9th European Quality Assurance Forum

13 – 15 November 2014

University of Barcelona, Spain

Changing education – QA and the shift from teaching to learning

Author(s)

Name: Roberta Piazza

Position: Associate Professor

Organisation: University of Catania

Country: Italy

E-mail address: r.piazza@unict.it

Short bio (150 words max):

Roberta Piazza, PhD in Education, is a researcher on adult education, lifelong learning and career guidance. Associate professor in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Catania, she is member of the international PHD in Education (University of Rome and University of Granada). Scientific referent for counselling (degree course in Education), in charge of competences recognition activities in the University of Catania, she is project manager and coordinator of University postgraduate course in Expert in job Placement Services. Coordinator of the local unit of the ERASMUS ACADEMIC NETWORK, Network for Innovation in Career Guidance & Counselling in Europe (NICE) (2013-2015), she is key staff member of J. Monnet Programme (2009-2014). Associate member of PASCAL Observatory (from 2008), she took part to monitoring activity on the development of learning region in Italy. She is linked internationally to specialist groups concerned with learning cities *Learning Cities Network* (Pascal Observatory).

Name: Simona Rizzari

Position: Phd in Education, Tutor

Organisation: University of Rome "Tor Vergata" and University of Granada

Country: Italy

E-mail address: simonarizzari@alice.it

Short bio (150 words max):

Simona Rizzari, graduated in Education Sciences at the University of Catania in 2006, attended the school for teaching philosophy, psychology and science education in secondary schools, earning the qualification in 2009. She has been involved as tutor within the University postgraduate course in Expert in job Placement Services (2013-2014), organized by the University of Catania. She received her international PhD in Education Sciences from the University of Rome "Tor Vergata" and from the University of Granada in 2014. Her research interests include adult education and lifelong learning, with a particular focus on higher education and work-based learning

(If there are several authors, please copy and fill in the fields for each author.)

After the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum will be published on the Forum website. If you do not wish your paper to be published, please indicate so here. This has no consequences on the selection of the papers.

Proposal

Title: *Quality internship. Students' self-assessment in their work-based learning experiences*

Abstract (150 words max):

Assessment in internship is an important part of the learning process aimed to provide a focus on what has been learned during the internship. Using diaries is a strategy to deepen learning, stimulate critical thinking, improve reflective practice and enables learners to valorise what they have learnt.

The paper aims to analyse a number of key issues that could affect the quality of the process: students understanding of the purpose of diaries and the support given by tutors in relation to completing a reflective journal.

To gain an understanding of these elements, the internship activity of 18 students (course on *Expert on Job placement services*) was monitored. The research activity carried on was based on the analysis of students journals to determine the extent and level of reflection achieved. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken in order to establish students views on the role of journals in promoting reflection and on the guidance given by tutors and teachers.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

The value of internship in easing the transition to employment depends on its quality in terms of learning content and working conditions. It what the Council of European Union suggests (2014), highlighting that over the past two decades internship has become an important entry point into the labour market.

Anyway, various studies and surveys have found that quality problems affect a significant share of traineeships (Gerken 2012), most particularly those where there is lacking attention to a solid and meaningful learning content, that means, inter alia, the identification of the specific skills to be acquired, supervision and mentoring of the students, and monitoring of his/her progress (European Council 2014). Monitoring and assessment in internship are an important part of the learning process aimed to establish the learners level of ability and to provide a focus on what has been learned during the internship experience (EC 2013 a, b).

According to Dewey (1966), the act of learning is "one of continual reorganising, reconstructing [and] transforming experience" (p. 50), intended as a cyclic model where learning occurred through experience and through reflection (Boud et al. 1985; Kolb 1984; Mezirow 1991; Osterman and Kottkamp 2004; Schön 1983, 1987). Much of the literature on reflection suggests reflection is part of a learning process involving not just cognition, but emotions, and resulting in a restructuring of conceptual frameworks. In a number of these models, there is reference to different levels of reflection (Mezirow, 1981; Brookfield 1995). The process of moving through the levels can be interpreted as moving from in-formation to trans-formation (York and Marsick 2000), although much reflection is at the lower levels of reflection (technical, practical), rather than being transformative.

Using student journals throughout the duration of their learning experience - as a form of formative assessment - is a strategy to deepen learning, stimulate critical thinking, improve reflective practice and enable learners to valorise what they have learnt (Boud et al. 1985; Mezirow 1990, 1991, Kember et al. 1996, Williams et al. 2000, Bleakley 2000). The use of journal writing as a means of promoting reflection and learning in educational settings has been widely recommended (Boud et al., 1985; Williams et al., 2000); moreover, journal writing is widely used as an educational strategy to encourage reflection in professional development too (Williams et al., 2000). The process of journal writing allows students to reflect on their attitudes and feelings and expand the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning (Chirema, 2007; Moon 2006). In journals, the act of writing is seen as a way to stimulate thinking, explain and clarify complex thoughts, thanks to the support of and the interaction between student and teacher (or tutor) facilitating reflection.

The experience presented, intended to students attending the second level post degree course on Job placement services (Department of Education), has been set up as a support activity to motivate students towards recognizing their learning outcome, towards narrowing the gap between theories and practice, towards gaining a clearer overview of their learning progress, towards an appreciation of the

importance of self-evaluation in the role of improving themselves. The writing of the reflective journal allowed students to review their learning experiences, to evaluate their performance and to plan future learning, taking charge of their personal and professional development (Clark 2004).

Although reflective practice is a growing requirement for many practitioners working in education, health and the social services, it was agreed that in the career guidance training programmes it should be paid particular attention to the development of reflexive practice, rather than assume the trainee practitioner is going to automatically develop this professional skill. As suggested by Reid and Bassot (2012, 179), practising purposeful reflection not only improves practice, but the reflective practitioner (Schön 1983) can support clients by creating spaces for career development thinking. Anyway, it's important to stress that the place to begin this work on reflection and reflexivity is within the development of a professional identity, and, above all, within initial training (Reid and West, 2011).

Reflexivity · intended as the deeper process by which we are aware of our own responses to what is occurring within a particular context · can lead to a greater understanding of how we co-construct knowledge about the world, and ways of operating within it. As Etherington (2004, 29) suggests, acquiring this reflexivity in counselling practice, intended as a deeper metacognitive process, students on career guidance degree programmes need to practise it during their learning across the curriculum. In a 'safe' context as the internship activities, they can develop their reflexive capacities becoming fully conscious of and act upon the subjective influences which have an impact on their developing practice. Within a curriculum for guidance practitioners, use of reflective journals, recorded collaborative discussions, useful to chart the development and understanding of reflective processes, can all help to develop this personal and professional skill (Reid and Bassot 2012).

Anyway, if reflective journal writing is internationally recognised as a valuable tool to promote students' learning, it's not always easy to determine the extent and level of reflection achieved and the effectiveness of reflective journals as an educational strategy for facilitating learning in the practice setting. A reflective learning journal is useful in cultivating lifelong learners if implemented successfully. At the same time, as an innovative idea, the relevance and value of keeping a reflective learning journal are not readily perceivable to many students such that the time and effort it requires can be justified. For example, clear instruction and continuous support are important as students might feel quite lost and confused at first, not knowing how to begin.

There are some questions to consider when using student journals as a form of assessment. Learners need to understand the purpose of these tools and understand how to map their learning experiences so that it can be used as a reflective aid. Learners and indeed tutors will also need to understand how the learners documented experiences contribute towards assessment. This highlights further issues about the validity of the journal as an authentic representation of the learner's work. Tutors may require additional professional development in structuring student journals and using them for assessment purposes.

The research path

Starting from previous researches based on the use of students journals (Chirema, 2007; Lew, Schmidt 2011, Mann et al. 2009, Moon 2004), the intervention aimed to analyse a number of key issues that could affect the quality of the process: i) students understanding of the purpose of diaries in their internship experience; ii) the effectiveness of reflective journals in promoting reflection and learning in the practice setting; iii) the nature and content of guidelines given to students with regard to the use of a reflective journal and the support given to students by tutors in relation to completing a reflective journal during their practice experience.

To gain an understanding of all these elements, the internship activity of a group of 18 students (attending a 60 Credits post II level degree course on Expert on Job placement services of the University of Catania) was monitored. All the students (17 female, 1 male, aged 23-34 years old) have a second level degree: 12 in Psychology, 4 in Education, 2 in Humanities. None of them have ever experienced the writing of learning or reflective journal.

After almost 1000 hours in class and distance activities (September 2013-March 2014), the students were expected to spend 300 hours within different career guidance and job placement settings

(March-July 2014). The host organisations were the public and private job services of the city of Catania and its region. According to the internship organisation of the University of Catania, 15 practitioners from the hosting organisations and 3 teachers from the University, who should facilitate the student's internship, have been chosen. In addition, 2 external tutors were selected, experts in internship activities, to support and offer guidance to the completion of the reflective journal and the final project of the course.

As part of their internship activities, intended as a strategy allowing the students to become autonomous learners, the student were asked to keep a reflective journal on his or her experiences related to the participation in the career guidance settings. The reflective journal was meant to help the student develop his or her competencies through reflection and critical thinking about the experiences. Students were assessed on their reflective writing, in order to ensure the requisite student effort (Williams et al. 2000).

The course students were not acquainted with the use of a reflective journal, nor reflective journals were an integral part of the programme's assessment strategy within the department of Education or the University of Catania. Nevertheless, within the modules attended by the students in the job Placement course they were required to complete a reflective journal as part of the achievement of the internship activities. Students were encouraged to write their own reflective journals, recording and analysing significant events or critical incidents that occurred during their experience, connecting what they learned during the course with their internship practice, identifying future learning needs and trying to gain a deeper understanding of their professional purposes. To complete their journals were given specific guidelines to the students. In order to clarify some critical aspects of the writing and to discuss the recordings with their tutors as their internship progressed, students were followed through personal contacts, focus group and group workshops.

The structure of the writing pathway, which lasted about three months, was as follows:

1) a preliminary phase, aimed at giving students some understanding of 'reflection' and introducing how to use the reflexive journal. The aims of this phase were: to help students to overcome some of the barriers to write reflectively in academic situations; to ensure that the level of self-disclosure was appropriate; and to gain an established understanding of the journal writing assignment. A series of shorter exercises were used as further support for the kind of thinking and reflective writing that is often required in learning journals (Moon, 2006);

2) the internship phase, during which the students wrote the reflexive journal. The tutors monitored the processes and supported students during this stage, giving specific instructions;

3) a monitoring phase, mainly simultaneous to the internship phase, based on focus groups face to face meetings, questionnaire. During the monitoring activities, students exchanged experiences and opinions with the researcher and the tutors. Focus group interviews were undertaken as validation of diary findings. The students were asked a set of questions in order to promote discussion and exchange of viewpoints. A self-report questionnaire, involving a sample of students (9), using the same set of focus group questions, was undertaken in order to establish students'views on the role of journals and the support provided by tutors in completing the journal in a more critical perspective.

At the end of the students assignments, researcher started a qualitative evaluation phase, based on: the analysis of students journals (n. 18) to determine the extent and level of reflection achieved in professional practice; the analysis of the self-report questionnaire (n. 10) to appraise self-reflection in learning, the usefulness of journal writing in improving reflexivity, the guidance received.

Results

The analysis of the **textual content** of the 18 journals was based on the Boud et al. (1985) model of reflection, adapted by Wang et al. (1995). The model categorized six stages of increasing depth of reflection: attention to feelings, association, integration, relationship-seeking, validation, appropriation and outcome. Using Boud's model, the category of attending to feelings was most commonly used, along with association and integration. The journals were also categorized using Mezirow's categories (1990, 1991) into non reflectors (no evidence of any of the reflective elements), reflectors (that showed evidence of Boud's first three categories, but no change in critical perspective) and critical reflectors

EUA
European University Association

ENQA
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EURASHE

esu
european students' union

(that demonstrated reflection at the level of validation, appropriation and/or outcome of reflection, but also made evident a changed perspective).

Prior to starting the process of analysis, the researcher discussed the process of assess with the 2 tutors acquainted with knowledge of reflection and the use of reflective journals.

According to the Boud model and Mezirow's categories, it appears that reflection can be assessed and different levels of reflection discerned. Only four students showed no evidence of any of the elements of reflective thinking. They wrote in a descriptive and concrete way, with minimal evidence of abstract thinking. Making some observations in relation to events occurred during their internship, there was little evidence of analysis of the experience. The group of students (12) demonstrating reflection at one or more of the first three levels . attending to feelings, association, and integration . were able to compare their experiences diverting them into new learning opportunities. They were able to identify relationships between prior knowledge/attitudes and/or feelings and to modify what was known achieving new insights. However, unlike critical reflectors they did not demonstrate evidence of validating assumptions, or a transformation of perspectives. Critical reflectors (2) always returned to the experience in the discussion, often examined in a critical way. The analysis of the problem was conducted considering the context and adopting a multi-dimensional perspective. Willing to change, they were able to connect existing resources, prior knowledge, relevant informations and appropriate literature.

The findings from focus group **interviews** suggest that students do reflect on their practice, however, the highest number of reflections occurred at the lower levels of reflectivity. Anyway, the discussions demonstrated that failure to use and assess reflection and reflective thinking could imply to learners lack of real value for this activity.

All students available to answer the **questionnaire** (10) reported that journal writing affected their own learning most commonly by encouraging reflection upon that learning and their experiences and developing their ability to think more critically. Students reported an increased awareness of their own learning, as well as of their own strengths and weaknesses. Reflective journals have been considered useful to promote professional development, enabling to make links between theory and practice and encouraged them to evaluate their performance. Negative views on the value of the journals in relation to the promotion of reflection were essentially related: to the structure of journals and the demands of time devoted to the task of writing; to the difficulty to express personal thoughts and feelings academically; to the adequacy to reflect and talk on feelings and experiences rather than write them in a reflective journal. Some of them disagree on the assessment of the journal, because assessing journal entries has seen as a barrier or obstacle that could discourage the process of private reflection.

Almost all the respondents were positive regarding the support and the guidance they received from the 2 expert tutors. However, the totality of students expressed negative views regarding the role of the academic teachers and the practitioners from the hosting organisations. In particular, the practitioners didn't have any experience or familiarity with reflection and journal writing, so their contribution to the personal and professional students' growth was vanished. The practitioners never red the content of the journals or discussed it with the students.

Final remarks

Journal writing needs to be treated as an ability to be developed over time. While many of the 18 students have been able to demonstrate levels of reflectivity, there were a number who recorded their reflections as a descriptive catalogue, appearing unable to write analytically about the process. As Kember highlighted (1996), "formal education normally requires a style of writing which is virtually the antithesis of reflective writing. Many students find it hard to unlearn their conception of impersonal academic writing and to record their personal reflections" (p. 345). The research, however, demonstrates the students' capability of achieving this through instructional planning and frequent feedback. University courses need to be planned to allow the reflective writing development to take place. The findings of this research suggest that reflective thinking may develop if it is deliberately stimulated by the educational context. As result of the students' questionnaires, according to Sobral

(2000), a greater effort at reflection is associated with more positive learning experiences and to the readiness for studentsqself-regulated learning (Lew, Schmidt 2011).

If the study provides evidence that is possible to assess the reflection achieved by students from their reflective journals, what emerges is that the students consider, as most influential elements in enabling the development of reflection: a supportive environment, group discussion, organizational climate and adequate time for reflection. Anyway, the importance of receiving clear guidance on the purpose of journal writing from tutors and teachers and the need for continuous feedback were highlighted as prevailing factors in promoting the effective use of journals. Despite these considerations, teachers and practitioners, whose task in supporting students was considered to be extremely important, do not seemed to be adequately prepared for their role.

The quality of internship learning heavily depends on the quality of feedback and supervision by both the practitioners and the University (Narayanan et al. 2010). In order to enhance the learning experience of students while at internships, both companies and universities have to find a way to effectively support, facilitate, and supervise students while they take and complete their internship (Gerken, 2012, Tynjälä 2008). Work-based learning in the form of internships is increasingly important for universities. However, there is a limited understanding of how universities, students, and the world of work can effectively interact with each other before, during, and after completion of the internships. In addition, few training opportunities are given to the personnel and university staff to develop competences in assessing studentsqinternship.

Universities and companies would clearly benefit from collaborating together on the internship program by sharing purposes in order to increase the studentsqlearning outcomes and the quality of the internship experience. Therefore, establishing a common understanding, the use of shared methodologies and tools between the different stakeholders before starting the internship and a joint guidance of the internship students by both company and university seems a necessity. To overcome barriers to communication, ICT technology could provide a means helping to bridge the differences between the company and the university (Gerken 2012). Creating a social network or a community of learners would support co-learning where the stakeholders can benefit from each otherq experience to further improve the internship supervision.

References:

Bleakley, A. (2000). Writing with invisible ink! Narrative, confessional and reflective practice. *Reflective Practice* 1, 11-24.

Boud, D., Keogh, R., Walker, D. (Eds.) (1985). *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. Kogan Page: London.

Brookfield, S. (1995). Becoming a critically reflective teacher. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Chirema, K. D. (2007). The use of reflective journals in the promotion of reflection and learning in post-registration nursing students. *Nurse Education Today*, 27, 192. 202.

Clarke, M. (2004). Reflection: Journals and Reflective Questions : a Strategy for Professional Learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 29, 2, 1-13.

Council of the European Union (2014). *Council recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships*.

Dewey, J. (1966). *Democracy and education: an introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Free Press.

Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

European Commission (2013a). *Work-Based Learning in Europe. Practices and Policy Pointers*.

·   (2013b). *Apprenticeship and Traineeship Schemes in EU27: Key Success Factors*.

Gerken, M., Rienties, B., Giesbers, B., Könings, K. D. (2012). Enhancing the Academic Internship Learning Experience for Business Education. A Critical Review and Future Directions. In Van den

Bossche, P. et al. (eds.), Learning at the Crossroads of Theory and Practice, *Advances in Business Education and Training*, 4, 7-22.

Kember, D. Jones, A. Loke, A. McKay, J. Sinclair, K. Tse, H. Webb, C. Wong, M. Wa Yan, P. Yeung, E. (1996). Developing Curricula to encourage students to write reflective journals. *Educational Action Research*. 4 [3], 329-348.

Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential Learning as the Science of Learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Lew, M.D.N., Schmidt, H.G. (2011). Self-reflection and academic performance: is there a relationship? *Advances in Health Science Education*, 16, 529. 545.

Mann, K. Gordon, J., MacLeod, A. (2009). Reflection and reflective practice in health professions education: a systematic review. *Adv in Health Science Education*, 14, 595. 621.

Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education*, 32(1), 3-24.

·   (1990). How critical reflection triggers transformative learning. In Mezirow, J. et al. (Eds). *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1-20.

·   (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Franscisco: Jossey-Bass.

Moon, J. (2004). *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning*, London: Routledge-Falmer.

·   (2006). *Learning Journals: a handbook for reflective practice and professional development*. London: Routledge-Falmer.

Narayanan, V.K., Olk, P.M., and Fukami, C.V. (2010). Determinants of internship effectiveness: An exploratory model. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 9(1), 61. 80.

Osterman, K.F. and Kottkamp, R.B. (2004). *Reflective Practice for Educators: professional development to improve student learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Reid, H.L. and Bassot, B. (2012) Reflexivity. In Schiersmann, C. et al (Eds). *NICE Handbook for the Academic Training of Career Guidance and Counselling Professionals*, Heidelberg University, Institute of Educational Science.

Reid, H.L. and West, L. (2011): Struggling for space: narrative methods and the crisis of professionalism in career guidance in England. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 39, 5, 397-410.

Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

·   (1987). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sobral, D. (2000). An appraisal of medical studentsqreflection-in-learning. *Medical Education*, 34, 182. 187.

Teekman, B. (2000). Exploring reflective thinking in nursing practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 31, 1125. 1135.

Tynjälä, P. (2008). Perspectives into learning at the workplace. *Educational Research Review*, 3(2), 130. 154.

Williams, R., Sundelin, O., Foster-Seargeant, E., & Norman, G. (2000). Assessing the reliability of grading reflective journal writing. *Journal of Physical Therapy Education*, 14, 23. 26.

Wang, F.K.Y. Kember, D. Chung, L.Y.F. Yan, L. (1995). Assessing the levels of student reflection from reflective journals. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 22, 48-57.

York, L., Marsick, V. (2000). Organizational learning and transformation. In Mezirow, J. and Associates (Eds.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Questions for discussion:

Which are the difficulties for learners and indeed teachers/trainers to understand how the learners documented experiences contribute towards assessment?

Is the journal as an authentic representation of the learners work?

Do Teachers/trainers require additional professional development in structuring student journals and using them for assessment purposes? Which kind of competences they should acquire?

What about the role of tutors in the workplace? Do they feel involved in the University activities?