

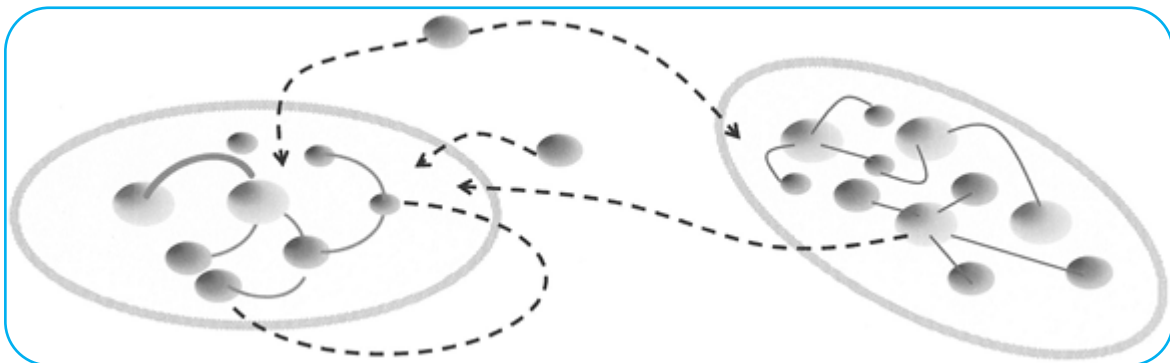
DEVELOPING CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT OF ASSESSMENT: THE CONTESTED PLACE OF ASSESSED REFLECTIVE WRITING IN ITE

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Reflective dialogue - the co-construction of networks of connected ideas

Reflection, the activity which encompasses noticing, marking and deliberating on new experiences and ideas and the connections they may or may not have with existing personal theories, is represented as a broken arc which begins to form tentative connections between theories and ideas. The image below represents reflective dialogue between two individuals.

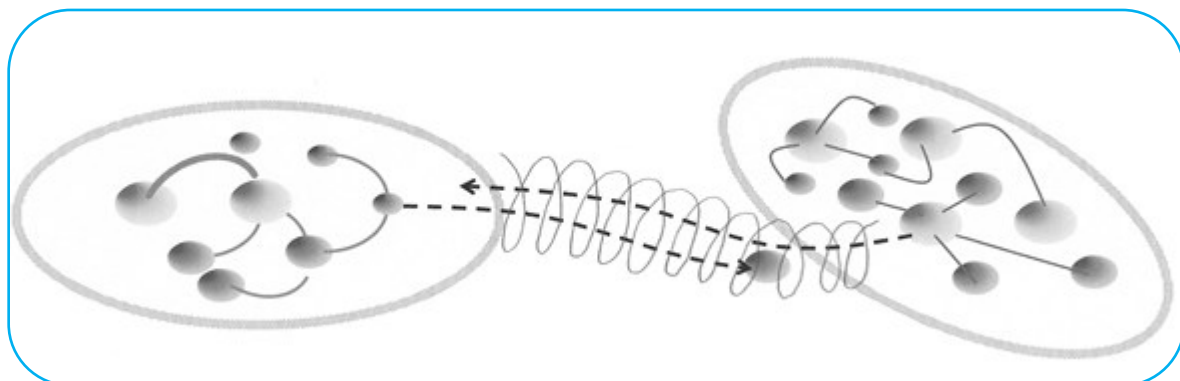
Ideas and experiences are represented as nodes and the connections between them as arcs. The connected and unconnected ideas (the knowledge) of an individual are enclosed within a transient and penetrable boundary, adopting Vygotsky's (1978) construct of a Zone of Actual Development.



Constructive alignment of learning and assessment in ITE

Constructive alignment theory (Biggs, 1996) asserts that assessment and learning are inextricably entangled due to the motivations and priorities which drive the learning activity of students.

The notion of assessment depicted below is that of a course assessment strategy which includes interaction between students and tutors. In order to be constructively aligned with the intended learning outcomes, i.e. with reflective practice, the assessment strategies of both student and tutor are aligned with each other and support and promote reflective dialogue between them. The image shows assessment wrapped around reflective dialogue in the manner of an exoskeleton, providing strength and security for reflection.



References

- Biggs, J. (1996) Enhancing Teaching Through Constructive Alignment. *Higher Education*. 32:1-18
- Dewey, J. (1933) *How We Think*. USA, D. C. Heath and Co.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MS. Harvard University Press

Factors influencing reflective writing

Reflective writing for oneself	Reflective writing for others (journal)	Reflective writing for others (non-journal)
May be 'in the moment' insofar as it is jottings about something that is troubling at the forefront in thinking at the time. For example – the thought that interrupts sleep.	May be 'in the moment' insofar as it is jottings about something that is troubling or at the forefront in thinking at the time. Topics which are considered unsuitable may be omitted. Topics which are considered popular may be appended to the 'true' reflections.	Topics for reflection may be determined by the requirements of the task. Whilst the 'problem' may (or may not) be genuine, it is likely that it is no longer a problem. The stage which has been reached when this writing is made public is effectively Dewey's (1933) "forecast" stage.
Written for an audience who is self. Therefore sentence structure, explanations of context etc. are not required.	Written for another reader. Therefore structured for understanding and may require description of context to 'set the scene' for the reader.	
Not bounded by rules, requirements or conventions.	Written to a set of criteria.	
Therefore, may capture reflective processes but can never be evaluated by others.	Therefore, may begin as 'in the moment' but is likely to be re-presented and hence becomes 'on the moment'.	
The 'problems' which are the prompt for reflection and, therefore, initiate the reflective writing are real and troublesome.	Some perplexing problems may be rejected before presentation because they are considered to be unmatched to the criteria or because they are too difficult to explain to a reader who is distanced from the practice.	

Findings

Reflective writing which will be read by others is influenced by a power relationship between author and reader

Ideas of others and experiences in practice are major influences on reflection

Reflective writing was valued by participants

The assignment appears to discourage reflective qualities

Evidence of connections between reflection and improving practice is inconclusive

The assignment was perceived as limiting reflection

Concluding remarks on the study

There is a conviction expressed in the literature that reflection can be a fundamental element of improving teachers' professional practice, although there are those who see a need for further research in this area. Much work has been done to develop frameworks by which to identify qualities of reflection in the medium of reflective writing, and there is a strong argument from the literature that writing serves to promote and sustain purposeful reflection, to share that reflection with others and, thereby to provide a basis for reflective dialogue. However, the data from this study do little to support those common beliefs, with some participants demonstrating apparent connectivity between the qualities demonstrated in the reflective writing and professional achievement whilst others appeared to present a conflicting image in which evidence of reflection and achievement in the professional standards were in opposition, one strong and the other weak. The argument and evidence in the literature is persuasive, and my personal experience endorses that argument. Furthermore, the cases in the study provided insights about other factors which had influenced perceptions and priorities and which may, therefore, have affected the capacity of the student to demonstrate purposeful reflection on improving practice within the reflective writing assignment.