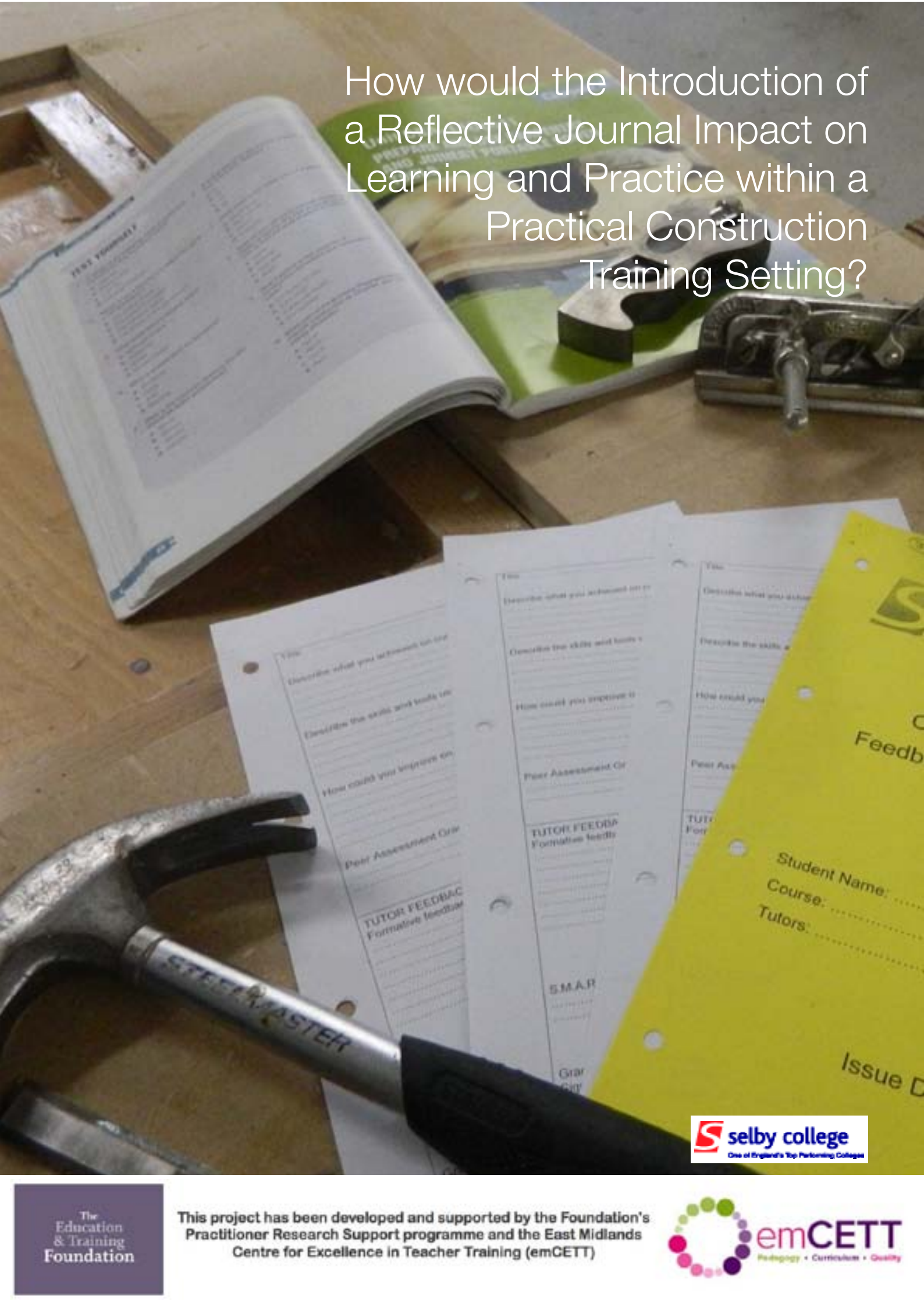


How would the Introduction of a Reflective Journal Impact on Learning and Practice within a Practical Construction Training Setting?



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Introduction

This study has been carried out to establish if deeper learning through reflection, (Moon, 2004), completing a learning journal, would improve learning with 16-19 level 1 construction students.

Working in a college, engaging in both informal and formal contact with students, has allowed me to observe students ranging from entry to level 3, whilst developing their creativity and reflecting on a practical and theoretical process. Some are confident, others can hold back, sometimes, it is not a conscious act just how they have developed through the education system building barriers to cope with learning and critical thinking skills (Brookfield, 1987).

The students taking part in the research, with the aid of a reflective journal may be encouraged to adopt

a deeper thinking strategy as well as adopting new ways of learning autonomously also looking at their work critically. This encourages deeper learning to take place. Consequently, the students may have more control over the subject matter. If the learners are encouraged to categorise and problem solve with minimal tutor input a higher level of achievement may take place. Mosston, (1981), describes this as going beyond to the realm of creativity and invention.

Dedicated to my family without their support this would not have been possible also my colleagues at Selby College especially a big thank you to Elaine from art who was involved extensively with the graphical design.

Produced by Darron Piercy



John is confused

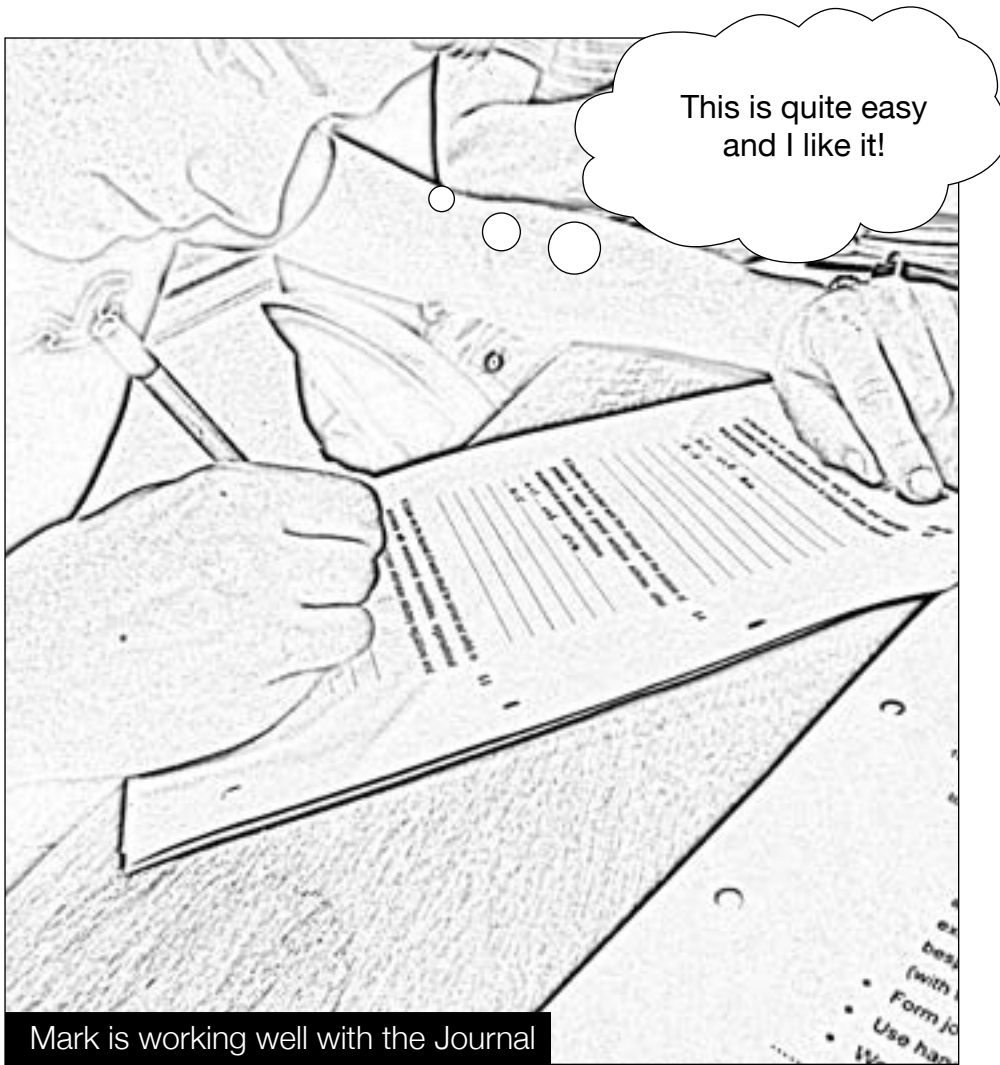
Hey John will we ever be able to do this?



Harry does not feel confident and he's unsure



John and his pal Mark wanted to work in construction Harry had been working on his college work and started to progress well Mark and John wanted to be like him.



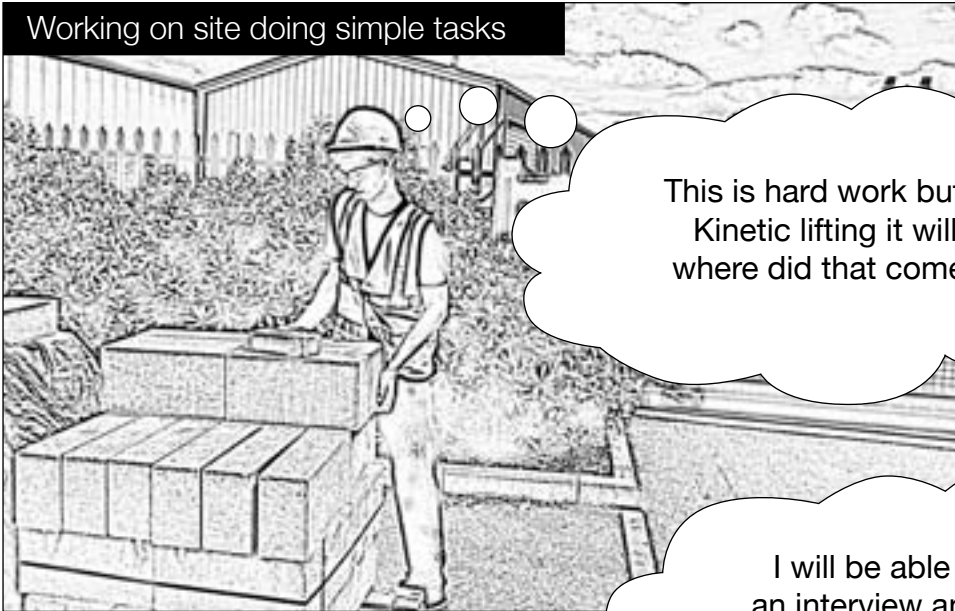
Mark is working well with the Journal

Dawson suggests 'journal writing nourishes the creative impulse lying at the heart of all significant learning and living', Dawson (2003), by encouraging the moment in time, to be creative through writing, learning may take place that would otherwise have been lost. Creating a journal may encourage the ownership of the particular event that has taken place allowing the learner to be at the 'helm'. Rodgers, (1969) suggests that significant learning takes place when the student can relate directly to the subject matter.

A focus group is a great way to find out how participants show an understanding and perception and feel about a particular subject a consensus of opinion can be explored (Gibbs, 1997). Running an organised and semi structured focus group rich information and ideas can be conveyed that otherwise would have been lost in a questionnaire for example.



Working on site doing simple tasks



I will be able to take this to an interview and it will explain what I have been doing in the practical sessions

A ten question quantitative survey will be given to one hundred students around three main categories (content, understanding and feedback), each questionnaire having a unique number, (Bell 2010). They will be distributed at three construction colleges, to level one students over the age of 18, one college being a rural town tertiary college, one a specialist city college and one being a tertiary city college containing a mixed social background. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with course tutors will be carried out via visual social media and secondary data that can be collated from statistics, websites, and reports.



Reinforcing knowledge



Harry is getting confident now

Reflection on events as they take place allows improvement on further action, writers cannot make sense on a range of actions in a few sentences (Boud,1985).



Peer learning

Learning can be linked to assimilation (Piaget, 1971) new ideas maybe created promoting cognitive change, in turn promotes accommodation to learning. Encouraging more flexibility, moving away from the accumulation of knowledge, the cognitive assembly may change the development of learning.



Harry working autonomously

40% of participants had filled out a reflective journal prior to doing this research project. 70% said that if they wrote down a process it helped them to retain evidence. No participating students had a disability. 25% strongly agreed that if you reinforce a practice it helped to retain the information 8% strongly disagreed. 80% said yes to the introduction of pictorial evidence. Qualitative evidence was that some students liked to be repetitive in action on action, many failed to complete this section.

Training was paying off




Working confidently on the job



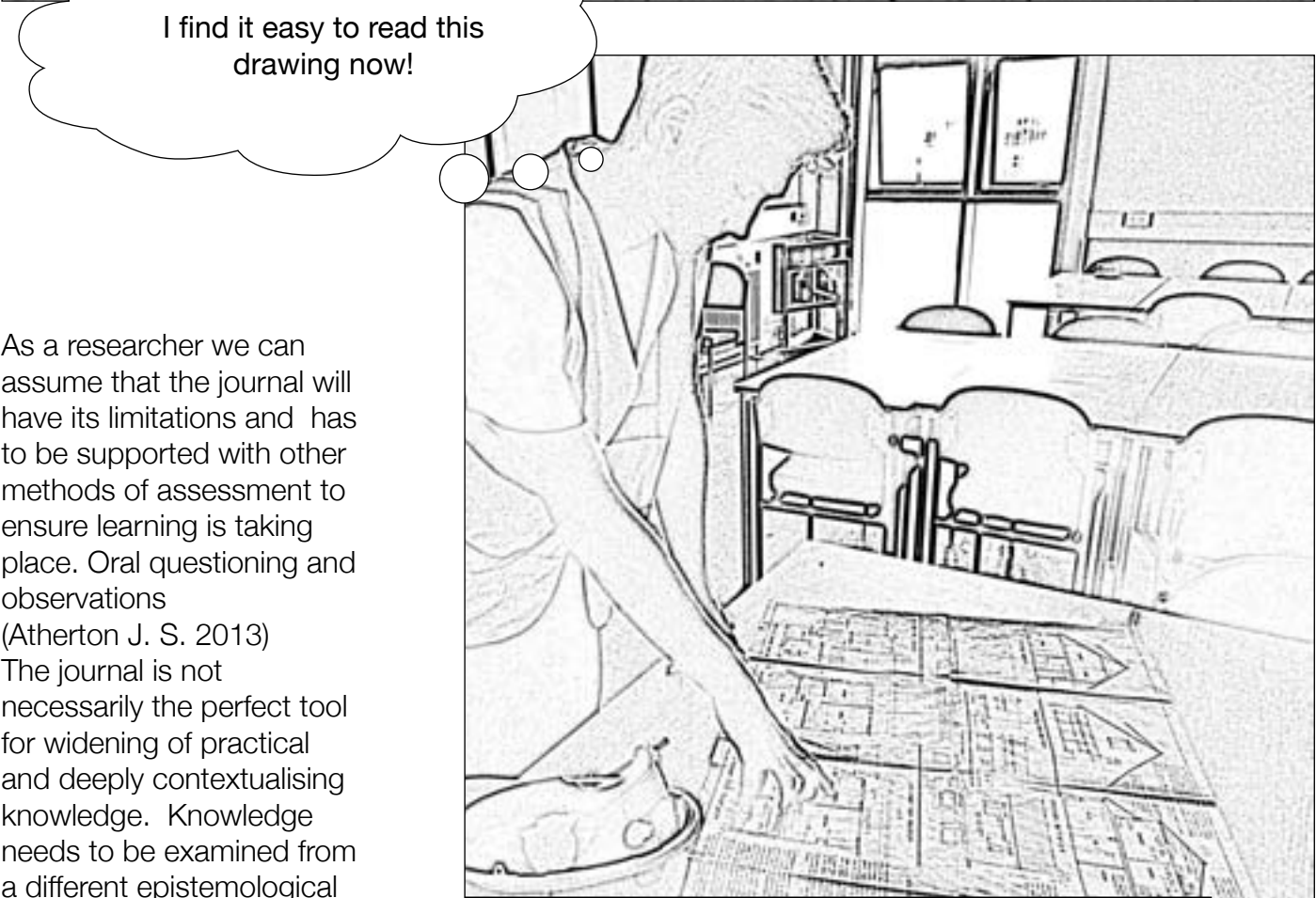
Harry can organise himself



Although the sample size and range of the referred study is limited it provides an example of how a journal can, and at the same time cannot, be employed in order to track down practical knowledge.



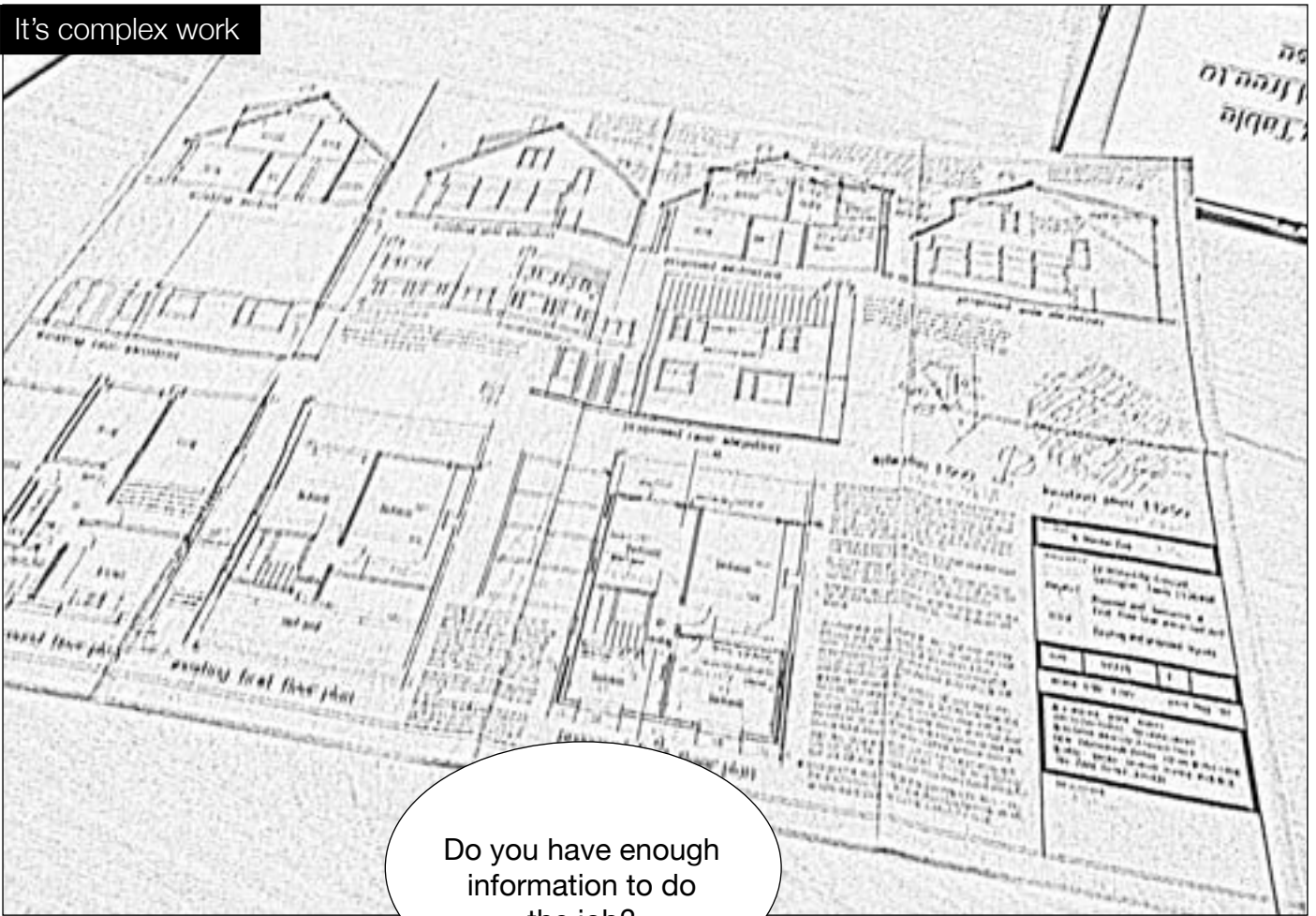
Organising this job
is all falling
into place now...



I find it easy to read this
drawing now!

As a researcher we can assume that the journal will have its limitations and has to be supported with other methods of assessment to ensure learning is taking place. Oral questioning and observations (Atherton J. S. 2013) The journal is not necessarily the perfect tool for widening of practical and deeply contextualising knowledge. Knowledge needs to be examined from a different epistemological perspective.

It's complex work



Do you have enough information to do the job?

It all fell into place Harry could now be in charge of the job, he says his time at college was helpful and filling out the journal helped him to reinforce the learning (Moon, 2001)



Harry has now been given the responsibility to run a project

In Conclusion

The journal can be used as a tool to document practical knowledge this can help with the collection of qualitative data and from a teacher's point of view it can be used as a tool to understand and develop practice.

As a researcher we can assume that the journal will have its limitations and has to be supported with other methods of assessment to ensure learning is taking place. For example, oral questioning and observations (Atherton J. S. 2013) The journal is not necessarily the perfect tool for widening of practical and deeply contextualising knowledge. Knowledge needs to be examined from a different epistemological perspective.

Shulman (1992) tries to find such an epistemological perspective and distinguishes three forms of knowledge: propositional, case and strategic knowledge, where case knowledge is described as knowledge of specific, well documented, and richly described events. He argues that cases are a way to transform propositional knowledge into case knowledge, the latter being a type of practical knowledge. We tried to use the proposed bridge in the other direction. But prerequisites for this journey are that the practical knowledge can be "richly described" personal and exhaustive something that turned out to be hard (though not impossible) to accomplish communication between teacher's working in an oral culture.

The journal allows the text to be free from any physical constraints. It is invaluable to the learner to express a feeling, some students who were not always happy to enter into discussion in a focus group were more than happy to express feeling in the journal. This made the journal an excellent tool for a tutor to capture thoughts that may have been lost.

By using the journal it allows the tutor to contextualise the material and at the same time not forgo small detail. The evidence that will be presented will be detail of knowledge on a process and this is invaluable to reinforce learning. Using the journal will have its limitations. Some small alterations may have to be made to increase its success the introduction of a picture box may trigger extended reflection.

From the evidence collated this shows the journal does have a place in a practical session enabling enhancement of the learning process in a practical application, (Piaget, 1956), encouraging thoughts through the written word. This is invaluable from a teachers perspective. All students taking part in the study were happy with the outcome. When using the journal, they could see that documenting a process allowed them to look back and reflect on a process allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of what they had previously been taught and more importantly retained information. All the tutors taking part in the study were happy with the process and recognised how the journal, in a practical setting, had a place. They could see how the introduction of a journal encouraged most learners to engage in the reflection processing and documenting. It added value and more importantly an evidence trail.

To sum up the students taking part in the study could see that reflection was an important part of a learning process; many had not completed a journal of any sort previously and found it a useful tool. From the teacher's point of view they did like the concept. However, did offer a critical point of view general being in favour of this type assessment tool and were in favour of a journal in a practical setting. The surprising thing to come out from the study is that the tutors found it would help with their continuous professional development.



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