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Reflective Learning Journal Using Blog

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Abstract

Getting students to write reflective journal is a good way for them to learn new concepts. This approach is also useful in order for the lecturer to gain feedback on the concepts that the students learned. The question that the author wishes to pursue is “How best the journal is going to be managed?” To manage the reflective learning journal assignment, the author has been experimenting with the use of special blog called '*Jurnal Pengurusan Emosi*'. All registered students in Managing Emotion, an elective course in the Centre for General Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia were required to submit their journal on weekly basis using e-mail and their journal entries are automatically published in the blog. The feedback of the students were very good, among the reasons quoted in relation to the use of the blog were in terms of facilitating their expression of thoughts, learning and sharing of each other's knowledge, and enhancing their understanding of concepts that they learned in class. This paper aims to share author's experience in managing *Jurnal Pengurusan Emosi*.

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1. Introduction

According to Brockbank & McGill (2007), a journal is “a collection of your thoughts, feelings, speculations, and maybe dreams. It is like a map of your learning journey.” (p. 377). For Thorpe (2005), reflective learning journals refer to “written documents that students create as they think about various concepts, events, or interactions over a period of time for the purposes of gaining insights into self-awareness and learning” (p. 328). It is a significant tool for active learning (Thorpe, 2005) and serves as an evidence for a learner's learning journey (Brockbank & McGill (2007).

To do reflection, one needs to have a medium where he or she can express his or her thoughts. Traditionally students write in a book. However with the advance of the web, the introduction of blogs is the new medium where they can publish their thoughts and reflections. The underlying assumption is that student can discuss through electronic platform e.g. blog, websites and online forums. Potential of blogs for reflective learning journal has been explored by researchers, for example, Armstrong et al. (2004), Williams & Jacobs (2004) and Yang (2009).

Getting students to write reflective journal is a good way for them to learn new concepts. This approach is also useful in order for the lecturer to gain feedback on the concepts that the students learned. This is in line with

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Thorpe's (2005) observation that learning journal can improve teaching. The use of blogs as a medium to publish reflective thoughts is used in various fields and academic courses, for instance in Social Work Ethics Course (Biggerstaff, 2005), English language courses (Murugaiah & Thang, 2010; Hourigan & Murray, 2010), engineering (Jensen, 2005), and nursing management (Thorpe, 2005). Jensen's (2005) study reported the outcome of reflective learning in terms of intercultural awareness between Danish and foreign students at a Danish university. The table below summarizes advantages and challenges faced by the implementation of reflective learning through blogs in the courses.

Table 1. Advantages and challenges of reflective learning through blogs

Author	Course	Advantages	Challenges
Biggerstaff (2005)	Social Work Ethics	Develops ability to reflect No time restriction Learner autonomy	Giving feedback and answering responses
Murugaiah & Thang (2010)	English proficiency	Helps to raise the students' awareness of their own learning process Acquisition of cognitive benefits and practical learning skills	Increased role by instructors (pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical) Students' professional and family commitments, cultural attitudes and barriers in the online environment.
Jensen (2009)	Professional Procedures in a Globalized World	Increase cultural awareness between Danish and foreign students	-
Thorpe (2005)	A nursing management course	Can improve teaching	Demanding and time-consuming for both students and educators.
Hourigan & Murray (2010)	Language courses	Can increase students' L2 English writing	Increased administrative workload educators

Among the advantages of the use of blogs in reflective learning are the enhanced ability of students to write clearly and reflect creatively, the increased nature of self-directed learning among students, the '24/7' or the 24 hours a day and seven days a week participation in the learning activity and the improved understanding of cultural awareness. From educator's perspective, the use of blogs can inform how much students understand what they have learned and this contributes to improved teaching.

This innovation strategy also has its drawbacks mainly in terms of the increased of educator's responsibility in managing the web-based platform. Responding to students' reflections required extra hours on top of educators' formal teaching hours. Murugaiah and Thang (2010) reported that students' constraints are mainly in terms of time commitments, cultural attitudes and barriers in the online environment .

2. The Learning Journal Assignment

Publication of students' journal in the Web adds more meaning to the activity as it provides opportunity for the students to learn from each other. In order to manage students' journal writing, a special blog called 'Jurnal Pengurusan Emosi' has been created. All registered students have to submit their journal on weekly basis using e-mail and their journal entries are automatically published in the blog. This paper aims to report author's experience in managing Jurnal Pengurusan Emosi.

The assignment on learning journal worth 10% of overall evaluation in Managing Emotion course. Students are required to submit their personal thoughts on lecture topics on weekly basis. They are reminded to publish their reflections in the blog. Therefore they need to write reflections which are suitable for public reading. Altogether there are ten topics they have to write on. In submitting their assignment, they used two methods of submission, namely (a) by submitting printed copy (b) by online submission. Because I want other students to share the thoughts, what I did was to have them posted to the blog and send to my e-mail as a backup copy.

The lecture topics to be reflected upon are as listed in the following table.

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