomous, they must clearly and explicitly intend that their learning be enhanced by reflection in *specific* ways. The students themselves emphasise that in reflective commentaries they must recognise what the task requires and they must actively construct knowledge to understand the problematic issues (Maclellan, 1999).

Whether one is concerned with reflective practice or any other mode of assessment, it is worth considering the five questions which Brown uses to arrive at a system of assessment that is 'fit for purpose'.

- Why are we assessing?
- What are we assessing?
- How are we assessing?
- Who is best placed to assess?
- When should we assess? (Brown, 1999)

We have not systematically organised our research into these categories, however, we have had these questions in mind when researching and selecting examples of successful practice.

What are we assessing?

Is it specific skills which are being assessed or are we assessing group and individual attributes? The line between skills and personal attributes is a fine line and one which is likely to become blurred when developing reflective practice, especially when it includes self reflection (and/or reflection on one's peers) on the reasons why something didn't work as well as it might have done. Similarly we need to be clear about whether we are assessing a particular process or the student's ability to reflect articulately. The use of language (whether academic or other free-flow styles) is another issue which requires careful thinking about in relation to all reflective practice. This is discussed later in relation to content and form, and narrative traditions.

Is it more appropriate to assess a group discussion than a production or rehearsal? Ideas are essential but they may not work in practice or may simply be the source of something that could not be thought out but only worked out through physical exploration. These sort of questions need to be asked before determining what sort of assessment should be employed.

Within higher education, it is increasingly acknowledged that clarity of assessment criteria is vital within any formal mode of assessment and linking learning objectives to the reflective process can help to promote clarity and assist understanding. The following examples, drawn from the project's first year research, illustrate quite different ways in which reflection can be incorporated into the assessment of group work.

Example 1. School of Media, Music and Performance, University of Salford:

Multimedia theatre is a project whose “assessment strategy reflects the aims of the module to encourage students to apply theoretical understanding to practical experimentation and is therefore designed to reward ideas and creativity alongside critical reflection and contextualisation.” The critical analysis and evaluation of the piece created by the group as well as the supporting documentation detailing original ideas for additional scenes/sequences for the development and extension of the piece “offer each student the opportunity to express their personal vision and understanding of the group devised piece and enable individual students to be rewarded for the quality of their understanding and ideas (Smart, 2001).

Asking students to suggest ideas for the development of the piece rather than to identify their contributions to what already exist, enables the assessor to distinguish the depth of student engagement with concepts and the originality and creativity of their own ideas. Students suggesting further creative ideas, which are appropriate in the context of the presentation, are likely to have been fully involved in the generation of the group-based work. There is also a space for those whose ideas were perhaps not used or who disagreed with the decisions of the group to express their opinions in an analytical context within the evaluation of the piece. Thus the assessor is able to reward aspects of intellectual and creative process that were perhaps unseen (Smart, 2001).

It was widely reported that objectivity and self-reflexivity are often under-developed in students and that there may be difficulties with the critical contextualisation of students' practical ideas. This example shows one way of extrapolating what levels of cognitive skills have been employed by an individual in the creative process and assessing these specifically.

Example 2 Music Theatre, The Central School of Speech and Drama

Students within Acting Musical Theatre are provided with ‘Mental skills for singing’ which provide categories and criteria which the student uses weekly for self assessment and tutorial. A scoring method can be used in conjunction with this to compare and identify previous work and skills on which to focus for further improvement. The scoring can also provide concrete evidence when the student is not progressing as s/he should. It demands an honesty and maturity and a level of professional responsibility from the student. Self-assessment forms are supplied so that the thinking and reflection is directed by the tutor. Once completed, these identify the student's ‘personal ideal

performance state' and assessment and evaluation of performance throughout the course, including the Final Showcase as a preparation for the final interview (Green, 2001).

Example 3. School of Media, Music and Performance, University of Salford:

Video projects are assessed through working notebook, reflective critical self-assessment and individual viva voce. Reflection is assessed through the critical self-assessment and the viva voce supports assessment of both process and reflection - 50 - 50 equal weighting. Peer assessment questionnaires provide clarity of the whole picture of the marking and also frame how the observation and reflection might work. The combination is deemed effective as peer assessment encourages them to face and justify personal problems. If there has been a personal issue raised by one student with another and this is repeated by others, then there is a basis to the statements. The log books are read before the viva voce and thus personal performance can be related to the whole group and awareness checked. Students can be honest in the viva and in their log books about their individual contribution. However, there is still the issue of criticising peers or indeed friends which is acknowledged in most forms of peer assessment (Smart, 2001).

We will consider journal writing in more depth later.

Example 4, School of Dance and Theatre, Bretton Hall

A set of protocols is defined for actors' logs and workfiles, a different one for performance and the results of the two conflated. Dramaturgs record and evaluate rehearsal processes, rehearsal outcomes and performance effectiveness. This provides an informal reviewing and assessment of their peers. Third level actors who undertake a directing project are encouraged to keep evaluative journals that informally assess the progress of their first and second level acting colleagues within the rehearsal and performance process. These are often anonymised and currently do not contribute to formal profiling of the first and second-level actors (Johnson, 2001).

Effective collaboration is likely to include various communicative and interactive skills which further the aims of a project. Thus, we might devise assessment criteria to include, for example, listening and ability to compromise, effective time management, ability to contribute to finding new solutions to problems etc. If the main aim of the project is to produce the 'most effective' performance possible, according to the director or the group, individual student growth and development might have to take second place or even be sacrificed for 'the greater good'. Although it is unlikely that we would devise assessment criteria to include ruthlessness or ability to cut corners, we might acknowledge that in circumstances where the group performance is paramount and where differences of opinion over interpretation, for example, occur, undemocratic behaviour, particularly by a director, is quite appropriate. S/he may simply instruct colleagues to do things her way for the sake of the performance. What is important is to determine the

learning objectives of any project at the outset and to employ assessment criteria which support these objectives.

When drama students are asked to reflect on their own contributions as autonomous individuals within a group, it is difficult for them not to sound overly self-referential or deceptively disinterested. Dacre and Mackey argue that reflection must be framed within the expert systems and within the 'narrative traditions' - reflecting on the personal and social narrative of existence (Dacre and Mackey, 1999, p.59). As Taylor propounds, it is essential that in evaluating there is knowledge of traditions and awareness of history and culture, as well as a body of knowledge of subject and understanding of craft. All argue, as we have here, that students need a greater frame of reference for reflective practice as well as a knowledge, and eventually a possession, of the appropriate critical vocabulary (Taylor, pp 4-5).

The value judgements we make in all assessment must be informed by sound educational ideals. To make the reflection *count*, students need to be clear about specific objectives, understand the often highly complex context in which they are working and be aware as to how their reflections are to be recorded and presented.

Taylor's categories for the teaching of art as 'content, form, process and mood' raise some interesting questions around the language used by actors on their reflection. What has the acting student experienced, observed or set out to achieve? Can s/he discuss or write about the content and form - the one with its concerns for what the work is about and which is "likely to invite use of a highly descriptive range of vocabulary" and the other which "stimulates use of vocabulary to do with the structural"? Can the acting student reflect about process - individual or group? *Process*, Green proposes, is key to finding the life of a character, to learning to be an actor and to collaborative work. Assessment questions might ask, for example: "what is the process by which you came to the choice of characterisation that you did?"

Taylor describes how this area of 'process' is most likely to throw up vocabulary of a subject-specific and technical nature. 'Mood' is the most immediately obvious subjective area engaging with feelings and emotions. It is what captures the onlooker. It encourages the use of an evocative type of language. Both process and mood are important but students need to understand with which they are engaging and the reasons why (Taylor, pp 67 – 88).

The education of actors is about their ownership of process and this needs to be articulated. It is often only in articulating our thoughts that we begin to clarify them and thus enable the process itself to emerge and become clear.

Learning how to articulate complex ideas, whether verbal or written, is essential for deep learning to occur at higher education level. This assertion is supported by research of staff and students across a wide variety of disciplines. Students from University of North London undertook work

placements varying in length from four weeks to one year in which they were expected to study independently. It is interesting to note that prior to their independent study, students neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement above. However, on returning to university from their placements, the majority of students stressed how important it was to articulate process, particularly where they might have acted in response to 'emergencies' or where a level of crisis management was required and where the 'post mortem' would be the first opportunity to analyse what had happened. Talking about and reflecting on how they had coped enabled them and the tutors to perceive what deep learning had occurred (Bryan & Assiter, 1995).

There is an understandable tendency within HE to focus on the development of higher cognitive skills such as analysis, evaluation and synthesis and even to expect students to demonstrate meta-cognitive skills by analysing and developing their own styles of learning (Bryan, 1995). Whilst acknowledging that this is one of the primary aims of HE, we should not forget that cognitive skills are practically inseparable from affective skills. When dealing with the assessment of creative work and performance, students can *feel* particularly vulnerable about feedback of any sort and, if inappropriately handled, this can adversely affect their ability to learn from the feedback and to move forwards. When receiving feedback, they may feel as though they are open to an 'attack' on themselves rather than being able to accept 'constructive, objective criticism' of their work, whether from their tutors or their peers. This is another reason for laying down the ground rules for reflection and assessment at the earliest possible stage and reminding students what it is they are reflecting on and assessing throughout the process. Students can learn to depersonalise the process of giving and receiving feedback by practising structured reflection on their learning processes.

Moon and others acknowledge that the fear of being "knocked back or laughed at" is widespread and this has to be dealt with, particularly in any performer's education. An example of how this fear can be dealt with constructively was demonstrated at Central School of Speech and Drama with the Neutral Mask unit where students have to say what they see about each other as they watch their peers, justifying laughter and criticism. This can be harsh, but it provides the necessary de-personalised and down to earth approach an actor requires as the 'vehicle for expression' with an audience that is 'always right' and is an empowering way to form and deal with constructive criticism right from the beginning of the course. The result is that the students can be 'critical friends' to each other.

Both Moon's and Brockbank and McGill's conditions for reflection include modelling reflection in an emotionally supportive environment that removes the barriers to this mode of learning. Moon argues that group work with reflection is important and that the combination of individual *and* group reflective practice is most effective (Moon, pp 172-3).

Another problem in assessing reflection in any written form is ensuring that it is actually the collaborative process which is the focus of attention rather than the represented process. In other words, ensuring that fluency of writing is not

assessed above, or even instead of actual experience of group work. This was highlighted in one of our case studies.

Example 5, Drama Department, University of Ulster

“In a large number of modules reflection on the process of working together is assessed through reflective logs and, in some cases, written essays or examinations. Such reflection is vital in the process of learning from experience. However, there are two dangers here. In assessing their abilities to reflect through these forms, there is a danger that the represented process comes to stand for the actual experience. Students who are effective at reading the rules of the game engage in post-hoc rationalisations and descriptions, which may be far from their actual experiences or contribution at the time. Here, the ability to reflect insightfully may take precedence over the actual engagement at the time, which is the crucial element of collaboration. Furthermore, by using written means to assess collaborative practical working, there is the danger that such forms favour skills of articulacy rather than collaboration. The issue of ‘fairness’ under the QAA definition is called into question: ‘a fair assessment method is one that rewards only the attributes being measured’ (Cook 2000[on line]).

Alerting tutors of a difficult process in the logs or module evaluation may be too late to address the situation and the “effect of [some students] non-participation cannot be redressed for the other members of the group” (Maguire, 2001).

The following examples demonstrate how keeping a reflective journal can enable students to build upon and transfer their learning from one module to another in an education system which may appear to present learning in neatly packaged and discrete units.

Example 6, Drama Department, University of Ulster

Directors are assessed on work presented and on a reflective log. Evidence of their learning from collaboration is provided in the logs. There is “emphasis on reflection ensuring that students interrogate the processes through which they have worked and learnt together. It is a key element of experiential learning and the use of pre-requisite entry requirements for pathways ensure that such reflection is then able to be implemented in further cycles of experience as students progress” (Maguire, 2001).

Example 7, Drama Department, University of London, Goldsmiths College

In the production journals students are required to assess their own development in relationship to the practice of the course through a week by week self-assessment. The journal is submitted at the end of the year-long course as part of their formal assessment. Vivas as oral presentations supply sense of separate contribution. It has been found to be useful to hold a viva the week before the presentation to investigate individual contribution to the group work. (Ajaykumar, 2001)

An example where third year students modelled reflection for first year students was found in a community drama context. Students were asked to hold a type of 'master class' to discuss their rehearsals and draw upon notes from their own diaries and logs as necessary. Although this was a slightly unrealistic situation in which the third year students were 'on show', it was, according to the first years, invaluable to glimpse what sort of work would be expected of them and to perceive models where positive language was used to help peers learn from each other. This sort of modelling can also be used as an introduction to self and peer assessment as it demonstrates how judgements are made in relation to specific assessment criteria (Bryan and Assiter, 1995).

Although group vivas have proved to be both cost effective and of particular benefit to the learning process (Crème, 1999; Moon, 1999; Snaith, 2001), we encountered few examples of group vivas being used as a method of summative assessment.

This apparent resistance to assessing group talk rather than individual written work may be because it is hard to assess individual contributions within a group discussion or because it is acknowledged that some shy students may not get a 'fair crack of the whip'. Seminars or group tutorials are a forum for engagement at the aesthetic inner level which is so important within the arts. Ross suggests that assessment conversation between pupil and teacher is "first an act of construction and interpretation and then an act of deliberation and evaluation" and that good reflective conversation, shaped by knowledge of Rom Harre's work on 'identity projects', might be incorporated into assessment practices (Ross, p. 37 and pp 50 – 66). He sees these conversations as more than viva voces and we suggest such skill can be taken into the group situation effectively.

One English department applies a universal ten percent accreditation for students' seminar contributions. In this instance, not only are clear criteria made explicit from the beginning of any course, students are also guided through various exercises on how to participate effectively in seminars. This example demonstrates sound learning objectives (i.e. learning to function effectively in a group discussion) being inextricably linked with the mode of assessment (Snaith, 2001).

Assessing talk, particularly within a group context, is an area which has been identified as requiring further research within this project.

Moon provides a valuable discussion of reflection as well as practical approaches to reflective practice, including a 'map' for successful reflective thinking/writing. She defines the stages through which one reflectively travels, starting from description, moving to additional ideas, followed by the melting pot of reflective thinking, into further processing and product as a resolution, or more reflection, which may well be a review of new purpose against the original. Reflection, she warns, can be circular and this is to be avoided. She

also understands that the process of working with 'inner voice' needs support and guidance and that the mind needs loosening up if it is to be able to reflect. She also suggests that reflection for learning requires conditions structured to encourage it to happen (Moon, pp 165 – 176). Others who advocate some sort of structure for reflection demonstrate how clearly defined protocols discourage students from providing "vitriolic accounts of the misdemeanours of other group members" (Stephani, Clarke and Litlejohn, 2000). We would instead encourage honesty and diplomacy and students can be steered away from perceiving reflective practice as the place for personal confession.

Moon deals with theories of learning in order that she can apply reflection to the map of learning and underpin the process of reflection in education. She describes how at the first stages on the map of learning, the learning is surface but when the stage of 'making meaning' to 'transformative learning' is reached, reflection is implicit within initial learning and will become the deep learning aspect sought within the Higher Education ethos (p.153). Reflection retrospectively of the first three stages she says can change surface into the deep leaning state as the student begins to work with a realisation and thus with 'meaning'.

In a similar way, Morrison draws on Schon's distinctions between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. He advocates a model of reflection which focuses the student's attention on deliberate, structured reflection-on-action (articulated orally or in writing) which he argues then feeds into the tacit and more immediate reflection-in-action (Morrison, 1996). In other words, taking time to reflect after the event and noting particular moments from a performance might influence the student's subsequent performances as well as deepen his/her understanding of complex processes. Our research revealed that some practitioners are wary of reflection-in-action, suggesting that bringing the intellect to bear during specific moments of performance actually changes the creative energy of those moments, usually, in their experience, to the detriment of the performance (Bryan, 2001). If there is any place for reflection-in-action, it is in rehearsal and not in performance.

Moon cites journal writing as her major focus, inspired by her own personal connection to journal writing. By 'journal' she means, "predominantly written material that is based on reflection and is relatively free writing, though it may be written within a given structure. A journal is written regularly over a period of time rather than in a single session." (p.187) It is important that at the first stage of reflective writing there is a non-judgement of the actual writing as there are so many issues for people around 'writing' and that the students should notice if their personal censor starts operating. She cites eighteen purposes for journals drawn from the research she has done and then is able to pinpoint criteria that seem to underpin the description of a good journal.

Perhaps journal writing as she advocates it, can be seen in a similar light to conversation which can encourage thinking away from the academic form of writing, which can inhibit perception. This sort of reflective process is what turns experience into learning. How one assesses such journals, particularly within the context of mass higher education, can be problematic. Our research

revealed that where reflective journals were used, they were hardly ever submitted in toto for the tutor to read or assess. Firstly, this would not only present the tutor with a daunting task to read the thousands of words written, but secondly and more importantly, it would have been quite inappropriate for the tutor to read all the detailed description which provided the stimulation for subsequent thought processes to occur. It is the *students* who need to move from description to deep learning and as such, submitting the whole journal would deprive them of the necessity to extrapolate what learning actually occurred. Instead, all sorts of summative assessments can be derived from journals requiring students to present specified summaries, reports or essays highlighting particular areas for scrutiny. It is incumbent upon the tutor to ensure that s/he makes clear to the students from the outset, what will be assessed and what part the journal plays in the assessment. Even where learning journals have been used as a tool for learning with no formal assessment of the journal at all, students report the benefits of keeping a regular journal. The benefits they recognise include not only linking theory and practice but integrating personal, intrapersonal, interpersonal, private, public, intellectual and professional aspects of themselves (Morrison, 1996, pp.327-328). Integrating the whole learning process in a holistic way through guided reflective journal writing is to move considerably in the direction of 'critical being'.

Conclusion and recommendations

How might we in the arts, with little spare capacity within our curricula, foreground these collaborative skills? Whilst we rarely teach the theory of team building as such, there is ample evidence that performing and creative arts students do acquire team skills. Perhaps the time to foreground collaborative skills, to define them and understand their importance is during the reflective process, once they have experienced the potency of group working.

It has been argued here that students need a greater frame of reference for reflective practice and that reflection can potentially enable students to become emancipated and empowered. Higher education, with its overarching mission to improve student learning, appears to be somewhat of a novice in the whole area of assessing collaboration. Since it is known that assessment is a powerful motivator of student learning, we can no longer ignore the assessment of these skills within a group context.

If, as part of this project, we can trial and develop some of the ideas discussed here, and develop guidelines which enable tutors and students to implement them, we will have made a serious contribution to the advancement of reflective practice within the context of assessing group work.

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Notes

Assessing Group Practice researchers submitted reports in 2001 from which extracts have been included here as examples of successful practice.

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