

Reflective Learning Journal Entry 20 August 2007-08-20

I've thought a lot about the course lately and especially about last week's session. I'm also thinking a lot about my role and responsibilities as course convenor, as well as other things that are going on in my life, some personal, some professional. I don't know how much I am willing or able to say at the moment, but I know that reflection is critical to my own continued learning and professional development. In sharing some of my reflections with you, you have a unique opportunity to look into the inner workings of Dr J. In sharing some of my thoughts and feelings with you, you may get a clearer picture of what drives me to do the things I do and don't do.

Reflection is usually a personal practice; the individual benefits to the degree he or she applies the discipline honestly and in a timely way. In the way we practice it, you share your reflections with me in your journal, and I try and respond in a helpful way. We both benefit; you, for having made conscious and written down your reflections; I, for having read and reacted to them in some way. Further, your combined journals provide rich feedback to me that I can incorporate into my teaching, so others benefit, as well.

You may see journal writing as just a required part of assessment, thus a necessary evil. If this is you, then journal writing will probably remain an imposition, a hurdle for you to get through, something done for me instead of yourself. I will probably never know (until, perhaps, course evaluation time when you strike back at me for my unfair and unconventional teaching tactics!) If you value journal writing as a new way to achieve understanding and improve personal and professional effectiveness, then you will increasingly apply yourself and invest in your thinking and writing in a way that will pay big dividends.

That's why I reflect and write and sometimes share my thoughts with others. I want to improve myself. I want to learn. I know that I am stubborn and inflexible sometimes. I know I have fixed ideas. I act single-minded and arrogant. I know that I keep doing things my way even when other ways might be more effective. Honest reflection (and honest feedback) help me to see what I'm doing and not doing and the effects it has. The hardest thing for me is to know when I do things because of commitment to my beliefs and when I do them for lack of skill or knowledge of a better way.

I recently read a book about worldly wisdom by Baltasar Gracian, written just before Machiavelli, who wrote *The Prince*, was born, I believe. For Gracian, the worldly wise follows popular opinion; it is foolish to be wise alone, he submits. We must understand the reality – that is, what is truly needed in a given circumstance – and what we should and can do. What do we care about most? What do we think is the best course of action? Are we acting in accordance with beliefs and our values we hold dear or out of self-serving interests? Are our beliefs and values in need of exploration and possible revision?

I know there are more questions, here, than answers. I don't know the answers. I know only that I must continue to ask if I am to learn and change. So, what is it I'm so troubled about? Why have these questions now?

I am reminded of last week. After what was for me a great first hour, I found the second hour quite difficult and exhausting. We were to move from visioning the Life Centre to developing the proposal for it. In accordance with the culture of collaboration and empowerment we are trying to foster, here, we approached this as a collective task, trying as a group to identify the

elements needed in a proposal to be able to craft it. This is where we got stuck. I'm sure many of you felt frustrated with the process and maybe with me. I'm willing to take your possible frustration, anger, or disappointment if the process (and, ultimately we) succeed in the long run.

Could I have handled this all differently, as instructor or leader? Yes. I could have done a number of things differently. I could have, for example, given you the framework for the proposal. I could have done a number of things to make the process simpler and faster. You may think this is what a *real* leader would have done. I may never what the right thing to do would have been. This said, I am thrilled about the way we resolved the problem last week, with the decision for learning cells to work on various aspects of the proposal.

I am impressed and pleased that some of you were willing to show leadership by getting up and taking responsibility for moving us along. How many of you wrote about this in your journals? I would expect that every one of you made many observations to yourselves (and maybe later to others) about our process last week. I would hope that you were sensing your thoughts and feelings during all this, that you were recording them as they happened, and that you continued to process them after class and wrote about them in your journals. Why? Because last week was the stuff of incredible learnings about management and people, about group work and collaboration, about planning, organising, and much else.

I'm not saying that what we did was textbook perfect, that is, best practice. On the contrary. It might have been, in your opinion, worst case. But it was perfect in the lessons it had to offer each of us, but only if we exact those lessons. I'm working on the lessons for me. What would or could I have done differently, if anything? Could we have got the outcomes we did through any other process? Those are some of my questions. But, what are the lessons for you? What are your take aways from last week?