

Blogging to Learn

Establishment

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Establishment

- Students set-up a blog and initiate the practice of recalling and recording learning events, paying attention to and expressing their feelings.
- To encourage participation through the early phases of blogging, structured questions are provided, first and foremost as a guide for contributions based on recollection after an event, but secondly to permit the learners to become familiar with the technology and the process of writing in this new genre.
- All students are encouraged to share their blog URL with their colleagues by posting it on their home page in UTSONline – the learner management system used by UTS and powered by Blackboard. This is not a compulsory activity and there is no obligation to read other students' blogs.
- It is also made clear that I do not intend to read their blogs on a regular basis, however, I may 'drop by' occasionally, and no assessment of entries, either quality or quantity would be made.
- Generally, however, the entries to the blogs are quite clearly intended for me to read! The assumption by most students is that I will read all blog entries between classes. The comments can direct anger and frustration with the process that are rarely expressed in a classroom environment. This can provide the opportunity or permission to address the emotional aspects of learning of which I would previously have been unaware.

Introspection

- Students are encouraged to continue recording learning events, while starting to pay attention to their emotions and to start evaluating the experience.
- Fifteen minutes at the start of classroom sessions is allocated to blogging and structured questions are available as a guide to contributions and to focus on introspection.
- Some software challenges can still dominate the experience and often detract from the reflective process.
- Most of the writing is brief comments based on the reporting of facts, although some writers can be keen to express their negative emotions.
- A shift away from consciously writing for me, the lecturer, starts to become apparent as students write for an anonymous reader in cyberspace.

Reflective Monologues

- Students start to become consciously aware of the full range of reflective processes, from simply answering structured questions to considering the experience and extracting some meaning for further evaluation.
- Fifteen minutes classroom time is still dedicated to blogging. However, rather than structured questions, suggested topics for consideration are used with the intention of allowing the students to take more responsibility for their entries. Students are also encouraged to anticipate future learning based on their past experiences.
- Many students at this point are now making more frequent entries to their blog during the week and summarising these during the allocated class time.
- Students that have been used to surface learning display some resistance towards reflection and deep learning and these issues are often noted in their blogs.
- The expression of emotions can alter considerably. The emotions now relate to the learning events and are not directed to the intended reader.
- Some students will start to write short paragraphs, with considerable thought evident in the entries. Some start to develop a questioning technique, but are not necessarily prepared to apply their learning to future events.
- The writing appears to be for themselves, thus the naming of this stage as reflective monologue.

Reflective Dialogue

- Further encouragement towards a deeper reflective process requires the students to consider their style of expression, intended audience and publication of their thoughts.
- No classroom time is allocated for blogging; however, each class discusses topics and issues that could be incorporated into its blogs. An intentional push towards self-directed blogging is made and responsibility for the contents is moved to the student.
- At this stage, some students may stop contributing to their blogs. The trend towards self-direction and responsibility is not a comfortable paradigm shift and can be met with total abstinence. Further encouragement and time spent at Stage 3 may resolve this issue.
- Students that reach this stage acquire a 'voice' or style of writing in the new genre that moves away from surface level reporting to personal knowledge publishing that exhibits a more considered writing style. Some students develop journalistic qualities in the reporting and opinions on their learning events and experiences. Some students may now use quotes from their blogs in written assessment tasks and report enthusiastically about seeing their own name in the References – as a published work with an official URL. The students' blogs construct a type of learning conversation or dialogue.

Knowledge Artefacts

- Students move from personal knowledge publishing to reflecting on the knowledge learned and providing guidance to readers, who may use the knowledge to enhance their own experience and learning, as knowledge artefacts.
- At this stage the students may start to read each others' blogs and make comments in contrast or agreement - intentionally providing their experience and opinions as an opportunity for others to learn , so creating knowledge artefacts.
- The students are now totally aware of the broad reach of blogs, not only as authors but also as readers. Their writing can be strongly opinionated, however, it may also display critical thinking and deep reflective qualities of learning.