

Blogging as a Tool for Reflective Journaling

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When compared to wikis and discussion boards, I believe that blogs would be the most effective tool for helping my students demonstrate learning that addresses the following objective in their Group Dynamics course:

Demonstrate therapeutic use of self, including one's personality, insights, perceptions, and judgments, as part of the therapeutic process in both individual and group interaction.

This course objective is taken directly from the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) standards for occupational therapy education. There are many books and resources in occupational therapy literature that assert the critical importance of developing reflective skills in future practitioners. In the 2014 essay "*Leading Lights: Essays on Leadership and Occupational Therapy*", Leslie Addison notes "Occupational therapy practitioners regularly use reflection as a skill to remain client centered and to help others accomplish shared goals".

For these reasons, I have utilized journaling as a tool for students to reflect on the group dynamics they observe in a series of lab sessions that are designed as a therapeutic group process. The weekly journals give students a personal opportunity to consider and describe the ways in which they see themselves and their peers demonstrating the components identified in the objective I cited, beyond the discussions that take place during group sessions. Lai and Land's 2009 review highlighted the value of using journal writing as a tool to support reflection, citing research that indicates, among numerous other benefits, the understanding that journal writing enhances writers' metacognitive awareness, broadens the number of learning strategies students utilize, and develops their ability to conceptualize complex, abstract information.

In my opinion, blogging is the tool that lends itself best to the intimate nature of this sort of reflection. Miyazoe and Anderson's 2009 study cites Murray and Hourigan's research supporting the positive role of blogs in self-reflection. Given that wikis and discussion boards are collaborative by design and that this exercise is intended for self-reflection of a more private nature, a blogging tool would be the best of these three options for students to organize and reflect on their process from week to week as well as comprehensively, from initiation of the group process through termination. Some of the best practices I would employ with a blogging tool to insure it is being used effectively to support student learning include the following:

- Use of a template or posted prompt to structure student reflection and organize entry contents (Lai and Land, 2009)
- Regular, prompt feedback to "reinforce analytic responses...model thinking processes, offer ways of organizing or expanding upon ideas...and ease students' learning anxieties" (Lai and Land 2009)
- Explicit instructions for posting in the blogging tool (Berg, 2011)
- Familiarity with using the blogging tool myself (Berg, 2011)

- Posting the rubric that will be used to grade the journal entries to reinforce positive course expectancies (Ambrose, et al., 2010)