



2010

Efficacy of Interactive Journaling as an Undergraduate Teaching/Learning Device

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Recommended Citation

Lay, William; Curd, Annemarie; and Trujillo, Shanyese, "Efficacy of Interactive Journaling as an Undergraduate Teaching/Learning Device" (2010). *Writing Research Fellows*. 14.

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WRITING COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY FELLOWSHIPS Closing Write-up for 2009-2010

Researcher's Names:

Annemarie Curd, Shanyese Trujillo, and William Lay

Title:

“Efficacy of Interactive Journaling as an Undergraduate Teaching/Learning Device”

Research Questions:

1. What is the impact on learner attitudes and behaviors revealed by the Karchmer/Bauer study when peer read/respond interaction is used as an instructional technique in journaling?
2. In the perception of the learner, what is the impact on the degree of concept reflection and depth of concept understanding when peer read/respond interaction is used as an instructional technique in journaling?
3. In the perception of the learner, what is the impact on the development of critical thinking skills and achievement of course goals when peer read/respond interaction is used as an instructional technique in journaling?
4. What is the impact of sex and academic standing on learner attitudes and behaviors related to peer read/respond interaction as an instructional technique in journaling?

Method:

Quantitative data based on 53 surveys administered to the learners enrolled in *EDUC 109-Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* during the autumn quarter of 2009 and 60 surveys administered to those enrolled during winter quarter of 2010.

Key Findings:

The most significant finding from our survey is the overwhelmingly positive response we received from the learners regarding the use of interactive journaling as an effective teaching/learning technique. The responses to research questions 1-4 and 8 indicate a very positive correlation between learner attitude and behavior and peer/respond interaction. Students agreed that peer interaction in journals:

- Increased understanding of varying perspectives (87.2%).
- Encouraged students to stay current in their readings (90%).
- Increased ability to participate fully in class discussion (72.9%).
- Resulted in students writing honestly about ideas/concepts (74.3%).

Not only did the students respond positively to the questions concerning their attitudes and behaviors, we also found that they were overwhelmingly in favor of the method of interactive journaling to increase concept reflection and depth of understanding. Questions 1 and 3-5 demonstrate peer interaction on journals:

- Improved overall comprehension of concepts/course content (88.6%).
- Proved transferable and applicable in outside courses (87.2%).

Perhaps most significant of all, data produced by our survey demonstrates the effectiveness of the interactive journal in regard to developing critical thinking skills and the accomplishment of course

goals. Survey questions 1-3, 6 and 7 show that the students responded that the interactive journal component is effective in:

- Facilitating better understanding of the theories and developing justification for accepting them as valid (92.9%).
- Meeting course objectives more fully than merely maintaining a personal journal (81.5%).

Our research also took into account the implications for further study suggested by the Karchmer/Bauer study on reflective journaling. As suggested by them, we included questions on gender and academic status, which allowed us to cross-tabulate and compare our results based upon those criteria. Some of our most interesting findings include:

- Males were more neutral in their response (46.7%) towards being able to transfer learning skills developed by interactive journaling to other classes, whereas females responded more positively (41.8%) by agreeing that these skills could be transferred.
- There were no significant differences between the responses of the freshman and those of the sophomores.

Another interesting aspect of our research is the incorporation of undergraduates in the process of creating and conducting scholarly research. Shanyese Trujillo and Annemarie Curd, undergraduates at Western, participated in an opportunity usually reserved for graduate students. Through this project both were able to develop their research and writing skills, as well as participate as researchers rather than merely as research subjects. William Lay, the faculty member involved, also benefited greatly. He gained invaluable insight into the scholarly aspirations and existing research skills of his undergraduate collaborators, as well as knowledge about the efficacy of an instructional technique he can employ in future classes. Results from our research also indicate that the culture of teaching and learning on our campus can be positively impacted by wider use of this journaling technique.

Implications for Teaching and Learning: Because of the overwhelmingly positive response received from the students, we believe that this method of journaling is, in many ways, a superior technique to other journaling methods. The implementation of this different approach to journaling would, according to most student responses, improve content understanding and skill development. Additionally, the learning gained by both student and faculty collaborators was significant. We would encourage the implementation of the journal in the classroom setting, as well as the increased collaboration between faculty members and students in order to gain valuable insight each other's different perspectives.

Implications for Further Study: An aspect of this project that deserves further research is the method of evaluating the journal. Currently journal scores are determined by the number of total entries (50%), student self-evaluation (25%) and professor evaluation (25%) of the journal. We also think the impact of the student voice on the effectiveness of the journal should be further explored. Would our survey results have been as positive had the students not been involved in the grading of the journal? We are also interested in the question of whether or not this interactive journaling technique actually improves writing. Our survey asked mainly affective questions; how students felt about the journaling and their reactions to it. Is there a way to measure improvements in writing brought about by the interactive component of journaling? Does the depth of content and/or the quality of both grammar and conventions improve due to peer read and response?