Reflection, Insight, and Empathy: Uncommon Outcomes in Management Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides solid research support for the use of learning journal writing in undergraduate and graduate management education. Journal writing promotes deep learning, problem-solving skills, and insight through the reflective process, itself a crucial management skill. Guided and structured journal writing leads to greater integration of material, better ability to apply theory and methods to real world problems, and increased understanding of self and situations. Improvements have been seen in student empathy, confidence, and self-awareness. The journal writing / reflection and the review and feedback process create a powerful dialogue between learner and facilitator of learning, not often otherwise possible. A major contribution of this paper is its clear guidance to students and instructors on journal writing and journal assessment.
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INTRODUCTION

A strong case can be made for adopting the use of learning journal writing in undergraduate and graduate management education. Numerous articles and studies provide convincing evidence that journal writing significantly enhances student learning, complementing or supplanting more traditional instruction and course-related learning activities. In addition to the substantial references cited in this paper, the author has had an on-going association with journaling for ten years, including instrumental use in Organisational Behaviour and Organisational Development courses in MBA and graduate Human Resource Management programs, as a tool to support train the trainer programs in industry, and as a “journaler,” using his own journal writing in teaching and learning. The author’s experience with the use of learning journals is on-going. A special type of learning journal (as described in the body of this paper) was used in an undergraduate management course and in a graduate qualitative research methods course as recently as Semester I, 2004. While the research into the efficacy and the overall benefits and trade-offs of the use of journal writing in these two courses is not complete, the four main faculty members using and reviewing the journals believe the value to be substantial enough to merit use again in both courses in Semester II. In addition, the slightly-modified version of the learning journal will be used in a second graduate course, Management and Organisation.

For the prospective instructor, the information provided in this paper will help make an informed decision regarding adoption of learning journals; and, once that decision has been made, how to best implement, structure, and get the most out of them. For the broader audience, this paper provides a solid theoretical foundation as well as strong justification for the use of journal writing in the management classroom. Numerous benefits have been identified, and there is extraordinary agreement across the literature on what many of these beneficial outcomes are.

KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Learning Journals

While there are many types and purposes of learning journals, as noted by Varner and Peck (2003), for the purposes
of this paper a learning journal is a:

- Crucial and integrated course requirement for learners and, thus, a key assessment component.
- Dedicated instructional strategy to promote greater engagement with course concepts.
- Primary communication device between learner and facilitator of learning (outside the classroom), where each learns about and from the other and the relationship becomes more effective.
- Focus and vehicle across an instructional period for putting the learner at the centre of learning through:
  - promoting self-awareness and appreciation for human behaviour—observing and recording one’s own behaviour and that of teammates (and, potentially, of instructors, work mates, managers, and others) against the backdrop of course theory and content.
  - developing effective personal and collaborative skills—exploring alternative courses of action; surfacing assumptions, beliefs, and biases underlying behaviour and impacting decision-making; thinking through, attempting, and learning from new strategies.
  - extending the material—making connections amongst ideas and experiences; applying course concepts, principles, and skills to school, work, and other life situations; showing how things relate; integrating and synthesising what might ostensibly seem diverse and unrelated elements from readings, lectures, tutorial/seminar experiences, and other assignments and activities.
  - testing-out material and making it personally and professionally relevant—digesting, processing, and reflecting upon course content and its personal and professional relevance to the learner; exploring and experimenting, essentially asking, “what does it mean to me and what am I going to do about it?”

The preceding description of learning journals has evolved quite naturally through extended use, and has been validated by the findings of researchers and practitioners, as summarised below. A learning journal format developed by the author and his colleagues to assist students in organising their thoughts and to promote achievement of the objectives implicit in the above description is covered in the section of this paper, A Learning Journal Format.

Other Key Terms and Concepts

Reflection / Reflective Thinking. Reflective thinking is the practice of thinking on material, problems, situations, experiences and their meaning and relation to self (Daudelin, 1996). Active and on-going examination of theories, beliefs, and assumptions that contribute to understanding and decision-making (Griffith and Frieden, 2000). Self-reflection (and insight) are meta-cognitive processes (Grant, 2001),

Meta-cognition. Meta-cognition is a predisposition to engage in thinking about thinking, thinking about learning, and even learning how one learns (Brown, 1987). It involves enquiring into how and why people behave, think, and feel the way they do (Grant, 2001). It is about being conscious or self-aware of one’s own abilities, tendencies, and strategies (Lin, 2001; Brown, 1987) and “knowing what you know (Shimamura, 2000). It is about students knowing why they are doing something the way they are doing it (O’Rourke, 1998).

Insight. Insight is an ability to see into the depths of complex problems and situation, and discern relationships and explain phenomena (or an occasion when this occurs); it is not unlike deep learning defined next). Insight is one of the products of self-reflection. Insight comes from cognitively assembling or reassembling diverse elements in new ways or coming to see things in a new light. Insight may represent a quantum leap in thinking or a total shift of analysis (Shimamura, 2000).

Deep Learning. Deep learning occurs when students are able to make connections (conceptual links) between and among separate elements, ideas, concepts, and methods, when they have integrated previously (in their mind) unrelated principles, theories, and practices (Korgel, 2002). You know this has occurred when content or skills can be applied in novel and diverse situations.

**BENEFITS AND COSTS OF JOURNAL USE IN EDUCATION**

The list of references at the end of this paper is indicative of a large body of work published on the subject of learning journals and reflective thinking and, to a lesser extent, on meta-cognition and experiential / active learning strategies. A review of the literature substantiates the author’s personal experience: journal writing offers a wide range of learning benefits. The table below summarises some of the benefits, improvements, and positive outcomes often found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits/Ideas</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence and Self-Assurance; Self-Awareness (O’Rourke, 1998; Kalliath and Coghlan, 2001); Self As Learner (Lin, 2001)</td>
<td>Cognitive Ability and Critical Thinking (O’Rourke, 1998; Patton et al, 1997; Callister, 1993; Griffith and Frieden, 2000)</td>
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<td>Embedding and Extending Learning; Content (O’Rourke, 1998; Patton et al, 1997; Burrows, et al, 2001)</td>
<td>Connect Theory and Practice (Praxis); Real-World Transfer (Alm, 1996; Loo and Thorpe, 2002; Patton et al, 1997; Kalliath and Coghlan, 2001)</td>
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<td>From Surface to Deep Learning; Meta-Cognition and Strategic Learning (O’Rourke, 1998; Korgel, 2002; Kalliath and Coghlan, 2001)</td>
<td>Integrate Material and Activities (Longhurst and Sandage, 2004; Burrows et al, 2001; Kalliath and Coghlan, 2001)</td>
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<td>Self-Direction and Positive Change (Loo and Thorpe, 2002; Grant, 2001)</td>
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There is also general agreement, and it is taken as a given, that student communication skills improve, especially in writing. Many of the researchers and practitioners cited above would undoubtedly agree that journal writing promotes reflection, itself instrumental to developing many of the other positive outcomes identified above. Kalliath and Coghlan (2002), for instance, note that “[J]ournal keeping helps the individual to reflect on her experiences, see how she thinks about them and helps anticipate future experiences before undertaking them (p. 62). The author is convinced that journal writing—or at least guided reflection—leads to greater empathy, and the ability to better see oneself in relation to others and see multiple perspectives. As the lower left-hand box in the table above shows, some support for this has been found in the literature.

Since they are encouraged to write about situations and experiences, students often demonstrated an understanding of the bigger picture and regard for the thoughts and feelings of others. This brief passage from a student’s journal regarding declining attendance in the undergraduate management course shows considerable empathy and sums up several that were collected around the middle of the term:

I was not particularly surprised that you talked about attendance in your recent journal. It is obvious that attendance has been poor. I was struck, though, by your obvious concern and disappointment. I never really thought about lecturers having feelings, at least not about class or students. I can imagine how I’d feel if I was in your place. I might be tempted to “skip class.” I mean, why go to all the trouble to put lectures together if nobody’s going to come?

In the following section, the author provides some of the assumptions that underlay reflective journal writing, that is,
characteristics and processes of journal writing that are believed to promote learning and how this occurs. While deduced from the author’s own experience, these assumptions are generally supported in the articles and studies reviewed, as summarised in the table above.

**Reinforcement.** The very act of writing what one has observed, read, or participated in reinforces the content and the lessons inherent in those activities.

**Reiteration.** Recalling specific events and interactions with as much detail as possible commits them to memory. Trying to put them into perspective and exploring the context in which they occurred, can lead to important insights and connections. Inability to do this completely brings to the learner’s own attention that something has been missed. This is useful for the *whats* (the principle, concept, or fact, or skill) and especially important for the *whys* and the *wherefores* (the rationale).

**Dynamics.** Exploring the reactions and connections one makes to a particular piece of content or event, and the process or situation within which they occur, adds richness and meaning to the content or event, thus making the learning more relevant and meaningful. This is also important to better understanding ones individual behaviour and the self in relation to others.

**Extension through Sharing.** Sharing one’s thoughts, reactions, feelings, and connections with others not only reinforces the learning the first time around (that is, when written), but potentially increases and extends the learning. Feedback [should] generate another round of learning, reframing clarifying, or reiterating. Additional benefits are gained if journal sharing amongst peers gives rise to discussion and debate and the learning is, thus, personally deepened and extended to others.

**Application.** Learning is advanced as the learner tries to apply course material / theory to his or her life, for example, how a concept or skill can be used at work. Or when examples from personal experience are sought and written about. This is especially effective if the learner can describe instances where the concept or skill may or may not work, and why. Learning journals make the ideal place for such deliberation to occur. The value of this exercise is further enhanced if the learner explores his or her own feelings and thoughts about the utility of trying something out or his or her resistance to it. And if actual attempts to try something out are detailed for “lessons learned.”

**Meta-Learning.** Keeping a learning journal makes learning a conscious and deliberate process for students. It helps them understand themselves as learners. Students and other learners reflect on and react to not only the content, but the process of learning and the context in which it takes place. They evaluate learning activities and instructional styles, and their own behaviour in the learning situation. They think about what works and what doesn’t. Armed with this knowledge and opportunity, learners can really influence the learning process and the direction of their learning. They become partners with their instructors and mentors; they become “active agents” in learning.

**Evidence of Learning.** Journal writing helps learners recognize that learning is, indeed, taking place. Their work to “make it real” actually proves to them they are learning!

Finally, learning journals offer instructors, facilitators, and mentors numerous advantages as well. One of the stronger benefits is that they can provide continuous feedback about how the learner is experiencing a course, mentor relationship, or other learning activity, what the learner appreciates and is struggling with, and how the learner is progressing. In the classroom case, where there may be many students and little time or opportunity to get to know one another, the learning journal provides an effective way of helping instructor and student connect. The journal provides a window into the student as a real and unique person.
**Downsides**

While some concerns exist regarding assessment, particularly with respect to the often subjective and introspective nature of journal writing (Varner and Peck, 2003), few criticisms or problems have been noted. There have been concerns voiced regarding the double challenge faced by international students having to articulate their thoughts and feelings in a second language (Varner and Peck, 2003). The author has found that international students, on the whole, perform as well as, and sometimes better than, domestic students. For instance, half of the minority that achieved a status of “High Distinction” in the undergraduate management course this past semester were international students (primarily Asian). Possible explanations for their performance include a work ethic international students bring to the study or a greater focus they might have. An intriguing alternative has been put forward by Lin (2001) that bears on the Australasian region: international students might possess a mental discipline that makes learning journal work second nature for them. Chinese and Japanese schools inculcate “habits of mind” involving meta-cognitive reflection and other activities throughout the education process, habits that Lin claim are supported in the wider community. Once they get past the challenge of writing in a second language, some of our international students may actually find writing reflective learning journals novel, but playing to their honed thinking behaviour, part of their cultural heritage!

One problem, as anyone who has utilised journals in instruction will appreciate, is that there is a burden of reading and responding effectively to learners’ journal entries. Journals can be extensive, a problem multiplied by the number of journals one must review. But, as Spalding and Wilson (2002) note in summarising their research on various strategies to promote reflective thinking, personalised feedback on journals and students’ relationship with instructors overall were most important in helping them grow. The reading and responding effort is clearly worth it. On the whole, the quality of student journal writing improves as a result of feedback and coaching on their journal entries. Presumably this improvement corresponds to qualitative improvements in reflection and other cognitive processes. The author has begun to collect data that will enable later research into nature of faculty feedback on journal writing and its affects. Also on the rewards of review and feedback, some of the author’s most enriching and satisfying teaching experiences have been in the solitude of reading student journal entries. Students attest to this as well, often commenting on how appreciative they are of continual feedback and how instructors’ questions and encouragement keep them going.

There is also the related problem of student balking. Students often grumble at the initial prospect of journal writing, and some are openly sceptical. Researchers and practitioners have consistently reported this (Alm, 1996; O’Rourke, 1998; Korgel, 2002). These views usually shift, as students gain exposure and confidence, and begin to see the benefits themselves, as noted in this extract from a student’s journal:

> At first I couldn’t believe that you were asking us to write journals and pass them in each week. I really didn’t understand what you were looking for, and didn’t see any learning value in it for me. In fact, I thought it all a bit childish and maybe just “make work.” Over the course of the term, however, I came to value journal writing a lot. It was interesting to see how my views changed over time. I honestly believe that I have become a more effective Team Leader at work as a result of exploring what was happening at work in my journal, thinking about it in the context of our readings and class discussions, and “listening” to your suggestions and questions [written feedback to journal entries].

In summary, those researchers and educators writing about learning journals believe strongly that their use promotes reflective and critical thinking, and that the journal can be a clear indicator of learning. Scholar Toby Fulwiler (cited in Shafer, 2002; p. 20) notes that “Journal writing tells teachers more about what students know and don’t know than more formal assignments designed specifically to find these things out.” And Brown (2002; p. 240) has noted that
“The importance of writing as a tool for learning cannot be overestimated. We make sense of ideas and experiences in a more profound way by writing about them.” Furthermore, Brady (in Brown, 2002; p. 240) is cited as noting that “…self-examination [through journal writing and reflection] and the resulting self-knowledge is ‘…an important and perhaps even necessary condition for learning about other human beings.’” Brown (2002) concludes that knowledge gained through reflection “might be used as the basis for greater understanding and appreciation of the lives and perspectives of others.” In a similar vein, Drevdahl and Dorcy (2002) found that facilitating reflection on self-learning in the context of collaborative group work through use of a structured, graded, weekly journal assists students with understanding group process.

Following is a journal excerpt that shows how reflection and journal writing can promote learning and, in this case, lead to better team functioning.

Through the act of writing down exactly what happened, I began to see that I was as much at fault in our escalating conflict as [he] was. I was not really listening to his arguments or giving them any weight, and I just kept trying to convince him that my way (the way I had thought we agreed to) was the way to go. As I thought and wrote, I realized we had never really agreed; I had just assumed that what made sense to me was what we should do. I’m not sure why the others [on the team] didn’t stop us fighting. I’ll have to check into that. In the meantime, I know I owe [him], and maybe the others, an apology. In the future, I’ll try and get other people to express their points and concerns before pushing mine on them.

A similar entry from another student is included here, which reflects a consciousness of her own learning in a team context:

I found the journal writings to be extremely useful. I feel that I have been given the opportunity to take what I would have dismissed as hellish team [and other] experiences which were nothing but a waste of time and turned them into valuable learning experiences. As I reviewed my journal entries over the course of the semester, I noticed positive personal growth in the area of group dynamics and communication skills.

Entries exemplified by the foregoing two are not uncommon. The author has reviewed hundreds of journals over the years that demonstrate sophisticated thought, observation, reflection, empathy, and analysis, including many compelling positive reviews on journals and journal use in promoting their own learning and change. Copies of journals are now being retained to further study.

**CONTENT AND PROCESS**

Journals come in many forms (Varner and Peck, 2003). They tend to be either more objective and analytic to foster critical thinking or more private and introspective for personal development. Few of the articles and studies reviewed for this paper dwelt on the personal or revelatory side of journal writing, such as might be used in therapeutic counseling. In fact, in the education context, most authors providing guidance on how to introduce journal writing stress that students should be advised to exclude highly personal sentiments and confidential matter (O’Rourke, 1998). While designed to reassure the student and to promote more critical and analytic thinking, this admonition may pose a dilemma for students as well as faculty reviewing journals. Where do you draw the line? How do you achieve high levels of reflective thinking and deep insight while at the same time avoiding aspects of the self and the self in a social or work context?

This issue seems to be an inherent contradiction, and may [unintentionally?] avoid meaningful reflection. The subject does not appear to be entertained in the literature, and there may be no straightforward answer. In the author’s opinion, some of the very best student journal entries have explored the inner domain: internal dialogues, struggles, quandaries; self-doubts, feelings, misgivings; motives, aspirations, desires. These elements, by nature, are
not often consciously or intentionally externalised for others, and may concern places some faculty may wish not to go. But they may be the very exercise that leads to insight and or behaviour change. Explicit guidance on expectations or not, some students may include extremely sensitive and private ruminations. It is up to the faculty member how to respond to such entries. Responses (feedback) provided will shape future entries.

Researchers agree that the journal is not a place to express unfounded opinion (O’Rourke, 1998); or that such opinion demonstrates lower levels of reflective and critical thought (Williams and Wessel, 2004). The author does not mind opinion, and sees some measure of it in journal entries. In fact, journals can be viewed as one outlet for (and to promote) student expression (Callister, 1993; Griffith and Frieden, 2000). How many chances do they get to have an opinion and be acknowledged for it, particularly at the undergraduate level? Nevertheless, few unfounded opinions slip by this reviewer unnoticed, and feedback intends to have students re-examine their views and how they formulate them.

While journal formats and objectives may be many, this paper focuses on one format the author and his colleagues have developed that combines a content and process approach intended to (1) assist students learn the course material (content), (2) make that learning more relevant, meaningful, and memorable by forcing them to apply it in their own lives, and to make connections between theory and practice, and (3) encourage personal / individual professional growth and development of interpersonal sensitivity and skills related to, but transcending, course content through reflective thinking. See the following section, A Learning Journal Format, for a brief description of the learning journal structure.

Objectives 2 and 3 are more context and process related, than content. By content and process approach is meant simply that the student records or annotates a course theme, issue, principle, concept (etc.), or lecture or tutorial activity or event in factual, objective terms (content) and then, through and following reflection and introspection, explores in writing the subjective and personal interpretation, relevance, feeling, and meaning (process) of the content. This process activity includes surfacing and exploring assumptions, or even searching to explain one’s own behaviour and its consequences. This process moves the student through the various levels of what is known as Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom and Krathwahl, 1956; Krathwahl et al, 1964). In ascending complexity, the levels are competence (skill), knowledge (information), comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The learning journal format the author and his colleagues have developed seeks to exercise and promote the development of thinking across all these levels.

When students can take principles, methods, and theories out of the classroom and apply them to real situations, they have extended the content to other contexts (Korgel, 2002). Additionally, in evidencing their opinions, observations, and experiences (O’Rourke, 1998) with sufficient detail, students explore and develop their process skills, while demonstrating their thinking and justifying their conclusions. These involve the richness and complexity of situations. For example, student journal entries can fall any where on a continuum from superficial description of an event to a detailed, insightful, and interpretative treatment of the same event. What is not so clear is whether the student elects the former from a motivational, purely practical point of view, or whether the writing represents an intellectual capacity. This should be the object of future research. We can be fairly confident, however, that students do improve in this regard over time, whether or not they are just responding to feedback and coaching or whether the quality of their thinking is actually improving. In any event, they often show dramatic improvements in writing (articulating their views, describing events and situations, and showing greater empathy for others and regard for multiple perspectives).

The author and other faculty working on these courses believe that student learning journal entries demonstrate
distinguishable performance differences through various levels of writing and thinking (Bloom and Krathwahl, 1956; Krathwahl et al, 1964). This means that we can confidently assess journal entries and discriminate performance across students on the journal writing requirement. There is consensus among researchers and practitioners that assessment is possible (Kalliath and Coghlan, 200; Williams and Wessel, 2004), and that weights should be sufficient to motivate students to write (Alm, 1996). Journal writing is so integral to the current undergraduate and graduate management course that it carries 40 and 35% of the semester assessment / grade respectively. Having clear and agreed criteria for assessing journals helps (see discussion below). Further, the reviewing faculty moderate journals to ensure there is consistency in evaluation. Consistency did become an issue in our case as students voiced, particularly in the graduate Qualitative Research Course, because there were three reviewers, each with his or her own expectations and reviewing and feedback style. For example, one faculty member sought an academic writing style and critical thinking, while another accepted more informal writing and personal reflective thinking.

A LEARNING JOURNAL FORMAT

The author and his colleagues have experimented with various formats and instructions to students over the years. The tendency has been to tighten the structure, that is, to make it more defined and specific. We have evolved the current format and structure to target or exercise specific mental processes and to simplify and economise the task for both students and their reviewers.

The revised learning journal format has five sections, abridged below for reference. The current version is preceded by a two-page introduction to and discussion of reflective learning journals. This is not reproduced here due to space limitations, but the essence is generally based on the benefits and assumptions presented earlier in this paper. Students also have access to a more comprehensive discussion on keeping a learning journal that is posted to the course web page. Included in that paper are the specific grading criteria used by reviewers and additional tips on writing reflective journals.

Journal Structure and Guidance to Students

There will be five sections to each journal entry. Each section is compulsory, and worth up to 20% of the overall journal entry mark. There is no page limit, but a “rule of thumb” might be half a page for each section.

1. Lecture. Briefly summarise the topics covered and your experience of the lecture, highlighting the points important to you, and any questions you might have. Explain how the material (or certain aspects) apply or might apply in your life (work, study, play, relationships).

2. Tutorial. The same guidance applies here as for Item 1. Additionally, tutorials typically will be more interactive and applied, so exercises and activities need to be described from a process perspective and any outcomes or results interpreted.

3. Readings. Briefly summarise the topics covered, highlighting the points important to you. Show how the readings relate to lecture, tutorial, or team work. Critique them: what were their strong and weak points, and why do you think so?

4. Team Work. Explain your team’s progress or lack thereof; detail what is happening and explore why things are happening or not happening. Consider your role and contribution to the team’s task and process. Compare this team to other experiences you have had.

5. Critical Incident. Here, describe any event or occurrence from the week related to the topics of the week, what it
means to you and why it is important in the context of the course.


CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

A strong case for the use of learning journals in education can be made. Numerous articles and studies have appeared in the past decade that document the use and the benefits of learning journals. Improvements and growth across a range of skills and competencies have been reported (O’Rourke, 1998; Kalliath and Coghlan, 2001; Brown, 2002; Loo and Thorpe, 2002) and through the depth of thinking abilities (Patton, et al, 1997; Griffith and Frieden, 2000; Korgel, 2002). It is not clear whether use is increasing, and future research might examine the prevalence or trend over a longer period of time. While learning journals appear to play a major role in fields such as nursing, counseling, and engineering, and for curricula requiring practicums and internships (such as teacher education), it is unclear the extent to which they are being used in management education. It might be productive to survey faculty in Australasia to determine the extent of use in this region and to identify if there are any unique features and challenges.

While the learning journal offers great promise in terms of promoting important and relevant skills, and providing at least a partial solution to large, impersonal classes, it is not without costs. The two-way dialogue learning journals permit, highly regarded by some researchers and practitioners cited, requires considerable investment and commitment. There is a high burden of reviewing and providing feedback to students. Some of the author’s associate faculty members have declined use of learning journals for this very reason, or believe that they should be used only in higher-level and smaller courses. An important area for future research might be to continue to refine and tailor the learning journal to maximise its impact while minimising or compensating for the labour intensive nature of faculty response (feedback and coaching). Ramsey (2002) employed peer sharing of journal entries, believing that this interactive approach amplifies the value of learning journals, and O’Rourke (1998) experimented with peer assessments for the same reason. Such approaches may extend the value of journal writing and reflection and might possibly provide a means for reducing the burden of faculty response. Some authors have structured the journal writing assignment, targeted specific ends (Korgel, 2002; Kalliath and Coghlan, 2001), which may make the tasks of journal writing and journal reviewing both easier. The author’s version, revised again for Semester II, 2004, is intended to improve integration and application, while reducing sheer volumes of writing.

The author and his colleagues have plans to advance research into the use and efficacy of learning journals. First, clarity is needed regarding the kind and amount of guidance students need at the outset. Most researchers and practitioners who have weighed in on this matter stress clear expectations are needed (Patton et al, 1997; O’Rourke, 1998). (And, certainly clear expectations are required for consistent assessment and feedback.) Yet, intuition suggests that explicit and comprehensive guidance (on how to reflect or on what to write) reduces independent and creative thought and approaches. The author’s own experience is that students will express confusion, scepticism, and reluctance irrespective of the type and amount of guidance provided. One way to discover more about guidance and its effects would be to compare classes of students, some receiving more general and basic guidance and the others receiving specific and detailed instructions and criteria.

Another line of inquiry planned is to test the hypothesis that students exhibiting a particular learning style (Kolb, 1984; Kolb et al, 1995) will take to journal writing (reflection) more easily than other students and perform more consistently on the assignment over time. Kalliath and Coghlan (2001) have noted that some structured approaches
to learning journal writing employ Kolb’s experiential learning cycle framework for journal headings (experience, reflection, conceptualisation, an experimentation). An examination of student performance on journal writing against, say, the MBTI classifications (Myers and Myers, 1993) might also be a worthwhile study. Interestingly, Varner and Peck (2003) have their students take the MBTI. They suggest that certain [MBTI] types find the assignment natural, while others may find journal writing so unnatural as to reduce its value. In the author’s experience, ruling out extreme exceptions, the majority of students can perform well in journal writing and improvement can be traced.

After ten years of experience using learning journals in management education and generally studying their value and costs, the author remains a convinced practitioner. The benefits appear to outweigh the costs. Learning journals bring humanity and reality into the management curriculum. Do reflection, insight, and empathy belong in the management classroom? The author thinks so. Learning journal use—and particularly the reflective thinking aspect it requires and builds—develops the kinds of interpersonal and professional skills that people need to be contributing team members and effective managers and leaders.

REFERENCES


Kalliath, T., and D. Coghlan. (2001). Developing reflective skills through journal writing in an OD

[1] The author has reviewed dozens of articles detailing various aspects of learning journals, including their theoretical
foundations and philosophical traditions, objectives and outcomes, methodology, use as assessment, and application in disciplines as widely-ranging as engineering, nursing, counseling, and teacher preparation, as well as in management. The most interesting and relevant of these articles and studies—and their implications for educators and future research—are incorporated into this paper and included as references. This line of research has also led, interestingly, into related streams on reflective thinking, active learning, and meta-cognition [thinking about thinking (or learning)].

[2] See the discussion below for a summary of benefits, along with the indicative references to researchers and practitioners who have identified the respective benefits and positive outcomes.

[3] To further promote understanding of self as learner and to highlight that people express diverse learning styles, students in the undergraduate and graduate courses take Kolb’s (1984) Learning Style Inventory.

[4] The author has a suspicion that journal writing will come more easily to some learners than to others, based on learning preferences, thinking styles, or even simple experience. This will be the focus of on-going research.