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Using Ignatian Pedagogy to Guide Reflections While Blogging

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Abstract

Communicating, interpreting and connecting service experiences with learning can be challenging for both a student and for a mentor/instructor. How does one realize a transformation? How does another interpret if that transformation has taken place? Previously, an assignment to write a reflection paper about service learning experiences during one of the core undergraduate RN-BSN courses at Regis University was in place but it did not seem to provide an avenue for the student to make those connections or realizations. Likewise, it was extremely challenging for faculty to objectively understand if the transformation and learning occurred. We found that by combining a blog format with reflection questions using the Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model and an enhanced grading rubric, students are better equipped and faculty can objectively evaluate the depth and quality of learning as they read the students' journey through their service learning experiences. This paper will explain the thought process that went into transforming this assignment with technology and the Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model.

Introduction

Currently, health care is delivered in an increasingly technological and mission driven format. In 2010, the Loretto Heights School of Nursing at Regis University adopted the Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model (the Model)¹ as a meaningful teaching-learning strategy to enhance student reflection assignments (see Figure 1). Since that time the Model continues to assist students to reflect thoughtfully on their experiences, service learning projects, and clinical activities. In the RN-BSN online and hybrid programs particularly, the Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model is used in many of its nine core courses to guide student reflections. The four arms of the Model have questions related to the elements named in the Model: *context, experiences, actions, and evaluation*. This model supports student understanding of how knowledge is transforming their practice and potentially their values and views.² Since its adoption, a modification has been made to the reflection writing assignment in order to maximize the opportunity for reflection

using the Model, and also preparing students for a tech-centered practice environment.

Background and Challenge Identified

Prior to the Model's adoption, students were requested to reflect and write about their service experiences as a reflection paper. The overarching objectives for service learning include personal growth, civic engagement and academic enhancement to support the development of the whole person, known as *Cura Personalis* (see Figure 2). The hope was that the students would relate their experience of service learning activities with these objectives.

General questions were provided to guide students about their experiences related to service learning. Despite the guidance to assist the reflective process while writing their papers, students tended to be fairly superficial in the reporting of their learning. Analysis tended to be from a detached first person standpoint listing a calendar or sequence of events. Unfortunately,

Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model

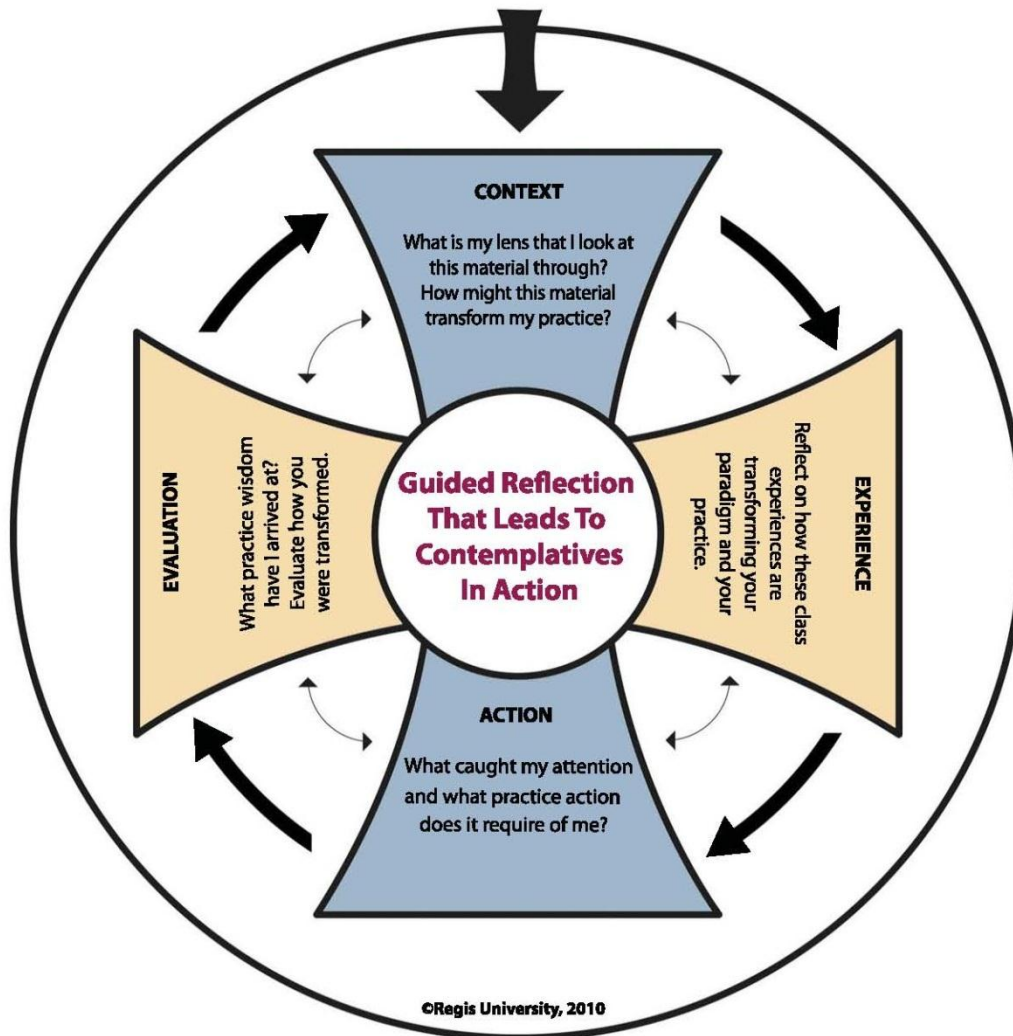


Figure 1: Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model

their papers fell short of the goal that they could provide in-depth analysis of how or what they learned and why.³ The students generally defined what they *thought* service learning *should* be rather than the lessons actually learned from their experiences.

Another challenge that arose from this reflective paper assignment was determining how the faculty will grade the quality of the assignment when one is evaluating a reflection of a person's learning experience. In the past, a grade of pass/fail was usually given based on whether or not the assignment was completed rather than the quality of the assignment submitted. The reflection paper assignment did not seem to get to the heart of the



Figure 2: Service Learning Model

educational objective that was aimed for, and thus a missed opportunity for growth and learning.

Working with an instructional designer to analyze the issue, it was determined that the problem with the reflective assignment was related to content, context and logistics in how the students actually did the assignment. The format of writing a formal paper for this reflective assignment tended to change the students perception from inward reflection and expression of lessons learned to that of fitting into a box of “scholarly writing”. Often, students expressed themselves in the third person rather than first person in their papers, which tended to detach them emotionally from the assignment and experience. Students and faculty both tended to treat this as “an assignment to do, get a grade, and then be done with” and missed the opportunity to critically reflect this experience as it could relate to their growth and

learning. A new format for this assignment was considered to address this issue.

A New Approach

The blog format (www.blogger.com) was chosen to replace traditional written reflection papers based on its versatility and capability to break boundaries and allow for openness and honesty. There are many advantages for online blogging such as the date/time stamp for each post and the ease of providing comments or feedback in the blog.⁴ Writing a blog is quite different from writing a formal paper. A blog releases the writer from formalities such as page margins, page numbers, and/or number of words. Instead of staring at a blank “piece of paper” students are able to personalize blog sites based on their own preferences for style and appearance. Students are reminded however to observe HIPAA

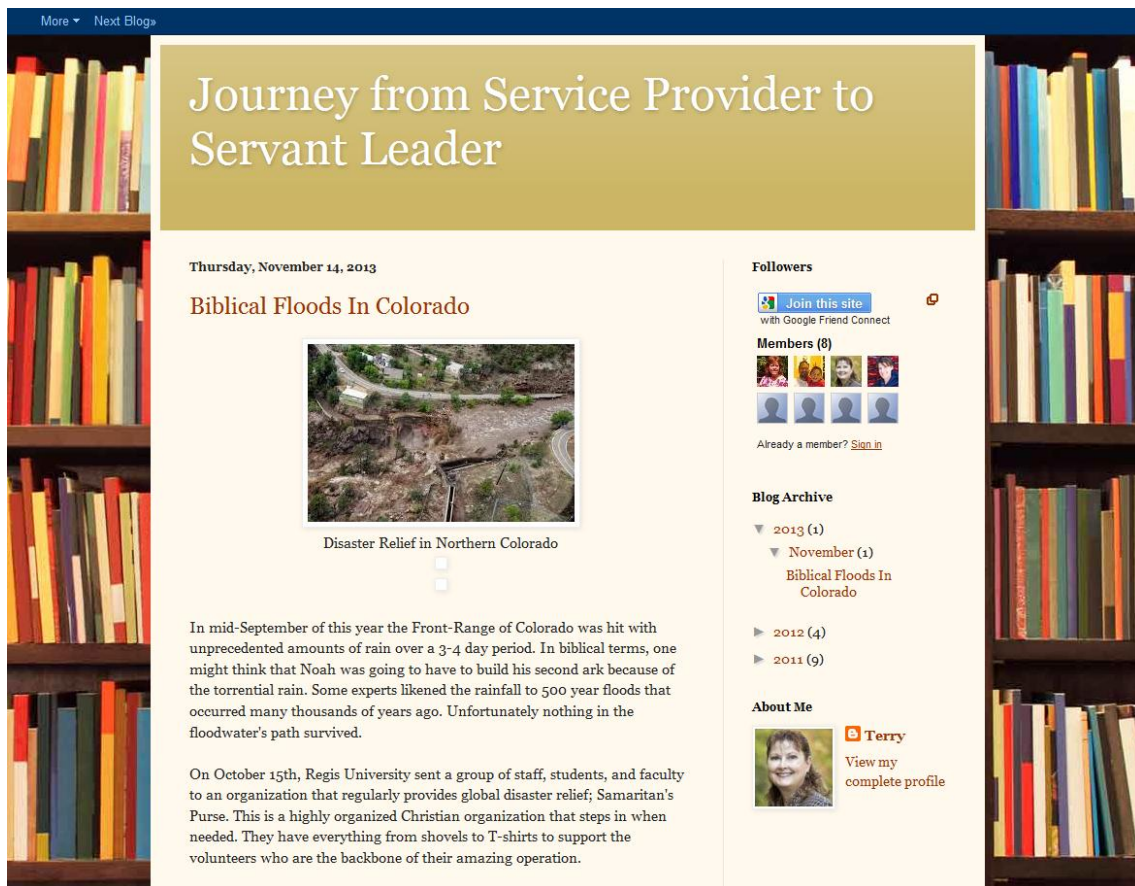


Figure 3: The instructor's blog

requirements and to use the various editing tools available such as spell check, as they are still participating in a scholarly activity. The blog is set up as a private journal blog and initially only shared with faculty, however, the student may choose to share the blog with whomever they wish. To help protect the confidentiality of the student's blog, faculty will provide feedback in the grading rubric and return the comments to the students outside of the blog.

Many students were unfamiliar with blogging or writing in-depth reflections so the instructor shared her own reflection blog of service activities to model and demonstrate how it could be completed (see Figure 3).⁵ Guidance was provided to both students and faculty with a critical

thinking model,⁶ the Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model,⁷ and enhanced grading rubrics. The grading rubric follows the Ignatian Model of Guided Reflection for Context, Experience, Action, and Evaluation by examining three unique perspectives: Personal Growth, Civic Learning, and Academic Enhancement (see Table 1). The previous grading rubric simply asked a series of brief, open-ended questions about activities performed, which underserved population was served, and what impact performing service had upon the student. Yet the expectation was an in-depth analysis of what learning occurred and how it was accomplished. This new rubric became an invitation to view the experience more deeply with critical thinking, rather than listing a series of events to describe one's activities. As a result,

Table 1: Evaluation Rubric

AREA TO ADDRESS	CRITICAL ASPECTS	%
Context/Meaning What is my lens that I look at this material through? How might this material transform my practice?	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?	25%
Experience Interpretation How did this class experience transform your paradigm and practice?	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?	25%
Action Interpretation What caught your attention? What practice action is required of you?	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?	25%
Evaluation What practice wisdom have you arrived at? Evaluate how you were transformed.	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?	25%
	TOTAL	100%




Figure 4: Word cloud comparisons: On the left is a student paper word cloud, on the right a reflection blog word cloud. The larger the word, the more often the word was used in the writing.

faculty were able to objectively assess the quality of learning that occurred based on the expressed critical thinking of the students' experiences as they moved through the reflective process and guided questions. The beauty of using the blog format is that student's control the blog's access. It can remain a private reflection tool used outside of a course to record a student's personal experiences or a tool that can be used during single or multiple courses in which the instructor and others are granted access by the student. If multiple courses in the program utilize the blog tool students can continue using the same blog they started and may wish to continue using it even after they complete their program. The blog helps students step away from treating this as "just an assignment to do, get a grade, and move on" and encourages them to revisit their posts and think about their growth over time.

Discussion and Conclusion

The blogging technique has been successfully used for the past three years without significant challenges. The one difficulty of using a blogging tool for reflection as opposed to writing a formal paper has less to do with the writing format and more with using unfamiliar technology. Providing clear instruction on setting up a blogging site, offering encouragement, and having technical support available if needed resolves potential problems. Before and after results for this assignment are visually amazing as presented in comparative word clouds (see Figure 4).

Stark contrasts between papers and blogs are revealed in words such as "author" and "population" versus "care" and "service." It was evident that the students were able to have a

deeper analysis of their experience and in many cases triggered some “ah-ha” moments that may lead to future action. For the instructor, a tedious and ambiguous evaluation has been turned into an enjoyable process. Through the blogging format, the students 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. Students seemed to find it easier to express themselves in an authentic and heartfelt manner. Overall, the blog format for student reflections appears to be a great fit. The next challenge is to explore the larger implications of reflective practice and whether it actually changes the way a student thinks or practices in the long term. 

Notes

¹ Regis University, “Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model,” in *Loretto Heights School of Nursing Student Handbook*, 2014-15, 16, http://www.regis.edu/~media/Files/RHCHP/Schools/LHSON/LHSON_Handbook.ashx.

² Karen Pennington, Judy Crewell, Tracy Snedden, Margaret Mulhall, and Nicole Ellison, “Ignatian Pedagogy: Transforming Nursing Education,” *Jesuit Higher Education*, 2, no. 1 (2013): 34-40, <http://www.jesuithighereducation.org/index.php/jhe/article/view/44>.

³ Jonnie Jill Phipps, “E-Journaling: Achieving Interactive Education Online.” *EDUCAUSE Quarterly*, January 1, 2005, <https://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/EQM0519.pdf>.

⁴ James A. Muncy, “Blogging for Reflection: The Use of Online Journals to Engage Students in Reflective Learning,” *Marketing Education Review*, 24, no.2 (2014): 101-114, doi:10.2753/MER1052-8008240202.

⁵ Terry Buxton, “Journey of a Servant Leader,” last updated November 14, 2013, <http://terry-servicelearningjourney.blogspot.com/>.

⁶ Foundation for Critical Thinking, “Online Model for Learning the Elements and Standards of Critical Thinking, 2007,” <https://www.criticalthinking.org/ctmodel/logic-model1.htm>.

⁷ Regis University, “Ignatian Pedagogy Conceptual Model,” 16.