

Diaries and Self-Reflection in the Practical Training

Maria Carmen Ricoy, Sálvora Feliz & Tiberio Feliz

Introduction

The diary constitutes a common point among Dostoevsky, Che Guevara, and Anne Frank. The diary is already a traditional genre of literature. In his *Writer's Diary*, Fyodor Dostoevsky included a collection of non-fiction and fictional writings from pieces written for a periodical between 1873 and 1881. Che Guevara wrote *The Secret Papers of a Revolutionary* (1940). Anne Frank wrote *The Diary of a Young Girl* from 1929 to 1945. *Zlata's Diary* was written by a young girl living in Sarajevo in 1992. *My Opposition* (2007) is the diary written by Friedrich Kellner to describe Nazi Germany. *The Freedom Writers Diary* (1999) is the story of Erin Gruwell, a teacher who faced her diverse mix of African-American, Latino, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Caucasian teenagers in rough neighbourhoods in Long Beach. She also used the diaries of Anne Frank and Zlata. The students paralleled their lives to those of these young girls also surrounded by violence.

Some famous diaries are fictional. *Bridget Jones* (1998 & 2000) was firstly a column in *The Independent* in 1995 about the life of a thirty-year-old single woman in London trying to make sense of life and love with the help of a surrogate "urban family" of friends in the 1990s. The column was published later as two novels (1996 and 1999). Both novels were adapted for films in 2001 and 2004. Other diaries are based on fictional journeys as Homer's *Odyssey* (orig. c. 8th cent. BCE, 1967), Dante's *Divine Comedy* (orig. 1321, 1948), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (orig. 1726, 1955), Voltaire's *Candide* (orig. 1759, 1966), Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (orig. 1759, 1962), and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (orig. 1902, 1998). Other books of travels as *The Travels of Marco Polo* (orig. 1298-1299, 1990) are not even considered authentic and could be based on imaginary and/or on accounts of other travellers. Sometimes, a real life journey is transformed into a fiction as the Kira Salak's *White Mary* (2008).

Alaszewski (2006) explains that there are texts which have some of the features of diaries as the Japanese "diaries" and Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (10th century). These texts are time structured and contemporaneous, and have records. In this same sense, we could accept oldest antecedents as the Roman chronicles. However, some writings as *To Myself*, written by the Marcus Aurelius (orig. 2nd century CE; Joad, 1960), show clearly many features of a diary. Some Japanese pillowbooks of court ladies and Asian travel journals offer the characteristics of the diaries. Li Ao (orig. 9th century CE; Barnstone & Barnstone, 1980), for instance, kept a diary of his journey through Southern China.

The same author (Alaszewski, 2006) related the success of the diary to religious reasons as the *Diary of Samuel Pepys* (1886). He related that this writing increased self-awareness to surveillance of the self both by the diarist and by others. Therefore, the prime motivation of the self-surveillance in early diaries would be religious and, with secularization of society and development of Psychology (especially psychoanalytical theory), diaries have changed their finalities, using them to collect feelings, understand own behaviour, and manage the self. The diary as a professional instrument for monitoring or self-monitoring has emerged in twentieth century, especially in the "reflective journal." As Alaszewski states (2006, p. 10): "*In human services reflective journals have become one way of monitoring and enhancing the personal development and performance of professionals, especially in initial training programmes.*"

Delimiting the field

The etymology of Diary is related to Latin noun *diarium* (daily allowance or daily food) and adjective *diarius* (daily). Therefore, the original word is linked to a regular daily activity. That means there is a daily frequency in a series of events or activities. This first approach is useful and must be clarified.

What is a diary?

Diary is a very open word. The on-line Dictionary.com (<http://dictionary.reference.com/>) defines the diary as:

A daily record, usually private, especially of the writer's own experiences, observations, feelings, attitudes, etc.

This definition explicit some interesting terms:

- The action (record): somebody registers something, usually by writing;
- The object (experiences, observations, feelings, attitudes, etc.): perceptions of the author;
- The author (writer's own): about or related to him/herself.

The Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diary>) defines the diary as:

(...) a record (originally in written book format) with discrete entries arranged by date reporting on what has happened over the course of a day or other period. Diaries undertaken for institutional purposes play a role in many aspects of human civilization, including government records (e.g., Hansard), business ledgers and military records. Schools or parents may teach or require children to keep diaries in order to encourage the expression of feelings and to promote thought.

This definition collects some interesting terms about:

- The format (with discrete entries): there are several, independent, differentiated entries;
- The order (arranged by date reporting): there is a sequence in writing and reporting;
- The object (on what has happened): facts and events are the focus;

- The timing (over the course of a day or other period): it is not only a singular event, but along a time period;
- The contexts (for institutional purposes [...] Schools or parents): they could be used in institutions, homes, and schools;

In *The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods*, Scott (2006, p. 68) defines the diary as:

A document, generally written for personal use rather than for publication, that records events and ideas related to the particular experiences of the author. The definition focuses on:

- The goal (for personal use): it is for an individual;
- The object (events and ideas): he opens it to personal contributions (ideas);
- The source (related to the particular experiences of the author): it avoids the possibilities of the diary to collect observations in a non-participative one.

Some examples of diaries related to literature

According to the use context, some words could be synonyms of diary: account, agenda, appointment book, chronicle, daily record, daybook, engagement book, journal, log, minutes, notebook, or record (see *Dictionary.com*). Perhaps, the most similar term to diary is journal.

The journal is a psychotherapeutic technique largely developed around 1966 at Drew University and popularized by Progoff (1975) with the name of Intensive Journal Method. The therapist, counsellor, adviser, or researcher ask for a series of writing exercises using loose leaf notebook paper in a simple ring-binder, divided into sections. These different sections are defined according to various areas of the writer's life or writing strategies. As Rozakis (2004, p.50-51) explains:

"It's clear that a journal is different from a diary. A journal is an idea book, a record of your thoughts, emotions, and reflections. A diary, in contrast, is used to record the day's events, like a Filofax or Day-Timer. Diaries are not used for reflection or experimentations. As such, they don't help you improve your writing skills while you grapple with life issues. A diary can help you make it to that 10 o'clock meeting on Tuesday, however."

Really, the diary and the journal could have similar meanings. Frequently, we use the name of diary as a hybrid of the traditional diary and the journal. In our case, the diary is a notebook the students write in, record the significant events, and place to write ideas, self-reflections, and emotions. Therefore, we do not want to define the diary but our use of the diary, our diary technique.

Nowadays, there are virtual means based on regular writing. The blog (a shortening of Web log) is a web page, usually maintained by an individual with regular textual entries (comments, events, reflections, etc.) or other materials such as photos, videos, audios, etc. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order (the last one at the top of the page). Most blogs were

textual, though nowadays some of them use other formats as basis of communication as photos (photoblog), videos (vlog), music (MP3 blog), or audio (podcasting). The main difference with the diary is the public feature of the blog. While the diary is usually a personal, private writing, the blog is written to share it with other readers who could add comments or information.

Another similar web tool is the wiki. It is an on-line tool that enables to contribute or modify the content of a text that is shared in an on-line space. Wikis are often used as collaborative tools. The encyclopedia Wikipedia, to be found under <http://en.wikipedia.org/> (Change en. by other initials to change the language: es. (Spanish), de. (German), fi. (Finnish), fr. (French), eo. (Esperanto), gl. (Galician), etc.)) is one of the well-known wikis, but there are others that are used in business, research, or writing to provide collaborative opportunities inside a unique space, situated in a shared website. The main differences with the diary are that it is a shared, non-sequential writing. Several individuals can edit the content at any time and it is useful because it is a collaborative task. The wiki can be public or private, but it allows a collaborative writing on a unique document, avoiding duplicate documents when mailing them from one computer to another among several writers. Google Docs offers free tools (word processor, presentation, spreadsheet, etc.) as wikis (<http://docs.google.com/>).

Context

The practical training in the workplace in Europe

The practical training has been already included in the curriculum design of the educators' initial training for a long time in the whole Europe. The different curriculum designs consider the practical training with different length, curricular weight, evaluation systems, and kinds of practical tasks. The European Space of Higher Education is oriented to the insertion in the job market. The competence design relates the training to the professional exercise. In traditional designs of Higher Education, the practical training was the part of the degrees that was more related to the work places. Especially in the educational field, where the gap between theory and practice was quite large, students were particularly implicated in the practice through practical training period.

To prepare reports about the different degrees according to the European Space of Higher Education principles, the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación [National Agency of Evaluation of the Quality and Accreditation] was founded. The Origin of the ANECA is the Article 32 of Organic Law 6/2001 of 20th December on Universities lays down that, by means of a Resolution by the Council of Ministers and subsequent to a report by the Universities Coordinating Council, the Government shall authorise the setting up of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA). ANECA was set up as a public trust on 19th July 2002. The ultimate goal of the Trust is to contribute to the quality improvement of the higher education system through the assessment, certification and accreditation of

university degrees, programmes, teaching staff and institutions. (Quoted from http://www.aneca.es/ingles/what_origin.asp).

This institution, also known as ANECA, asked specific teams of specialists in different fields to analyze the situation of each degree in Europe and to design its set of competences. These reports are called white books. The White book of the Degree in Teaching (ANECA, 2004) focuses the practical training in Europe. There is a large diversity, though they distinguished three types of contents in the initial training of teachers in Pre-school Education and Elementary Education or the First Cycle of the Basic Education (*L e v e l s* ISCED 0 and ISCED 1 according to the *International Standard Classification of Education* (UNESCO, 1997), also known as ISCED97 (http://www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/doc/isced_1997.htm)): the psico-pedagogical training (30%), the training in the different areas of knowledge (40%), and the practical training (30%). The practical training in work centres adopts converging models (integrating it in the initial training) or consecutive ones (adding it at the end of the initial training) and tends to spread several months as we can see:

- 1 to 2 months: Belgium.
- 2 to 3 months: Czech Republic, Spain, and Poland.
- 3 to 6 months: Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, and Luxembourg.
- 6 to 12 months: Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Holland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, United Kingdom, and Sweden.
- More than one year: Germany and Slovakia.

As in proportion, as in length, the practical training is an important part of the initial teaching training in Europe. It is also a classical topic in educational research. For instance, Schön (1983) is one of the wellknown international authors who has studied the practical experience and the reflection about it. Zabalza Beraza (1991) researched on the use of the diary in the educational field. Huber & Roth (2004) analyzed its use in the practical training. Medina et al. (2005) developed a research on the possible techniques to improve the learning during the practical training. Feliz y Ricoy have analyzed the evaluation of the resources in the practical training of the social educators as a generalization process (2005) and the practical training in the professional contexts in the competence approach for the implementation of the Bologna process (2006).

In Spain, the real present-day law has a part that is designed by the central Ministry of Education and that is common for all Spanish universities. This training is called trunk training and it is compulsory for all the students of all Spanish universities. One of the trunk topics is the practical training. Thus, it is a mandatory training for all the students of all Spanish universities. In the Social Education degree, this practical training in work centres implies 350 hours in a total of 1,800 hours for the whole degree. This situation is changing according to the Bologna Process, usually increasing the length. This structure is now changing according to the Bologna process.

The experience and the practical training

Experience is an important source of knowledge. As internal one, as external one, it is the motor of reflection and development. The professionals learn starting from their experience and it is really an important competence that provides a motor of growth, evolution, and advance. The students could develop this competence as a central one in their preparation for the professional activity. The practical training is an opportunity to develop such a competence. The students are participating in an educational context where they are experiencing the real worker's situations and events day by day. For Lucarelli (2006), in the Higher Education, the practical training is also an excellent space to reflect further the university politics and the academic perspective in the social and educational areas.

In our perspective, there are several techniques to promote the practical learning. According to the contexts, the needs, and the goals, we could propose several ones such as:

- The participant observation: It is an active procedure that implies the perception and interpretation of the events, happenings, and facts of personal situations.
- The memories: They are structured reports that the participants produce starting from their experiences in a context or situation and their interpretation.
- The field notes: They allow a writing process to collect the perceptions of the events, happenings, and facts by an open procedure.
- The recordings: They could be audios, photos, or videos about the personal experiences, activities, or actions.
- The diaries: They imply a regular writing process to collect the perceptions of the events, happenings, and facts.

The diary use that we have suggested is an eclectic use of the notebook, integrating the traditional diary, the journal, and other formats as removable notes, *realia* (*realia* are the objects of the reality that we use as didactic resources, though they have not been created for this goal; cf. Gonzalo Fernández, 2008), cuttings, photos, etc. that combine the recording and the self-reflection, differentiating them between opposite pages or with different colours. It has a lot of elements from the "antenarrative" that Boje (2001) defined as:

The fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted, and pre-narrative speculation, a bet, a proper narrative can be constituted.

Our design of the practical training in the Social Education

The design of the practical training in the Social Education degree is planned in three steps (planning, implementation, and conclusion). This election is intentional according to three analogies:

- The professional intervention of educators: they plan, they act, and they reflect on their practice.
- The places of their activity: home, centre, and home / university (The portfolio is sent to the university and they have also to pass an exam there).
- The activities realized in each moment: the planning, the action, and the reflection.

The three phases of our curricular design of the practical training are:

First phase:

The students have to prepare their practical stage in a work centre. They have to contact the centre and collect the main data to elaborate an Initial Plan of Practicum (in Spanish, PIP: Plan Inicial de Prácticum). The university tutor (a teacher who meets students once a week in their town to advise and to give orientation), who is responsible of the student, organizes seminars during this period, advises to solve problems, and monitors him/her, has to approve the PIP before beginning the practical period.

Second phase:

During the second phase, the trainees develop the process of intervention, interacting in real contexts with users, learners, educators, and other professionals. They gain experience and share it with other students in the regular seminars. This process of participation in a professional context has to generate other results than the diary. The diary supports the students' action and reflection.

Third phase:

At the end of the practice period, the students have to review the whole process and recapitulate their acquisitions. They have to become aware of the construction of knowledge and their learning. To reach this goal, they have to analyze the diary with a simple methodology and they redact the final report (in Spanish, IFP: Informe Final de Prácticum) that includes also the balance of the initial plan and the register of their timescale during the practical continuance. They gather all their documents in a portfolio that includes a self-questionnaire. The evaluation is based mainly on this portfolio combining it with an exam, the scale-report of the professional who was responsible for them during the practice, and the scale-report of the tutor.

The use of the diary

The students of the Practicum of Social Education have a large guide (Equipo Docente [Teaching Team], 2006) where the teaching team describes step-by-step the whole process that they have to follow along the course of their practical training in a work centre. Epistemologically, there are four steps – diary, synthesis, analysis, and conclusions – that alternate a concrete level (diary and analysis) and an abstract one (synthesis and conclusions) in a dialectic *process*.

The Diary

The first step is the writing process. In this guide, there are also specific orientations to write the diary. The diary is defined as a qualitative, narrative technique that helps to understand the processes that are being developed in intervention contexts, describing facts and including reflections and valuations. The guide offers a procedure of writing in four steps:

(1) In the beginning

The writing of the diary must be systematic, after each practice session. In the first sheet, the student has to indicate his/her personal data, the institution where he/she is realizing the practice, as well as the date and the signature of the tutor of the Associate Centre (the University centre).

(2) During the writing

The student must narrate and interpret his/her intervention in the work centre, gathering the diversity of situations in which he/she takes part. The student will write every day his/her experience during the practices, gathering both the description and the interpretation and the analysis of the facts.

Every day, in the beginning of the writing, they will include the date (day and month), as well as the length of staying in the centre (hours). To develop the writing, a basic scheme of questions that they will keep in mind is recommended:

- When did it happen?
- Where?
- Who has participated?
- What happened?
- What means were used?
- Why did it happen?
- How was it solved?
- How did you participate?

(3) Reading again

Once a week and writing with another colour, the experiences have to be valued. Before, it is suggested rereading slowly the text. The annotations about reflections will be outlined in another colour. Other aspects that were not reflected in the first moment will be able to be added.

(4) At the end

Once the diary is concluded, the date will be included, as well as the signature of the tutor.

The recommended support for diary is a small notebook (A5) and it must be paginated before the beginning. The diary will be included in the Portfolio and sent to professor.

Synthesis

The synthesis is a whole summary of the diary. Once writing is finished, the students have to read it again and to summarize it in two pages maximum. This step allows the student to refresh the first memories and to relate the facts since the beginning. This effort facilitates an opportunity to link, integrate, contrast,

reinterpret, and clarify the facts, perceptions, experiences, reflections, and feeling. It forces them to go through the text and get a whole picture of their experience before analyzing the concrete elements.

Analysis

In another part of the guide, the analysis process is described. For its development, the relevant elements as events, persons, situations, resources, etc. will be identified in the diary. The elements could be considered as relevant in any dimension: social, professional, institutional, or personal. It is recommended to use a table to arrange the analysis. In this table, every column is a step of the analysis and every row an element. The table increases the systematic routine. This analysis is developed in five steps:

(1) Identification of the element:

Each element will be identified by the key data that allow the reader to identify and to analyze them.

(2) Justification of his/her relevance:

The reason of the choice of this element has to be explained. The diary gathers a lot of elements (information, data, events, persons, situations, resources, etc.), though only some of them will be analyzed. Their relevance or significance has to be justified from any dimension: social, professional, institutional or personal.

(3) Interpretation/explanation of the facts or explanation of the element:

The interpretation or explanation is related to the chosen element. If they are persons, their features and their relationship with other participants will be indicated. When they are resources, the space, the time, etc., their characteristics and their role in the program or centre will be indicated. In the case of events, the interpretation could include an explanation of the origin or causes, the development of the facts, and their consequences.

(4) Valuation of the element:

This valuation must be realized from the social, educative point of view. Stating the agreement or disagreement with the fact or element is not enough. However, social, pedagogical reasons have to be given to consider their relevance or not. To achieve this step in an adequate range, arguments, reasons, references, etc. have to be given to sustain the statements.

(5) Proposal for improvement, if needed:

When the valuation offers an opportunity, a proposal for improvement has to be suggested. Sometimes, it could be a solution, a proposal for change, any arrangement, the inclusion of new strategies, etc.

Conclusions

Finally, the students will elaborate a synthetic list with the main personal, learning, and professional conclusions derived from the whole process: their experience, the developed process, their analysis of the diary, and their self-evaluation.

State of the art

Schön (1983) examined five professions (engineering, architecture, management, psychotherapy, and town planning) to inquire how these professionals solve problems. The author maintains that best professionals know more than they can put into words and they use less the learning of the graduate school than the improvisation learned in practice. Schön shows how *reflection-in-action* works and how this vital creativity might be fostered in future professionals.

Schön (1987) & Liston & Zeichner (1996) evolved the potentiality of the diary as instrument to promote the self-reflection in several contexts. Riley-Douchet & Wilson (1997) defined the diary as private means of self-reflection. To promote autonomy and self-direction of nursing students, they suggested the use of reflective journal writing. The three-step process of self-reflection was critical appraisal, peer group discussion, and self-awareness. This process of self-reflection was supported by the diary.

Atkins and Murphy (1993) have done a large review of the literature on reflection. The purpose was to unravel and make sense of the complex literature, and to identify the skills required to engage in reflection. They found several differences between authors' accounts about the reflection as the terminology and the hierarchy arrangement. They concluded that reflection is an important learning tool in professional education. The main skills are self-awareness, description, critical analysis, synthesis, judgment, and evaluation.

Wong, Loke, Wong, Tse, Kan, and Kember (1996) developed an action research project to find out how to prepare nurses to be reflective professionals. They involved a group of students who enrolled in the first year of the nurse degree studies at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. They combined several techniques as observation, interview, students' written material, and teacher reflection. The teachers and students were partners in the promotion of reflective learning. The teachers reflected on their teaching arrangement and the progress of student learning, offering them the appropriate guidance. They observed how the students learned to develop different perspectives about the professional nursing practice and eventually reconstruct their conception of nursing.

Cross (1997) applied the diary to the professional development of a cohort of physiotherapy students. The purpose was to record systematically the formal and informal learning. The learning was analyzed focusing especially the critical incidents. The students collected their main learning, the way how they acquire them, and the way how they applied these learning in their practice.

Fonteyn & Cahill (1998) studied the improvement of nursing students' thinking strategies (cognitive awareness). They wrote in a clinical log at the completion of their clinical day, reflecting upon client problems, the data used to identify them, their interventions, and their results. The students valued better the reflective log than writing nursing care plans. The logs improved their metacognition ability (thinking about thinking).

Ladyshewsky & Edwards (1999) studied the use of journals for curricular purposes. They proposed a resource based on the collection of thoughts and feelings. The interest of their study is that they stand out the relevance of the purposes of the journals.

Learning journals are a personal document in which learners describe their thoughts and feelings about their involvement and experience in a course study. (...) Learning journals are useful experiential learning devices and they should be linked in a purposeful way to the curriculum. Learning journals can be used for a variety of purposes. (Ladyshevsky & Edwards, 1999, p. 90)

Paget (2001) conducted an empirical research in a retrospective, three-phase, multi-method study in a nursing department. There was no significant influence according to the years of experience, specialty, or academic level of students, though the effectiveness of the facilitator was an important factor. They identified significant, long-term changes to clinical practice resulting from the reflective practice.

Zabalza Beraza (2004) stated that the writing allows the development of a whole, aware perspective of the activities done and their sequence. This periodic writing provides an opportunity for students to identify their difficulties and achievements, due to the self-detection of the problems and the self-revision of their successes.

Bulman & Schutz (2008) collected several works about the potential of the reflection to help nurses develop and learn from their practice. They highlight the strategies to promote the knowledge, and skills for reflective practice and writing reflectively. Some authors commented the difficulties and doubts about the diary caused by the lack of time and the distractions of the practice. The students that record and describe events may therefore enhance their descriptive abilities. The diary improves self-awareness of the students. Some experiences emphasize that not all of what is written in a reflective diary may be used for formal assessment purposes. The structure of the process of reflection needs to be formulated to give an opportunity to students to have both a public and a private version of their reflective thoughts.

As synthesis, the studies on diaries and journals are linked to the learning in the practical contexts, the role of the reflection, and the assessment in the initial training. The nature and the effects of the writing is also a useful focus to understand the benefits and limits of this technique for the professional practical training.

The content analysis of the diaries

Our experience for six years in this degree using the diary in the practical training allows a balance of the possibilities of this technique to promote the learning starting from the experience. To help to learn during this practical training period, we recommend some instruments as the diary. The diary is a technique to help the students to compile their experiences, their memories, their perceptions, and their feelings, and to verbalize them. Both actions are the nuclear activities of the diary: collecting and verbalizing.

However, the goal of the diary is not only the accumulation of data but their interpretation and comprehension, to allow the learning starting from them. This last phase is very important because they are students and their activities at

the University are searching the learning. That causes the introduction of the content analysis to extract the most relevant elements and to convert the analysis in the source of learning. Our instructions to write the diary are quite open in our guide book. This causes some diversity in the redaction results and makes more difficult a general content analysis strategy. The other side of this phenomenon is the rich diversity that is emerging and personalizes the results. To have a whole vision of the diaries, we have analyzed also the formal aspects as the support, the instrument, the form, the language format, and the writing.

In our content analysis, we explain the main codes and their subcodes. The main categories are the support, the instrument, the form, the language format, the writing, and the content.

The support

Most of them use a notebook or an exercise book. The pages have to be bound to avoid their elimination, insertion, or movement. In the beginning (six years ago), they used more expensive books as the accounts ones but we have softened the position. The goal is to guarantee the sequence in the writing. Any exercise book without rings or spiral-bound is allowed. Their main features are:

The size:

The size is also a secondary term. Some students prefer A4 and others A5. Very few choose a smaller size as agendas or pocket-size.

The page format:

The white pages without line are very unusual. Usually, they choose squared, lined, or ruled pages with or without margins.

The page orientation:

Most of them prefer the portrait orientation of the pages instead the landscape one.

The number:

Some of them have to use several notebooks, though most of them do not finish up the whole notebook.

The instrument

About the instrument that they use to write, we could consider two main features:

The type of instrument:

Usually, they prefer the ballpoint or pen; very few use felt-tip pen, marker, or fountain pen. Occasionally, some students use fluorescent markers to underline some relevant or significant ideas. Usually, this underlining is done at the end when they read again the whole diary to summarize it and to detect the most relevant elements to analyze them.

The type of ink:

Most of them use blue ink as the main colour; some of them use black; and very few use other colours. We ask them to alternate pages to link the narration of facts, events, or objective data and the explanations, reflections, or critics that they do about the facts but maintaining the identification of each kind of writing. Sometimes, they alternate colours to differentiate the facts and the reflections.

The form

In the beginning and at the end, we ask for a signature of the person in charge or the professional who is monitoring the student, but it is not a requirement.

The formal organization is very important. Usually, they maintain the alternation between facts and reflections (on the right / left pages). The content is usually organized by sessions that are identified by the date. Therefore, most of the diaries have a date on the top of the left page, a redacted text in this page and another one with another colour in the opposite page.

The length of the text of each session usually varies. The page size forces frequently the writing, as to fill it, as to limit it. However, sometimes, the most concise students can include two sessions per page and the most prolific ones use several pages per session.

To understand realistically these differences, we have to consider that a practice session has not always the same length. The social educators do not usually take part in formal schools and have not always a regular timetable. Therefore, the duration of a session could be from one hour (for instance, a talk or a workshop with young people) to eight hours or much more if they are in a shelter or refuge for street urchins, migrants, or vagrants.

The language format

As expected, the greatest part of the diaries is a regular writing text. Unusually, we found loose notes, enumerations, schemes, or mind maps. The text is formally redacted though there are unusual creative elements as in the discourse, as in the language. Usually, a text page shows a structure in paragraphs, with whole words, whole sentences, and punctuation. Contrary to other kinds of writing, the headlines organization is unusual.

There are also graphical elements inserted in as drawings (resources, means, objects, etc.), sketches (rooms, classrooms, centres, playground, etc.), photos (places, people, objects, resources, etc.) or other small documents related to their activity or the work centre activity as stickers, leaflets, cuttings, clippings, photocopies, etc. (see images 1 to 8).

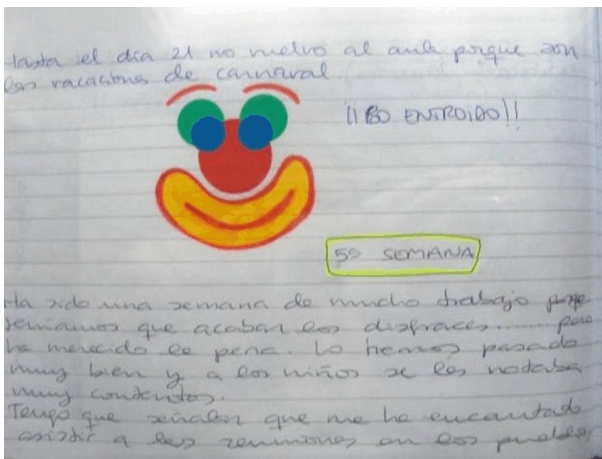


Image 1: Including drawings



Image 2: Including origami.

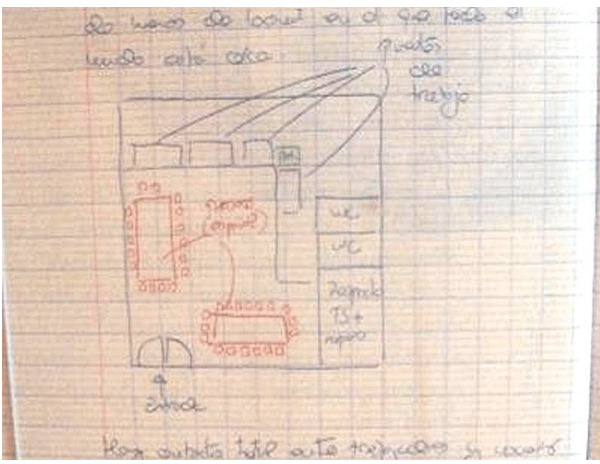


Image 3: Including sketches

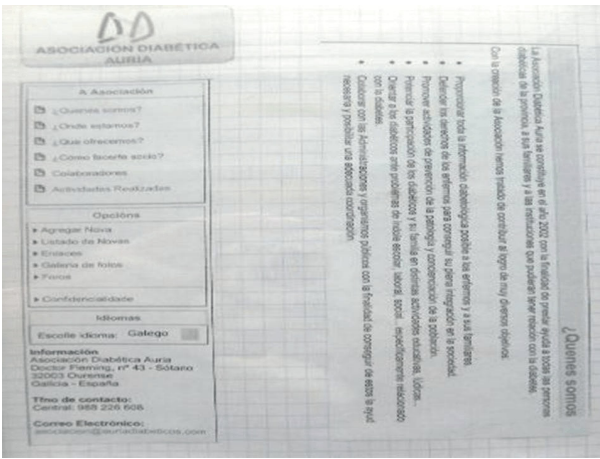


Image 4: Including reproductions of documents

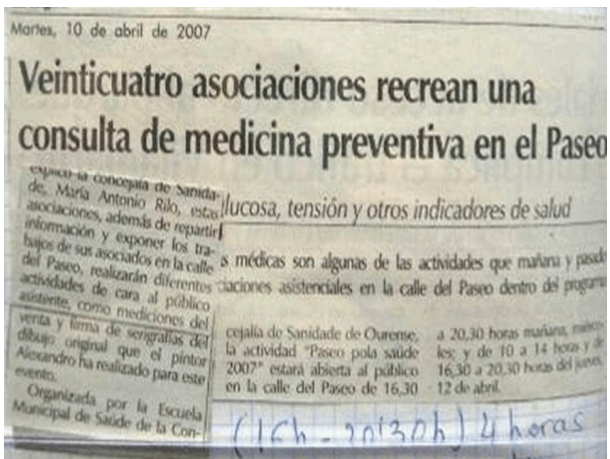


Image 5: Including news



Image 6: Including photos

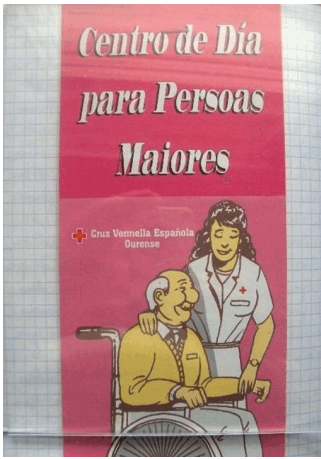


Image 7: Including realia



Image 8: Including jokes

The writing

The discourse is different if they write about their observations as facts, events, individuals, resources, data, etc., or if they do about their interpretations, reflections, feelings, etc. The observations are redacted in a narrative style, describing events, bodies, spaces, etc. in a sequential development. That means that there is usually a clear chronological development, even if they use flash-

back to come back on previous facts in this own session. In this style, they usually objectify the facts and use the third person to refer to their observation. Unusually, they talk to an addressee as the expected reader as the professor (*Dear Professor...*) or own diary (*Dear Diary...*). When they refer to their own actions, they use the first person and they express them in past tense. They use usually the indicative mood, the active voice, and the perfective aspect. The descriptions are quite superficial. The absence of a framework, a table, some steps, or a scheme to analyze events, persons, or objects causes a perception of false security and redundancy about the events. They think that the reader could perceive an excessive quantity of details and data, and they omit them deliberately. When they mention talking, speaking, or dialogues, they use usually the indirect speech. Very few students use direct speech and quotes.

The feelings are expressed in the first person. They do not always express their feelings during the facts but after them. As a consequence of their actions, they could feel anger, sadness, frustration, joy, satisfaction, etc. These are feelings that they usually record. They express them in past tense and indicative mood. It is difficult to write about emotions during the action. When the feelings remain, they express them in present tense.

The reflections are also personal and expressed in the first person. The style of the reflections is not argumentative but they use to consider, to value, to judge, to express opinions, etc. They express them in present tense. They use *I think, I believe, I suppose, I don't understand*, etc. In facts, they use to use the indicative mood. Therefore, they do not give arguments, reasons, examples, alternatives, comparisons, references, etc. that could support their opinions. This is the reason why we ask them to use a framework to analyze the content of the diary. Then they have to identify the most relevant elements (element is a generic name to include everything that could be relevant to analyze as facts, events, persons, spaces, times, data, information, rules, resources, etc.), justify their relevance, interpret or explain them, value them, and give a proposal for improvement if needed (see image 9).

Image 9: Analysis process in the report.

When you read the diaries, you find frequently corrections, rectifications, crossings out, adding, etc. Sometimes they are in the text, in the margins, or also added with a removable piece of paper or a stuck one. Besides the spelling corrections, they usually complete the information with new data, features or details that they have remembered after and considered necessary to understand the descriptions or narrations. This is the revision process and I like it because it is a way to improve the text, mature it, and look through it. That means that the student is learning and improving his/her thinking and knowledge.

The content

The content analysis shows the main elements that the students focus in their diaries. We have distinguished three dimensions: the kind of elements, the components of the description/narration, and the components of the reflections.

The kind of elements:

Our orientations facilitate an open perspective: anything is a possible focus for writing in the diary. The question is to find relevant elements, not their nature. Therefore, the main elements that we could find with their descriptions, features, details, data, information, etc. are:

- Institutions
- Professionals
- Rules and routines
- Organization
- Spaces
- Activities
- Events
- Special events
- Social Education
- Participants
- Means
- Personal feelings

Components of the description/narration:

According to the kind of elements, they need different components to describe them. For each one, we describe the components that we find. We group them in situational data, people, events, and resources.

Situational data are usually described with:

- Location
- Descriptions
- Measures
- Organization
- Furniture
- Decoration
- Stable means
- Sketches
- Diagrams

People are usually defined with:

- Identification
- Descriptions
- Technical details
- Behaviours
- Psychological terminology
- Medical profiles
- Functions
- Relationships
- Tasks
- Learning realizations

Events are usually explained with:

- Identification
- Narrations as:
 - Generic ones
 - Synthetic overviews
 - Step-by-step ones
- Regularity:
 - Routines
 - Idiosyncrasy
 - Peculiarities
 - Contingencies
- Facts:
 - Real events
 - Prospective style
 - Flash-backs
 - Self-reviewing
- Focus:
 - Conversations
 - Actions
 - Activities
 - Techniques
 - Instructions
 - Orientations
 - Conflicts

Resources are usually explicated with:

- Focus:
 - Didactic means
 - Documents
 - Reports
 - News
 - Realia
- Descriptions
- Uses
- Problems
- Applications
- Origin

Components of the reflections:

The reflection is not very good but we find several categories that we describe.

That means that the students interpret the reflections as:

- Valuations
- Questions
- Generalization
- Analysis
- Arguments
- Comparisons

- References
- Interpretations
- Conclusions
- Proposals
- Synthesis
- Detection of significance
- Internal dialogues

Discussion and conclusions

The main categories that we have found are related to the Zabalza Beraza's (2004) characteristics of the diary: the writing format, the implication of the interpretation, its expressiveness and references, and its historical and longitudinal character. Our main features are the support, the instrument, the form, the language format, the writing, and the content. This manifests that students use deliberate strategies which have a positive effect on knowledge acquisition (Gilar, Martínez Ruiz & Castejon, 2007). These researchers used the diary as a tool to assess the learning strategies and compare the results obtained with those using an inventory.

The formal aspects are not usually studied in the research about the diaries. Our study reveals that the support could be defined by the size, the page format, the page orientation, the number. The instrument could be shown by the type, the type of ink, and the form. The form could be explained by the formal organization - usually organized by sessions - and diverse lengths. The language format could be characterized by the structure in paragraphs and, more rarely, graphical elements inserted in as drawings, sketches, photos, or other small documents.

The writing is the essential way of expression and could be coded by different styles in their observations or in their interpretations, reflections, feelings, etc. that is manifested in the syntax characters and discursive features. Based on Schön's work on reflection-in-action, Richardson & Maltby (1995) studied thirty undergraduate nurses using the reflective diaries during a period of community health care practice. According to the Mezirow's levels of reflectivity (1981), the 94% of the reflections occurs at the lower levels of reflectivity (affective reflexivity). That means the level of reflexivity is low but it could be identified according its writing style. These specific skills of reflective writing need to be learnt with specific strategies and help the trainee to develop analytical and critical abilities which facilitate their own personal and professional growth as Jasper (1999) discovered exploring the nurses' writing techniques to facilitate and support their development in practice with two groups involved experiencing nurses of a professional course which included reflective writing. His research was based on Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). In this way, Spencer & Newell (1999) designed an educational package for practising nurses based on Boud et al. (1985) model of reflection in learning. With a pre- to post-test comparison, they evaluated the effectiveness of their strategies to improve the practitioners' reflective ability when it was low and it resulted in a significant improvement. Glaze (2001) researched on the advanced nurse

practitioners' experiences of reflection too. Using a qualitative approach, they collected the data with interviews and reflective learning contracts and analyzed them using the Colaizzi's seven-stage model (1978). Most of the students indicated that the development of their reflective skills had been positive generating changes in their thinking and behaviour.

Bruner (1997) maintained that writing the life in a diary meant for a student the development of an interpretative, valuable sharpness. As we have observed, the students learn to describe the content by the kind of elements as institutions, professionals, rules and routines, organization, spaces, activities, events, special events, social education, participants, means, personal feelings; the components of the description/narration as situational data (location, descriptions, measures, organization, furniture, decoration, etc.), people (identification, descriptions, technical details, behaviours, psychological terminology, medical profiles, etc.), events (identification, narrations, regularity, facts, and focus), and resources (focus, descriptions, uses, problems, applications, and origin); and finally the components of the reflection. Gibbs, Costley, Armsby & Trakakis (2007) concluded that the diary is useful to capture information and for the personal, professional development, though the reflection does not always imply a change in the action.

The reflections reveal a great diversity – valuations, questions, generalization, analysis, arguments, comparisons, references, interpretations, conclusions, etc. – that could be ordered as Teekman (2000) discovered in three hierarchical levels of reflective thinking: thinking-for-action, thinking-for-evaluation, and thinking-for-critical-inquiry. He used a qualitative research method to obtain and analyze data from interviews with ten registered nurses in order to study reflective thinking in actual nursing practice. He showed how the reflective thinking was observed manifestly, especially in moments of doubt and perplexity, and consisted of several cognitive activities. These activities were comparing and contrasting phenomena, recognizing patterns, categorizing perceptions, framing, and self-questioning in order to create meaning and understanding.

References

- Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (2005). *Libro blanco. Título de grado en Magisterio. Volumen 1*. Madrid: Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación. Download from http://www.aneca.es/activin/docs/libroblanco_jun05_magisterio1.pdf
- Alaszewski, A. (2006). *Using diaries for social research*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Atkins, S. & Murphy, K. (1993). Reflection: A review of the literature. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 18(8), 1188-1192.
- Barnstone, A. & Barnstone, W. (1980). *A book of women poets from antiquity to now*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Boje, D. M. (2001). *Narrative methods for organizational and communication research*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

- Boud, D. J., Keogh, R. & Walker, D. (1985). *Reflection, turning experience into learning*. London; New York: Kogan Page; Nichols Pub.
- Bruner, J. (1997). A narrative model of self-construction. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 818, 145.
- Bulman, C. & Schutz, S. (2008). *Reflective practice in nursing*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In M. King & R. S. Valle (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp. 48-71). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Conrad, J., Watts, C. T. & NetLibrary, I. (1998). *Heart of darkness and other tales*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press
- Cross, V. (1997). The professional development diary. A case study of one cohort of physiotherapy students. *Physiotherapy*, 83(7), 375-383.
- Dante Alighieri, White, L. G. & Doré, G. (1948). *The divine comedy: The inferno, purgatorio, and paradiso*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Domínguez Garrido, M. C., Feliz Murias, T., Cuevas Baticón, J., Sevillano García, M. L., Pérez Pérez, R. & Medina Rivilla, A. (2005). *La formación práctica del educador social, del pedagogo y del psicopedagogo* (1st ed.). Madrid: UNED.
- Dostoyevsky, F. & Lantz, K. A. (1993). *A writer's diary*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
- Equipo Docente (Teaching Team) (2006). *Prácticum II: Guía didáctica [Practicum II: Didactic guide]*. Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia.
- Gonzalo Fernández, R. (2008) Realia. In Feliz Murias, T., Sepúlveda Barrios, F. & Gonzalo Fernández, R. *Didáctica general para educadores sociales [General Didactics for Social Educators]* (1st ed.). Madrid: McGraw-Hill: UNED.
- Feliz, T. & Ricoy, M. C. (2005). The evaluation of the resources in the practical training of the social educators. Paper presented at the *Workshop Generalisation in Qualitative Psychology*, Klagenfurt, Oct. 21-23, 2005.
- Feliz, T. & Ricoy, M. C. (2006). The practical training in the professional contexts. A competence approach for the implementation of the Bologna process. Paper presented at the Workshop *Qualitative Psychology in the Changing Academic Context*, Riga, Oct. 20-22, 2006.
- Fielding, H. (1998). *Bridget Jones's diary: A novel*. New York: Viking.
- Fielding, H. (2000). *Bridget Jones: The edge of reason*. New York: Viking.
- Filipovic, Z. (1994). *Zlata's diary: A child's life in Sarajevo*. New York: Viking.
- Fonteyn, M. E. & Cahill M. (1998). The use of clinical logs to improve nursing students' metacognition: A pilot study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 28(1), 149-54.
- Frank, A. & Mooyart-Doubleday, B. N. (1952). *Anne frank: The diary of a young girl*. Garden City (N. Y.): Doubleday.
- Freedom Writers & Gruwell, E. (1999). *The freedom writers diary: How a teacher and 150 teens used writing to change themselves and the world around them*. New York: Doubleday.
- Gibbs, P., Costley, C., Armsby, P. & Trakakis, A. (2007). Developing the ethics of worker-researchers through phronesis. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(3), 365-375.

- Gilar, R., Martínez Ruiz, M. A. & Castejón Costa, J. L. (2007). Diary-based strategy assessment and its relationship to performance in a group of trainee teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(8), 1334-1344.
- Glaze, J. E. (2001). Reflection as a transforming process: Student advanced nurse practitioners' experiences of developing reflective skills as part of an MSc programme. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 34(5), 639-647.
- Higgs, J. & Edwards, H. (1999). *Educating beginning practitioners: Challenges for health professional education*. Oxford; Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Homer & Lattimore, R. A. (1967). *The odyssey of homer*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Huber, G. L. & Roth, J. W. H. (2004). Research and interventions by interviews and learning diaries in in-service teacher training. Paper presented at the Workshop *Mixed Methods in Psychological Research*, Freudstadt-Lauterbad, Oct. 21-24, 2004.
- Humble, R. & Hook, R. (1990). *The travels of Marco Polo*. Franklin Watts.
- Jasper, M. A. (1999). Nurses' perceptions of the value of written reflection. *Nurse Education Today*, 19(6), 452-63.
- Joad, C. E. M. (1971). *Classics in philosophy and ethics: A course of selected reading by authorities*. Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press.
- Johns, C. (2009). *Becoming a reflective practitioner*. Chichester, West Sussex; Ames, Iowa: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Johnson, S. & Fleischauer, W. (1962). *The history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*. Great Neck, N. Y.: Barron's Educational Series, Inc.
- Jupp, V. (2006). *The SAGE dictionary of social research methods*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ladyshewsky, R. & Edwards, H. (1999). Integrating clinical and academic aspects of curricula. In J. Higgs & H. Edwards (Eds.), *Educating beginning practitioners: Challenges for health professional education* (pp. 88-93). Oxford; Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Levitt, F., Zipursky, A., Abella Entertainment (Company), & Chip Taylor Communications. (Directors) (2007). *Anti-nazi: My opposition the diaries of Friedrich Kellner*. [Video/DVD] Derry, NH: Chip Taylor Communications.
- Lucarelli, E. (2006). Análisis de prácticas y formación: tres experiencias con docentes en universidades argentinas [Analysis of the practices and training: three experiences with the University professors in Argentina]. *Perspectiva*, 24 (1), 273-296.
- Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education*, 32(1), 3-24.
- Paget, T. (2001). Reflective practice and clinical outcomes: Practitioners' views on how reflective practice has influenced their clinical practice. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 10(2), 204-214.
- Porlán Ariza, R. & Martín, J. (1993). *El diario del profesor: Un recurso para la investigación en el aula*. Sevilla: Díada Editora.
- Progoff, I. (1975). *At a journal workshop: The basic text and guide for using the intensive journal*. New York: Dialogue House Library.
- Riley-Douchet, C. & Wilson, S. (1997). A three-step method of self-reflection using reflective journal writing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 25(5), 964-968.
- Rozakis, L. (2004). *The complete idiot's guide to creative writing*. Indianapolis, IN.: Alpha Books.

- Salak, K. (2008). *The white Mary: A novel*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Spencer, N. & Newell, R. (1999). The use of brief written educational material to promote reflection amongst trained nurses: A pilot study. *Nurse Education Today*, 19(5), 347-56.
- Strauss, A. L. & Corbin, J. M. (1997). *Grounded theory in practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Swift, J. & Sterne, L. (1955). *Gulliver's travels*. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- Teekman, B. (2000). Exploring reflective thinking in nursing practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 31(5), 1125-1135.
- Voltaire & Adams, R. M. (1966). *Candide or optimism: A new translation, backgrounds, criticism*. New York: Norton.
- Wong, F. K., Loke, A. Y., Wong, M., Tse, H., Kan, E. & Kember D. (1997). An action research study into the development of nurses as reflective practitioners. *The Journal of Nursing Education*, 36(10), 476-81.
- Zabalza Beraza, M. A. (1991). *Los diarios de clase: Documentos para estudiar cualitativamente los dilemas prácticos de los profesores*. Barcelona: PPU.
- Zabalza Beraza, M. A. (2004). *Diarios de clase: Un instrumento de investigación y desarrollo profesional*. Madrid: Narcea.
- Zeichner, K. M. & Liston, D. P. (1996). *Reflective teaching: An introduction*. Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum Associates.