

A Voyage Log: Diaries and journals in the virtuality of a new world horizon
Martha García
Professor, Modern Languages & Literatures

Rationale:

I must say that journaling and diaries have been integrated in my lesson plans for quite a while; however, they have become the crucial component of my courses in the fall semester of 2020 because these logs assist me in the imperative need of narrowing the gap between the absence of face-to-face interaction and the corpus of possibilities offered by the virtual learning environment. Reflection in the form of an academic journal in where students must connect what they have learned in the course with a concurrent community at large, help them to think beyond the immediate moment to interconnect the knowledge gained with their professional, scholarly, or personal goals bringing the learning experience to a place of concrete objectives in the midst of the uncertainty. In the context of language and literatures, this logging exercise has abetted students and I in finding a new meaning to our daily activities and their purpose.

Description:

Even though I have been using journaling for several years now, in the awake of a new reality during the pandemic situation that has redefined our teaching and learning, and as a result of my participation in previous FCTL winter experiences, I have been polishing this tool through logging that reflect not only the content of the subject matter, but also demonstrate self-assessment by students and by myself. Since this is a grade component, students pay special attention to the elaboration of this class assignment. In the fall semester of 2020, this tool was elevated to a completely different meaning since what used to be considered trivial, now has emerged at the top of our priorities overnight. Connecting the everyday course lesson plan materials with concise objectives, pedagogical approaches, and student's expectations keep us all on track towards superseding the factors that can be out of our reach now. I have implemented this semester of fall 2020 the journal component from a different angle of utility and assessment purposes. Not only have we learned to embrace the richness of working with a diversified student population, but we are also positioned in front of the millenniums who are highly literate in technology and virtual communication. Logging, consequently, constitutes twofold areas of online practicability. The first section is related directly towards reflecting about the material taught and logging on electronic diaries by the students. It consists of:

- a) The main topics of each weekly assignment
- b) Their own comments and reflection about those topics
- c) How they may use this knowledge in the academic, professional, or personal space.

Since I teach Spanish language and literature, this past summer, and this fall semester, I have incorporated one more possibility of reflection:

- d) Am I Hispanic or do I know someone who is Hispanic?

e) Do I know someone who has traveled to Spain and/or Latin America?

I wrote an example of my own logging exercise for the first week of classes and posted it on webcourses as a guideline in structure and format. With these questions as the foundation of each weekly entry in this diary, students have been presenting their insights these past two semesters with a depth that was not perceived pre-pandemically because each experience is full of true sentiment, reasoning, and hope for a future post-world pandemic. The second section has to do directly with my own perception and evaluation of this component. Even though I was always eager to read and assess these diaries for the past seven years, I must say that this summer and fall semester of 2020, I rely on them to learn about the students who I get to know only through the lens of a virtual interaction. Even those students who I already knew from my face-to-face courses or hybrid previous classes seem to be adapting differently online, not because it is an online course, but because the context of our common history has notably changed them, and honestly, it has changed us all. This tool has always assisted me in evaluating students and my own teaching through a more accurate light; however, the meaning of this so-called ‘old tool’ has made me, and my students, to succeed in teaching and learning. In terms of applicability and transferability, this reimagining of journaling can be implemented in undergraduate and graduate courses as well. What remains invaluable is the fact that students and faculty can preserve these diaries. For example, students keep their diaries and can always return to them when they may need it for pragmatic, professional, academic, or individual use. From my part, I treasure my own faculty diary, as an instrument to keep building, readjusting, or modifying aspects of my teaching in the middle of a constant changing global reality. Journaling has been with us since the beginning of the humankind; however, using journaling in the online teaching and learning environment in 2020 has been, by all possible means, a constituent that benefits and preserves, precisely, the human connectivity in the sometimes-disconnected online environment. It denotes that an online course can be as well a personalized experience. *Bon Voyage!*

Appraisal:

I have evaluated the effectiveness of this tool in the past; however, I have not conducted formal evaluation yet in these two academic semesters teaching under unprecedented circumstances. What I can share is the fact that formerly logging with a clear purpose in mind seems to redefine the use of this tool in our current reality. In the same way that journaling was used for completely different purposes in the medieval or early modern era where populations were subject to the limitations and restrictions of their context, journaling for academic purposes in the online learning environment in the COVID-19 era represents a new dimension of communication of ideas, concepts, and applicability with the unique advantages of higher technology at our fingertips and with generations of students who are savvy in the understanding of platforms and accessibility making the experience of ‘diaries’ and ‘journals’ some kind of ‘voyage log’ that will be used effectively for generations to come to learn about what we are now experiencing first hand.

References:

Lyons N., Freidus H. *The Reflective Portfolio in Self-Study: Inquiring Into and Representing A Knowledge of Practice*. In: Loughran J.J., Hamilton M.L., LaBoskey V.K., Russell T. (eds).

International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices. Springer International Handbooks of Education, vol 12. Springer, Dordrecht, 2004.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6545-3_27

Zubizarreta, John. *The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning*. 2nd ed., Jossey-Bass, 2009.
<http://wp.auburn.edu/writing/reflective-writing-in-eportfolios/>

Further reading related to journaling during the COVID19 Era:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/08/why-are-people-keeping-coronavirus-diaries/614977/>