



What is it?

The Teacher's Journal is a simple way for teachers to collect and reflect alone on events and results from their classes to improve their instruction and classroom management and, thereby, their students' learning. On a regular schedule, the teacher writes about her/his classroom experience, focusing on "critical incidents." These may be single events from the same school day or occurrences that repeat over many days, worthy of attention because they are especially positive, curious, or worrisome. Such incidents are rarely predictable, tending to fall beyond what outside visitors might observe since they are rarely present when the event occurs. In her/his journal entry, the teacher describes incidents, trends, or other phenomena, reflects on how s/he managed these, and how s/he might do so better, maybe identifying concrete steps to improve in the future. If it was a positive occurrence, the reflection may point towards what to try next and how to share the related practice with others.

Why do we do it?

As with all reflective practice strategies, the main aim of the Teacher's Journal is to help a teacher strengthen her/his professional knowledge and practice in order to improve her/his pupils' learning. It does so principally in three ways.

One, by thinking purposefully and routinely about one's instruction and students' learning and engagement, a teacher progressively builds greater understanding, competence, confidence, and outcomes, reflecting equally on their successes, challenges, and failures.

Two, the reflections a teacher captures alone in a journal can provide her/him with greater precision, clarity, confidence, and motivation to share experiences, conclusions, and ideas with peers when meeting in other ECoP activities, whether formal or informal.

Three, a Teacher's Journal can provide information and insights a supervisor or other advisor can use to guide discussions with a teacher, focusing on worrisome aspects the teacher has identified (ones that often do not appear in routine classroom observations).

How do we do it?

Most simply, the Teacher's Journal engages the teacher in the discipline of putting pen to paper for a minimum of ten (10) minutes at least three times a week to write about something (or somethings) notable from the teaching day or that has concerned the teacher for a while. What s/he writes will usually take one or both of two forms:

Critical incidents refer to any actions, events, reactions, and feelings from the day—positive and negative—that warrant further reflection or that may be valuable to explore with peers. It may be a significant success or discovery that you would like to repeat or that could benefit others. To the contrary, an incident may raise a concern, doubts, or questions that you feel require further analysis, whether alone or, likely, with others in order to resolve. For example, an incident may relate to the behaviour and/or learning of students, to the delivery of a lesson, to an interaction with a pupil or pupils, to an interaction with peers or parents, or to any other incident that relates to a teacher's actions, effectiveness, and happiness. A critical incident may be obvious at the time, but it may also not become evident until perceived as a trend, viewed in a series of incidents that may not necessarily have seemed critical when first noticed.

Descriptions refer to aspects from the day that may not be critical but are still notable; again, positive and negative. These may be mundane, such as the date, location, people involved, and lessons covered. A teacher may document details of a lesson plan and its delivery, the nature of student engagement, and other "non-critical" interactions and occurrences. Such elements may serve more to jog one's memory than to stimulate deep

reflection. They may also serve to create the context for reflections on a critical incident or, as suggested earlier, to help identify trends that a teacher might later identify as critical.

The specific steps of keeping a Teacher's Journal are basic, but they do require discipline:

1. Have a notebook used exclusively for the Teacher's Journal.
2. Write at least 10 minutes at least 2 times a week. It is not necessary to capture every detail but do record details that will help you remember and reflect. Include the date.
3. Write more often, if useful, even if just to note quickly an event, reflection, idea, or other thought, whether simply to capture it or as a reminder to explore it more fully later.
4. Feature in each formal entry the question:
 - i. What was the critical incident (or other aspect you are describing)—what happened, what did you do about it, how do you feel about it?Other valuable questions to address (in the journal and/or later with a colleague, colleagues, and/or Supervisor or other education advisors) are the following:
 - ii. What aspect of practice does the incident refer to—e.g., instruction, behaviour/discipline, assessment, small group work, ...? This might be the entry's title.
 - iii. What went well and what did not go well, or what challenges did I face?
 - iv. What can I do to improve both my knowledge and my skills to do better next time? (Allow for creative, "outside-the-box" thinking and solutions.)
 - v. Can others help me improve; and if so, what will I do to get this assistance?
5. As a habit, write in the journal at the end of the day, whether at school, before returning home, or at home, as suits you. Writing quickly during the day is certainly okay.
6. Leave space on the page for reflecting further at a later time, or for the Supervisor or other education advisor to add insights and ideas.
7. Related, review entries every two weeks or so to identify incidents that may represent "slow leaks," obvious only as an accumulation of small, seemingly benign incidents, or that may gain significance as a trend. It is also a valuable way to track progress.
8. Refer to the descriptions, reflections, and ideas captured in the Teacher's Journal in the other Education Community of Practice activities that happen with peers, both to seek others' insights and guidance and to offer reflections and ideas to them.
9. Review entries with the Supervisor or other education advisors to get help with priority needs, but also as an opportunity to share and take pride in successes.

Some key principles and considerations

One, the Teacher's Journal is just one part of a comprehensive approach to reflective practice. It provides a discipline for teachers to follow to reflect alone on aspects they have learned or reflected on previously with others to apply this to their own specific classrooms. It is also a source of reflection and ideas to share later with peers.

Two, the more honest and precise the teacher is in recording and reflecting on critical incidents, the greater the benefit, whether from one's own analysis or from the inputs of others.

Three, it is important to respect the discipline of writing in the Journal *at least three days a week*. Otherwise, it is too easy to skip an entry and, eventually, abandon altogether. As a habit, the Journal will become easier, more useful, and even a "friend" to consult regularly.

Four, it is okay to keep certain entries private; i.e., not to share with a supervisor. These may be kept in a separate journal or written on separate sheets to slip into the journal.

Five, it is a chance both to tackle challenges and mistakes and to celebrate successes.

Geneva Global is a mission-driven company that helps foundations, organizations, and individuals achieve positive social change through effective philanthropy.

For more information contact: education@genevaglobal.com

Learn more about education at Geneva Global at: www.genevaglobal.com/education