Learning Through Reflection: Exploring Covid-19 Pandemic Experiences of Phase 1 Undergraduate Medical Students

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Abstract

Reflective writing gives an opportunity to think deeply about something the person has learned or an experience he/she had. The importance of reflective writing in medical education is immense. The Competency Based Medical Education (CBME) curriculum by the Medical Council of India (MCI)/ National Medical Commission (NMC) recommends reflective writing as a means of learning, especially the affective domain. Writing reflections is a process of learning through experience, the experience may be any event like a seminar, a meeting, a disaster, or a pandemic. The outbreak of covid-19 pandemic forced the Indian government to impose nation wide lockdown. The medical students are going through a difficult phase due to pandemic per se and due to the surrounding uncertainties of re-opening of the medical institutions, resumption of onsite teaching activities and examinations. As a part of their learning, the students were asked to share their experience by writing reflection on the ongoing pandemic. The phase 1 undergraduate medical students reflected on COVID-19 pandemic, using the three steps model by Rofle, 2001 the three steps are- what happened, so what and what next. The current article is an attempt to summarise their reflections.

Keywords: Reflective writing; Reflections; COVID-19; CBME curriculum; Pandemic.

Introduction

The newer Competency Based Medical Education (CBME) curriculum focusses on reflective writing as a means of learning and has recommended its use for formative assessment of students.[1] Reflective writing is defined as a practice of learning from experience and engaging in conversations about practice to develop personal judgment. It can be said that reflecting can act as a stimulus for further development or paves a way in which to perform reflective practice.[2] It has three components: Experiences that happen to a person, reflective process that enables a person to learn from their experience and action resulting from the new perspective taken as a result of the reflection.[3] It can be said that reflective writing is more personal than other kinds of academic writing. With the unprecedented situation of the Corona virus outbreak, the foundations of the ecosystem of educational institutions have been impacted significantly, leading to highly uncertain circumstances regarding the implications for professional education especially medical education. One of the most crucial changes introduced has been the cancellation of in-person classes and their replacement by online lectures. The theory classes have been replaced easily; but the loss of collaborative experiences in demonstration classes and practical classes is one of the things to

Table 1: Steps of Reflective Writing as Per Rolfe's Model.

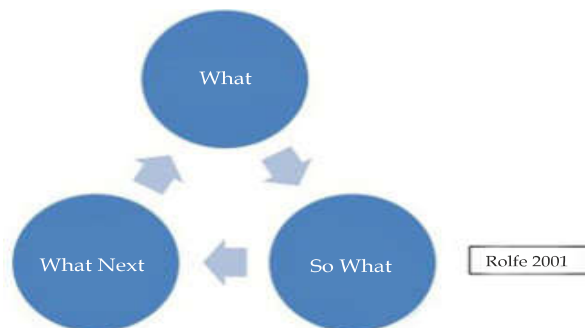| S.N.	Sub-heading of reflection	Event	To do
1.	What happened?	The narrative	Description of what happened. Set the scene and summarize the action.
2.	So what?	The learning	Analysis of the event. Ask yourself what the experience and situation means
3.	What next?	The change	Proposed action after the event.

Fig. 1: Rolfe's Model of Reflection.

worry about. The associated psychological turmoil cannot be ignored. In this article, we have tried to summarize some of the reflections penned by phase 1 MBBS students regarding this dreaded pandemic.

Methodology

To encourage reflective writing among 1st year MBBS students and contemplate on the current situation, they were asked to reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic. The reflections were collected through Google forms. The link for relective writing was shared through whatsapp and e-mails. Although, the students are accustomed to writing reflections, but to refresh, they were given a brief outline on "how to write reflection" based on Borton's model.[4] To encourage the students to express them freely, the responses were kept voluntary and anonymous. The responses were collected online and made available to the authors in a non-identifiable form. After going through the responses, it was decided to make it available for others to read. Hence permission from the Institutional Ethics Committee was obtained for publishing the data. For the qualitative analysis, the responses were reviewed, and thematically analyzed by two of the authors. Final agreement was reached after thorough discussions between the authors. The findings were clustered according to three themes: what happened; so what and what next. Few expressive codes are presented in Italics.

The students were asked to reflect as per Rolfe's reflection model[4] (Fig. 1). This is a simple model that is suitable for novices. The components of the three steps are given in Table 1.

Results and Discussion

There are numerous models of reflective writing. The Gibbs Model of Reflection (1988)[5], the Schön Model of Reflection (1991)[6], the Kolb Reflective Cycle (1984)[7] and the Borton's model[8], to name a few.

The Gibbs reflective cycleis the most complicated model thatbuilds on six stages. The six stages are shown in the Fig. 2.
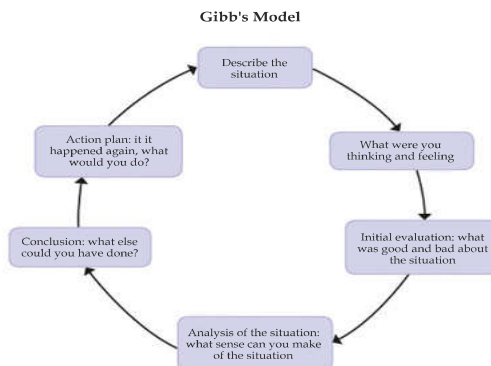

Fig. 2: The Gibbs Model of Reflection (1988).

The Schön Model of Reflection (1991) is a professional model, highly acceptable but not suitable for students. Schön explained reflection-on-action (a cognitive post-mortem post the situation) and reflection-in-action (in the moment puzzlement and surprise).[6]

The Kolb Reflective Cycle Model of reflection consists of points like making a judgement, testing things out, asking how/why etc. It is acceptable for beginners but is believed to be a superficial reflective practice. The Kolb Reflective Cycle (1984) is shown in fig. 3.[7]
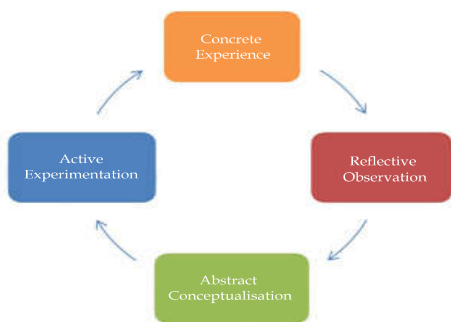

Fig. 3: The Kolb Reflective Cycle.

The Rofle's model has been derived from the Borton's model[8]. The Borton model was proposed in 1970, however it was further modified by Rolfe in 1988 and has been used by professionals as well as students since then. It is believed to be the most successful model for reflection writing.

In the current study, the students were asked to reflect on the situation using Rofle's model. Around 80 students responded to the activity. We have briefly summarised and are presenting the excerpts of some of the reflections presented by the students.

What Happened

The reflections of the students in this article showed that Covid-19 has same yet different face for each and every student. While reflecting on the current scenerio, the students talked about the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, the nationwide lockdown, closure of the medical college, discontinuation of onsite teaching activities and inception of online teaching-learning programme.

"The news of the corona virus outbreak in our country broke in like a fire in the jungle. Every body was tensed and scared."

"Due to covid-19 pandemic, all colleges, malls, theatre, all places where gathering occur get closed, and then the lockdown begins by the government of India, and we have to stay in our homes."

"Due to covid-19 pandemic in India we are unable to attend our regular conventional classes at colleges due to which we were lagging in our syllabus."

"We had to leave our institute because of the corona pandemic in hurry we were not able to bring all of our books with us and when college will reopen that was also not certain."

"Due to sudden outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic, our normal classes in college were suspended and students were sent to their homes. Further extension of lockdown interrupted all activities around the nation."

"We were at our college campus when this news of corona first came into light, there was the news of 1st case reported in Kerala. In few days, the Government decided to impose lockdown, all the students were sent to their homes from hostel and the college staff and faculty made sure that each and every student reached home safely they contacted us time to time and kept a check on us."

"The situation looked serious and the entire College was emptied, we all came home. Then eventually everything was under lockdown. It was really shocking to see the increasing number of corona patients. There was panic among people. Doctors have been giving all to safeguard the people.

"Everything was just going fine, we were about to have our terminal 2 exam, and suddenly, a virus named COVID-19, started spreading in India too, as a consequence of which, we were sent back to our homes. I didn't get enough time to judge the situation, didn't know till what time we are being sent to our homes."

"Due to sudden emergency situation we left the college hostel in hurry and couldn't take all the books and study material with us because we didn't knew that we were going for so many days. Productivity and the efficiency has also decrease as we are staying in the same closed environment day and night for so long for the first time."

So What

The students discussed about the actions taken as a result of the situation, they have primarily discussed the positive aspects of lockdown like improved personal hygiene, pursuing their interests and hobbies, preparing themselves for being the future doctors, appreciating the efforts of faculty in delivering online lectures etc. Negative analysis included affected studies, economic recession etc.

"The lockdown has provided individuals time to enhance their personal skills and complete backlogs. Although there has been inconvenience in completing the curriculum, the online classes have proven to be a boom for the students."

"It has taught us the importance of hygiene and inspired us to become dedicated and helpful doctors."

"I will once be a part of the Doctor Community, so on my part I raised awareness through social media, followed the precautionary measures and encouraged people around me (family members) to do the same. Yet there are people who do not understand the severity of the matter and roam outside for their leisure.

"Our online classes were started, which initially caused trouble, but I think now its working fine. Many people did come out with their talents in this quarantine. I myself, who is interested in sketching and painting, have been able to devote a bit of my time to it, which otherwise I would never have been able to. A lot of such things have changed in my life."

"A very applaudable step taken by our college faculty to teach us online. It was a very good experience to learn via online classes as we study with more concentration on the app."

"We are having online lectures by our institute but they are not that efficient as the college lecture and I am facing many difficulties like network problems and lack of books."

"Despite the pandemic, online classes came as aid and we are trying to gain as much as possible."

'Undoubtedly our studies has been badly affected by this pandemic.

"As the SARS-CoV-2 virus has spread around the globe, concerns have shifted from supply-side manufacturing issues to decreased business in the services sector. The pandemic caused the largest global recession in history, with more than a third of the global population at the time being placed on lockdown."

What Next

The students believe that the pandemic has taught them to overcome hurdles, to lead a simple life, to help others in need, to stay positive and hope for the best. It is an anxiety promoting time for all of us but it is in some or the other way affecting each and everyone differently.

"I learnt that, no matter how difficult the times get, we can together overcome it. Online classes can be conducted effectively if necessary. I learnt that we run for the materialistic world, and forget about how life can even be lead with simplicity. "

"This lockdown hasn't been same for everyone, daily wagers have to go through a lot. On my part, my family has helped poor people around by helping them with food item and ration. I will continue to follow the rules and do the needful in the times of difficulty when my nation needs me".

"After the pandemic is over, we must not forget the essence of hygiene and socially etiquettes. Be respectful towards the medical practitioners and healthcare workers. Be proactive in covering the education loss incurred during the lockdown."

"I feel incredibly optimistic about the future, there is an antidote to fear, HOPE that will pull us through these difficult times. By having faith that this virus will pass, listening to the medical professionals and authorities, staying indoors, keeping good hygiene, social distancing, being mindful and supportive for those deeply affected either physically or emotionally, I whole- heartily believe that we will be able to persevere and come out stronger than ever!"

"In the coming days I hope that everything becomes all right so that we can continue our studies like earlier. Because online studies cannot replace classroom studies."

"I wish everything gets back to normal so that we can continue our studies like earlier. Not good experience. As lockdown period is increasing, interest in every thing including studies is decreasing."

"After the end of this pandemic, we would be continuing hygienic practices and social distancing to avoid this situation in upcoming times."

"After current situation is over, professors should resume classroom teaching as soon as possible and giving extra time for practical as we are lagging behind there."

"Now, I am revising the previously taught topics, and reading what's being taught in the class. Hoping, everything will be fine soon, number of COVID cases will decrease and health care system of India will be able to combat with the upcoming situation, and for us, college willreopen, so that we have our life back to normal".

Conclusion

The medical students and we as educators will always have this unusual experience of the pandemic and lockdown etched in our minds,

incorporated throughout our lives and careers. Some students have a positive approach towards the upcoming times while the others are apprehensive of their syllabus lag and the dread of contracting the disease itself. Uncertain times call for stronger measures and the medical educators through out India have been stepping up to take some major changes to encompass the new age learning and the corona virus outbreak is acting as a catalyst in this situation. It is highly probable that the pandemic shifts the inclination of the educators as well as the learners from a conventional classroom learning to the new age digital learning. Apart from the syllabus being covered in the online lectures, we should encourage our students who are the budding healers of tomorrow to be strong and contribute to the society by keeping their family members, friends, neighbors and acquaintances in a positive state of mind; by alleviating their stress and anxiety through counseling.

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