



Student Reflection Blogs to Communicate Lessons Learned in the Complex World of Service Learning



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Context

Part of Regis University's mission is "service to others." Students are required to participate in a variety of service learning projects where they are working with diverse, vulnerable, or under-served populations within their program. The overarching objectives for service learning include personal growth, civic engagement, and academic enhancement to support the **development of the whole person**, also known as *Cura Personalis*.

Problem

Previously, methods of assessing online learning of service learning experiences occurred through academic reflection papers and discussion forums. Despite guided questions to assist the reflective process, students were very superficial in their analysis of their learning. It was a detached and shallow reporting of events. They tended to define what they think service learning *should* be rather than the lessons learned from their experiences. The format for this reflection assessment was analyzed and determined as cause of the problem.

Approach

An approach was developed to replace formal papers. Students were asked to blog about their service learning experience(s). The purpose of this activity was not just "an assignment" but also to encourage the use of reflection *as it relates to learning*. The blog format was chosen for its versatility and capability to break boundaries and allow for openness and honesty. As a starting point, the instructor shared her blog of service activities with students to demonstrate the conceptual difference between a formal paper and the blogging reflection.

Guidance was provided with links to different reflective models and a grading rubric to assist students in deconstructing the meaning of their experience. The grading rubric follows the Ignatian Model of Guided Reflection for Context, Experience, Action, and Evaluation from three perspectives: Personal Growth, Civic Learning, and Academic Enhancement. Rather than listing a series of events to describe one's activities, students were encouraged to share and analyze the meaning of their experiences. Instead of evaluating *just* the writing and content presented, evaluators objectively assessed the quality of learning that occurred based on the expressed critical thinking of the students' experiences as they moved through the reflective process. In this case, the instructor provided feedback into the grading rubric and then returned it to the student outside of the blog.

Results

After a year's use of blogging for reflections it has been amazing to compare before and after results. For the instructor, a tedious evaluation has been turned into an enjoyable process. Through blogging, the student became highly engaged in relating their experiences and reflecting on the meaning of their learning, making it a shared experience between the instructor and the student. Deeper self-analysis of meaning was related in an authentic and heartfelt manner so the instructor could begin to understand why a particular student interpreted a situation in a given manner.

Comparative "word clouds" of papers and blogs revealed stark contrasts in words such as author and populations versus care and service. Overall, the blog format for student reflections appeared to be a good fit.

OVERVIEW of Reflection Blog Assignment

The purpose of this blog is to reflect and analyze the Service Learning Experience with an emphasis on the implications for the student's nursing practice. The final product is an electronic reflection that addresses the assignment guidelines below.

As you begin to write your blog, use the Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model as a guide. As you review the Ignatian model imagine looking through a kaleidoscope and interpret what you are seeing from these three perspectives:

Personal & Professional Growth, Civic Engagement, Academic Enhancement

Reflect upon your completed Service Learning experience. This blog is more than a recounting of your activities such as the date, time, and description of what occurred. Rather, it is an in-depth analysis of personal experiences and the meaning (reflection) of those experiences. Your analysis should include: Your beliefs, thoughts, discoveries, decisions and conclusion.

BLOG EVALUATION CRITERIA

The Service Learning Reflection Blog will be graded using the following guidelines. Points will be awarded based on the **quality, and depth** in addressing each of the following areas (*refer to the rubric on the right*).

AREA TO ADDRESS	CRITICAL ASPECTS	%
<p>Context/Meaning What is my lens that I look at this material through? How might this material transform my practice?</p>	<p>Personal & Professional Growth Lens Describe the experience objectively. What were your initial understandings about the material? As you participated in class and heard other interpretations of the material, what did you say? What did others say and do? Were these views similar? If not, how were they different? How might your new found understanding of the material transform your practice?</p>	25%
<p>Experience Interpretation How did this class experience transform your paradigm and practice?</p> <p>Action Interpretation What caught your attention? What practice action is required of you?</p>	<p>Academic Enhancement Lens Compare and contrast your initial understanding of the academic content and your experience of using it. In what way was your understanding and your experience similar and different? What were some of the reasons for the differences? What were you trying to accomplish and why?</p> <p>Civic Engagement Lens Analyze your actions performed throughout the class. How were these actions changed or transformed based on your interpretation and meaning of Ignatian pedagogy? What continuing action change(s) will be required from you?</p>	25%
<p>Evaluation What practice wisdom have you arrived at? Evaluate how you were transformed.</p>	<p>How will you use what you have learned about your experiences in this program to make a difference? How would you evaluate the quality of this type of assignment as part of the nursing curriculum?</p>	25%
<p>TOTAL POINTS</p>		100%

Blog vs. Written Paper

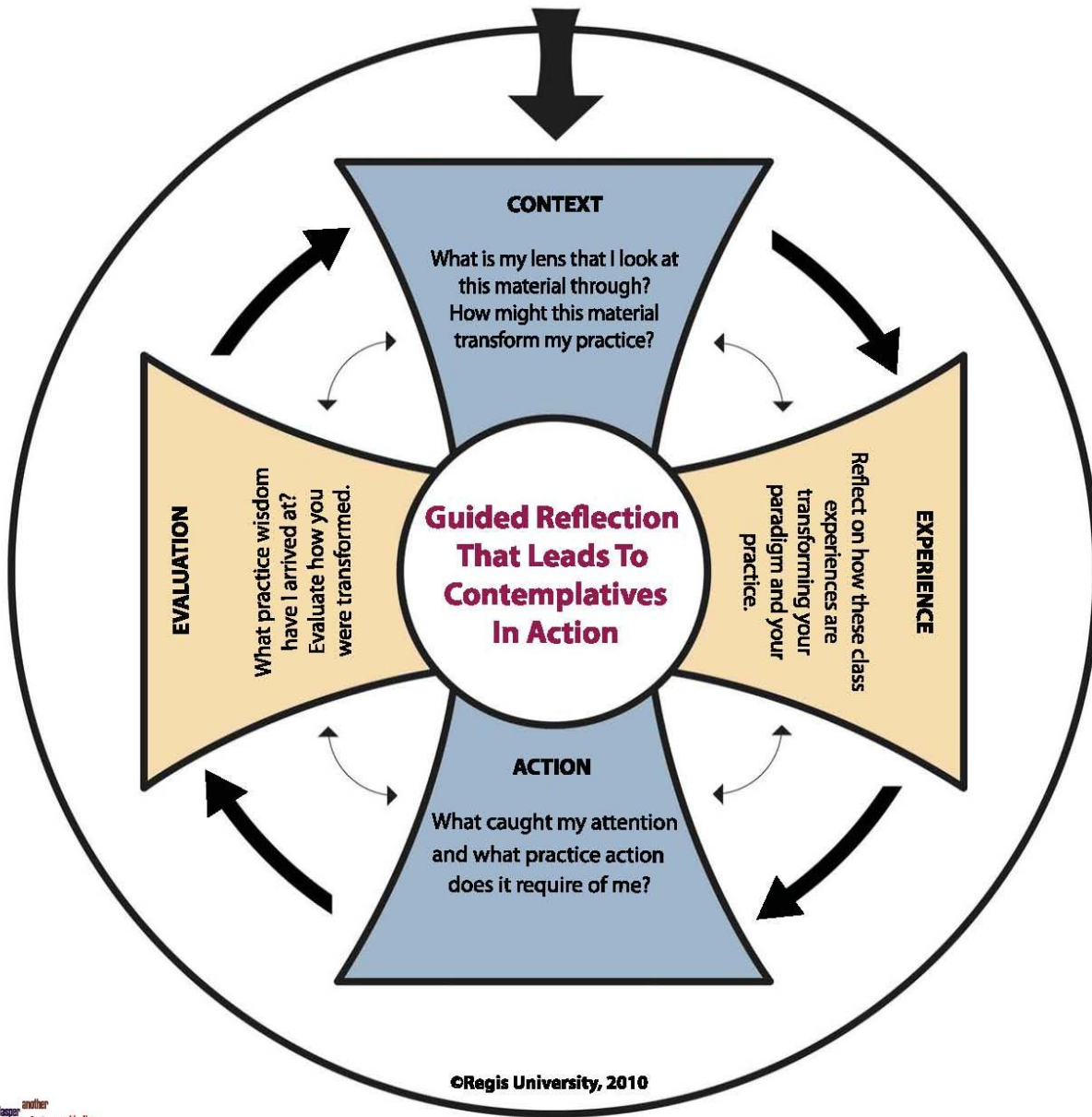
Blogging:

- Greater analysis of experience.
- Blogging releases boundaries and restrictions that may be imposed when writing an academic paper.
- It allows students to disclose their attitudes and beliefs with honesty and sincerity.
- The students have control to choose who they wish to share their blog with. (i.e. The instructor only; instructor and classmates; etc).
- Students can undertake the exploration of the process of learning.
- Students take ownership and personalize their blog.
- The combination of blogging and specifically crafted grading rubrics can provide greater objectivity in assessment of learning.
- Blogs can be used in other courses to continue the practice of reflective learning; on their own, students can look back to examine their growth over time.

Written Paper:

- The writing tends to be clinical, cold, or a bizarre 3rd party representation of the event as writers follow APA or other formatting requirements.
- Scholarly papers are generally limiting in that they often have a page length and citation requirements.
- It can be challenging to evaluate personal perspectives and reflective learning when lack of analysis is present.

Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model



Journey from Service Provider to Servant Leader

FRIDAY, MAY 4, 2012

Another 9 Health Fair!

A couple of weekends ago I had a chance to participate in another 9Health Fair only this time with a different twist. Last year I was a volunteer on the Regis campus and this year I was at my nurse practitioner's office as a volunteer. 9Health Fair is a wonderful opportunity to work with underserved populations needing health care. For some clients it is a free event to give them an annual update on their current health. For many, it's a chance to meet with various providers from different disciplines to discuss their health concerns and obtain much needed treatment after the Fair ends. Last year I was providing a lot of instruction to clients and their family members about adopting health eating and exercise habits. Like most health fairs I've volunteered at I was providing a direct service to participants. This year, I was acting in the capacity of clinical faculty so that nursing students in a Nurse Practitioner program could implement their newly learned Practitioner skills in the form of skin assessments.

Like many, I got used to doing things a certain way and become comfortable in those grooves of familiarity. I had assumed that when I first volunteered for the health fair that I would be one of the people providing direct service to clients. When I was asked to instead provide a different kind of service I was reluctant to agree. Not because I didn't want to help but because I was nervous about performing in a different role and feeling confident that what I could offer would in fact be helpful rather than a hindrance. Sometimes I need those uncomfortable feelings of inadequacy or uncertainty as a reminder that change is constant and that adaptation is needed. More specifically, that life doesn't always happen the way I choose or assume it will. I was also reminded with this wonderful experience that as a nurse



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BLOG ARCHIVE

- ▼ 2012 (1)
 - ▼ May (1)
 - Another 9 Health Fair!
- ▶ 2011 (9)

ABOUT ME

Terry
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