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Exploring Reflective Journal Writing in the Classroom

Jennifer Karchmer
Western Washington University

Kate Bauer
Western Washington University

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WRITING COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY FELLOWSHIPS
Closing Write-up for 2008-2009

Researchers' Names:

Jennifer Karchmer & Kate Bauer

Title:

“Exploring Reflective Journal Writing in the Classroom”

Research Questions:

1. What are some **attitudes** and **behavioral trends** of students toward a journal writing assignment?
2. How **effective** is a journal writing **assignment** in the classroom?
3. How can a journal writing assignment be **improved** for both students and instructor?

Method:

Quantitative data based on 39 **surveys administered during 2007 and 38 surveys administered in 2008** at WWU to COMM318 Professional Communication Fall Quarter 2008 students. Also, this study included student journals (about 10 pages each) with **qualitative** comments. The data reduction for quantitative portion was broken down into a year over year comparison.

Key Findings: The key finding from our study is that student attitudes and behaviors pertaining to journal writing positively increased in every measurable category from the year 2007 to 2008, as shown in the graphs included on page 3. Minor but significant changes were made in the assignment itself from the first year to the next, such as the implementation of periodic journal checks, as well as better clarity on behalf of the professor. The results from our research show a positive correlation between the changes made to the assignment and student attitudes/enjoyment towards it.

- Students preferred to **type journals rather than handwrite** (67%).
- Students said that they **typically wrote what they thought the instructor wanted them to write** (59%).
- About half of the students **waited until the final weeks of the quarter to write their journals** (49%).
- About half of respondents (46%) rated the **effectiveness** of the assignment “good.”

Implications for Further Study: In order to gain more insight about our findings, we are considering holding a focus group consisting of students who have participated in Jennifer Karchmer’s journaling assignment. This will enable us to gain some qualitative data from actual participants, as a means to better understand why students answered the way they did on their surveys. Through focus group interviews, we can gain a broader perspective on student attitudes. Also, the question: “Did you write what you thought the instructor wanted?” produced identical, negative results from one year to the next, so we would like to ask students why they think this may be the case.

1. Cross tabulate results by gender, major, previous journal experience (e.g., are women more likely than men to have previous journal writing experience? Does that experience influence their perspective when approaching the assignment? Are certain majors more likely to have the journal writing experience?)
2. Explore the **definition of “journal.”** How does it differ from “diary,” “log,” “field journal”? What are students perceptions of each of these going into the assignment and how has their perception of the value of journaling changed afterward?
3. Give students the option of choosing whether to **handwrite or type journal**. What are the implications of the choice and what led to students’ choices?

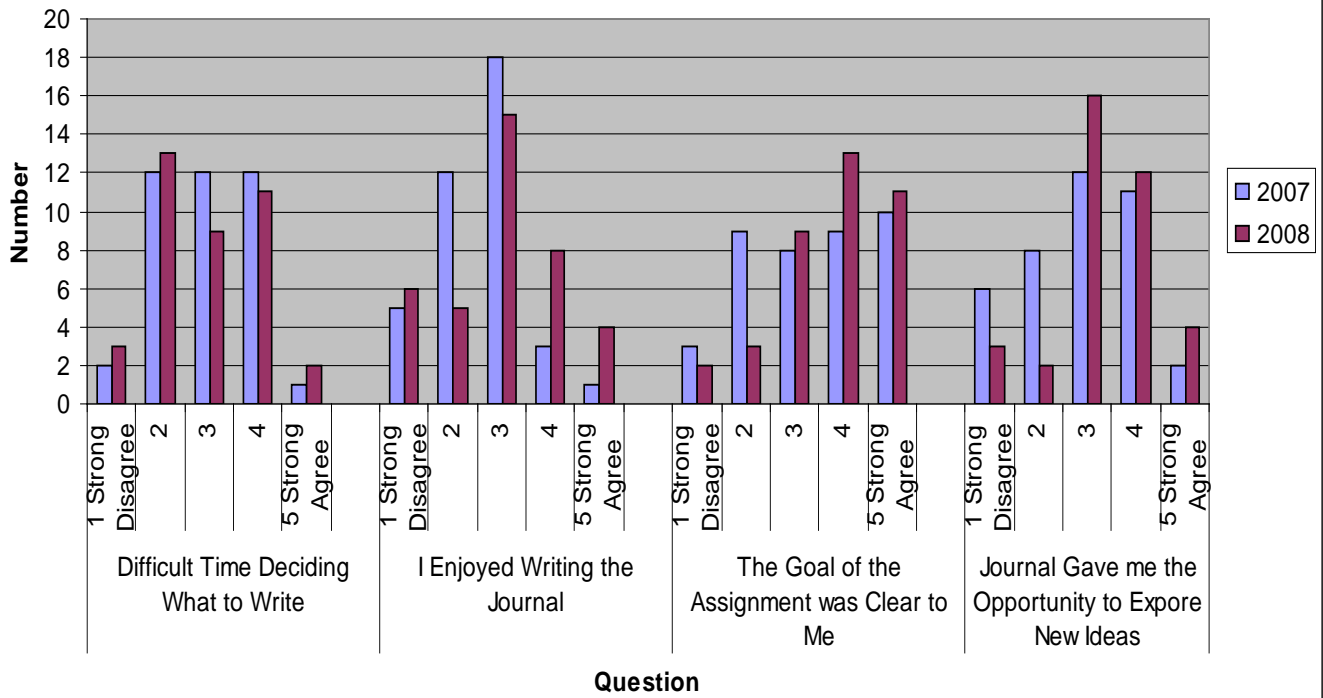
4. Does journal writing in the classroom require a level of reflection to truly understand, learn from and appreciate it? (Conduct a study of the attitudes of students toward journal writing at intervals after completing assignment, i.e., one year, 5 years, etc. and re-survey these students about how they reflect on the assignment).

Implications for Teaching and Learning: Our research is significant to teaching and learning because it aims to better understand this unconventional writing tool, in an attempt to implement it into more classrooms. Reflective journal writing enables students to put their true feelings and opinions down on paper, while still providing intellectual stimulation and furthering their practice of writing. Reflective journaling in turn gives professors an opportunity to really connect with and better understand their students.

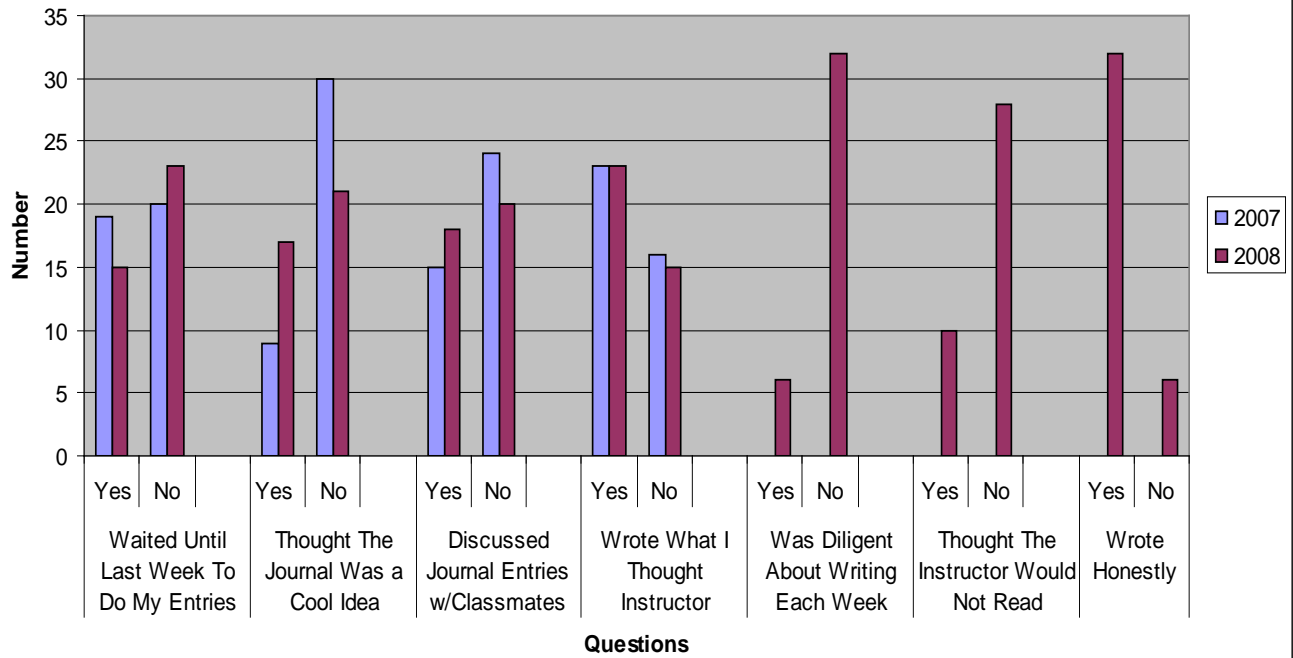
1. **Focus groups.** Hold a focus group of instructors who have implemented a form of journal writing in the classroom. What are some similarities and differences among their approaches? Is journal writing reserved for “Humanities” or do we see journal writing in other disciplines (and how effective is it?)
 - 1a. Focus group of students who have done journaling and find it useful.
 - 1b. Focus group of students who have negative attitude toward journal writing.
2. Gain **feedback** from instructors on how best to approach grading of journals. What kind of rubric is most effective? Is Journaling a low-stakes or high-stakes assignment?

The following graphs were created by Kate Bauer, 2009:

Summary of Journal Responses



Yes/ No Question Summary



Journal Writing Survey

This survey is being used to study journal writing as part of a research grant. The results are expected to be presented at the Festival of Scholarship in April 2008 being held at WWU. Your thoughtful input is greatly appreciated. Completing this survey is optional and anonymous and in no way will affect your final grade in this course. Thank you.

Jennifer Karchmer, Department of Communication

Expected Graduation Date: _____ Gender (circle one): Male Female

Your Declared Major: _____ (if applying for Communication, write "Pre-Communication")

Have you completed a journal writing assignment in another college course before? Circle one: (yes / no).

If "yes," provide the name of the course: _____

Indicate your level of agreement by circling one number on the right for each statement.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. I had a difficult time thinking of what to write each week.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I enjoyed writing the journal.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The goal of the journal assignment was clear to me.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Writing the journal gave me an opportunity to explore new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
5. If you were given a choice whether to handwrite or type your journal writing assignment, which would you choose? Circle one: (handwrite / type). Why?	1	2	3	4	5

6. For the following statements, check as many that are true for you:
- I waited until the last weeks of the quarter to complete the journal.
 - I thought the journal writing was a cool idea.
 - I discussed journal entries with classmates.
 - I wrote what I thought the instructor wanted us to write.
 - I was diligent about writing each week.
 - I assumed the instructor wouldn't have time to read my entire journal.
 - I found myself writing honestly about ideas and concepts.

7. How would you rate the effectiveness of the journal writing assignment in fulfilling the course requirements? (circle one of the following five choices)

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent I'm unable to determine

8. Provide any additional comments you have on improving the journal writing assignment (write on the back if you'd like).

Thank you for completing this survey.

COMM318 Professional Communication
Prof. Jennifer Karchmer
Journal assignment & evaluation Fall Quarter 2008

Evaluation: 100 points

Weighting: 25%

Due: Thursday, Dec. 6, beginning of classtime

Assignment: Toward the 5th-hour arranged portion of the course, students keep a weekly journal reflecting on their progress during the quarter. Entries may be on assignments, learning, class observations, participation in “Make a Difference Day,” and other topics provided by the instructor. The purpose of the journal is to provide a “reflection place.” It is expected that students will write with honesty and discuss appropriate topics relating to COMM318 coursework. The journal will be shared only with the instructor.

“**Journal entry**” reminders appear on the course schedule to encourage students to keep up with the journal on a weekly basis. Your reflections should be in chronological order and demonstrate a progression throughout the quarter. The instructor will not check in regularly on journal progress. If at any time, you would like feedback on your journal, hand it in and give the instructor at least one week to return it to you with a brief comment on your progress.

Do not wait until the final weeks of the quarter to write your entire journal. Doing so will be obvious to the reader and will affect your grade heavily.

Requirements:

Must be typed & double-spaced!

Includes at least 10 entries (one per week)

Single entry is at least 250 words (approx.: one page, double spaced, 12-point, TNR)

Must be spellchecked

Correct header: every entry is dated and numbered, ex: “Sept. 30, 2007, Entry #1”

Staple evaluation sheet to top (cover page)

Evaluation: (see next page) Journals are evaluated on overall effort; thoroughness, insight, ability to make connections to course concepts and the real-world, use of constructive tone. While grammar, syntax and sentence structure are not as important, the entire journal must be spellchecked and presented in a way that is understandable for the instructor to read.

Journal Topics to get you started (check BB weekly for journal prompts, although you may write on any topics each week you choose that are appropriate)

Week 1 Entry #1, course outline, assignments, journaling

Week 2 Entry #2, team building process

Week 3 Entry #3, addressing conflicts

Week 4 Entry #4,

Week 5 Entry #5,

Week 6 Entry #6, M.A.D.D.

Week 7 Entry #7,

Week 8 Entry #8,

Week 9 Entry #9,

Week 10 Entry #10, (final entry) final reflection on quarter.

COMM318 Professional Communication
Prof. Jennifer Karchmer
Journal Assignment Evaluation
(this is your cover page)

Name/Section: __type your name here__

Grade: _____

1) Attention to details:

Submitted on time

Typed

10 entries

Spellchecked

Employs correct header for entries

Includes this evaluation sheet

Needs work

acceptable

excellent

2) Content:

Thorough, insightful, makes connections to course concepts and real-world, constructive tone, shows personal growth, maturity, sense of learning.

Needs work

acceptable

excellent

3) Effort:

Overall presentation and output of effort.

Needs work

acceptable

excellent