

Mirror Blog Activity

Overview of Mirror Blog

Lisa Zawilinski coined the phrase 'mirror blog' in an article she wrote in 2009. She said "Mirror blogs allow bloggers to reflect on their thinking – hence the metaphor" (Zawilinski 2009). Mirror blogs are also referred to as "learning ePortfolios" (Chen et al. 2005) within the educational blogging community. "An observation and pedagogical challenge often found in project-based design courses [such as Construction Studies and Design and Communication Graphics] is that students see what they have produced but do not see what they have learnt" (Chen et al. 2005). Introducing mirror blogs to your classroom can aid in solving this inherent problem with project-based design courses/activities, as mirror blogs give the pupils a medium through which they can reflect upon their day-to-day achievements/learning in a simple and multifaceted way, using text, pictures, voice recordings, videos, etc. This means that if a pupil finds it difficult to express themselves through the written word they have the ability to use other (perhaps more natural) forms of communication, "enabling students to make their knowledge explicit and visible for themselves as well as for others" (Chen et al. 2005) simply and most effectively for the individual.

Brief Outline of Sample Reflective Activity

This is a simple activity that will introduce your pupils to using their new blogs to reflect upon their learning. You will ask your pupils to read a short article/chapter about a topic of your choosing e.g. sustainable design. Each pupil will be asked to read a different article. Once the pupils read their article they will post a reflection on how they felt about the text and what they learnt while reading it. Each pupil will then be asked to comment on three different posts posted by other pupils in the group (this will be monitored for engagement). The pupils will then be asked to read another article from the selection that, from reading their peers' reflections, they were interested in reading.

Duration

1-3 weeks depending on how many readings the teacher wishes for the pupils to read

Pedagogic Rationale for Activity/ Research Testing Results

The pedagogic rationale for this activity is to create a community of enquiry within the class group. A community of enquiry is a community where "teachers and students transacting with the specific purpose of facilitating, constructing and validating understanding, and of developing capabilities that will lead to further learning" (Garrison and Anderson 2003). It is acknowledged in most educational circles that "the primary goal of learning is that learners should learn to learn, and become capable of making their own decisions with respect to

their learning” (McLoughlin and Lee 2007), which the pupils are encouraged to do while participating in this activity.

Subject Matter of Activity

This is entirely up to the teacher and his/her scheme of work for the class group. Suggested topics to look at, which have up to 24 separate readings (vital that each pupil has a different article), would be:

Design and Communication Graphics

- Product Design
- Sustainable Design
- Mechanisms
- Structural Forms
- Geologic Geometry

Aim of Activity

To introduce pupils to expressed reflection using blogs to aid the pupils in learning to learn

Objectives	Assessment
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pupils will read and analyse given readings 2. Pupils will reflect upon their learning and the learning of their peers 3. Pupils choose a second reading after critiquing other pupils’ reflections 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quality of the reflections written by the pupils. Teacher’s impression on how well the pupils read and analysed the readings 2. Evidence of reflection in blog posts. The quality of the comments left by pupils on other pupils’ blog posts 3. The pupils’ second set of reflections will show if the pupils engaged in this section of the activity

Assessment of Activity

The pupils are graded 50%/50% between the reflections that they write and the comments that they leave. This is important as it will mean that that the pupils must engage with their own reflections as well and the reflections documented by their peers

Teacher/Pupil Activities

1. Refer to your scheme of work and choose a relevant topic for your pupils to learn about
2. Research the topic and find relevant articles on the topic (one article per pupil)
3. Give each pupil their prescribed article (in soft or hard copy)
4. Ask pupils to read their prescribed article about a topic of the teacher's choosing e.g. sustainable design.
5. Once the pupils read their article they must post a reflection on how they felt about the text and what they learnt while reading it.
6. Each pupil must then comment on three different reflective posts posted by their peers (this should be monitored for engagement). If the pupils wish to comment on more than three different posts this is to be encouraged. Also pupils should be encouraged to reply to comments on their own and other pupils' blog posts if they feel that they can add to the discussion.
7. The pupils will then be asked to read another article from the selection that, from reading another pupil's reflections, they are interested in reading.
8. Steps 5-7 can be repeated as many times as you see appropriate (each pupil should not read an article more than once)

Important Teaching and Observation Points

- Duffy (2007) found that there are some key points to maintaining pupils' engagement in written and illustrative reflection, one of which was "expressed reflection as a core expectation" (Duffy 2007). Reflection is a key element of this activity and it is important that the pupils are aware of its importance and more significantly that reflection is explained to the pupils at the beginning of the activity
- Encourage pupils to include text, pictures, voice recordings and videos in their reflections if they wish to do so. Be clear from the offset that this activity is not a test of their writing skills but an encouragement for them to see the value of reflection and cooperation.
- As the teacher, it is your responsibility to set an exemplary standard for the pupils. The best way to do this is to read an article yourself and participate in the activity as a peer to the pupils. It would be beneficial to comment on every pupil's reflection to show what meaningful engagement can be like.

Resources

- An individual blog for each pupil
- One reading per pupil

Other Reflective Activities using blogs

- Reflect on classroom activities, such as the routine that is enforced in the classroom
- Reflect on the drawing a question and how they could improve their skills for the next question
- Reflect on the teacher's performance and how the pupils feel about the teacher's methods
- Reflect on whether or not the pupils are progressing as they would wish

References

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