

Maximizing the Potential of Journals: A Workshop for Recreation and Leisure Students

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Introduction

Requiring students to write journals as a means of reflection is a popular technique in university recreation and leisure courses, especially those that include a field component or extended outdoor trip experience. However, from the authors' experiences working in the field, through discussions with colleagues, and in reviewing the literature related to journaling, it is clear there are many problems with the use of journals. It seems that too often students are simply handed a journal and asked to write about their field experience with little or no structure provided. Faculty who ask students to write journals often do not provide instruction in effective, creative journaling techniques.

Not surprisingly, given these circumstances, recreation, parks and tourism students echo sentiments of students from other disciplines who had been forced to write in journals. These students report that they feel "journalled to death" (Anderson, 1992, p. 306), that they are "journaling for a grade" (Chandler, 1997, p. 46), and that journals are "a pointless ritual wrapped in meaningless words" (Shor, 1992, p. 83). As such, it appears that student journals often fail to live up to their potential in helping to facilitate reflection, which has been noted as a crucial link between theory and practice (Priest & Gass, 1997; Bennion & Olsen, 2002)

Although studies have investigated the scope and potential of journal writing in many university courses in the fields of literature (Cole, 1994), psychology (Hettich, 1990), and business (Johnson & Baker, 1995), little research on journal writing in recreation and leisure programs has been completed (Bennion & Olsen, 2002). Furthermore, very little is understood about whether students can be taught to journal. Could some of the aforementioned problems be alleviated if students were given more direction and training in journaling?

Workshop Description

With a goal of helping students have more positive journaling experiences, the authors have developed a journaling workshop that is presented to students. The

workshop begins by the facilitator providing students with a small piece of paper on which to write down the things they dislike about journaling. Selected responses were shared with the larger group of students and the pieces of paper are collected and burned. The resulting ashes are combined with an egg yolk in order to create paint that is used to put closure on the workshop.

Having shared student concerns and dislikes about journaling, the purpose and description of the three objectives of the workshop are introduced. Specifically, upon completion of the workshop, participants will be able to demonstrate an:

1. Ability to write entries related to specific areas of content;
2. Understanding of Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Thinking (Bloom, 1956) and how it applies to their journal writing; and,
3. Understanding of the numerous types of creative journal entries that exist.

The first objective of the workshop is to ensure that students understand the numerous types of entries that exist in journal writing. The authors identified this objective as a result of lived experience with evaluating journals and noting that many entries were very similar in terms of the type of material that was written. Next, eight different types of journal entries and examples of each type of entry are provided. The types of entries and examples that are provided are found in Table 1. By having a variety of entries in their 'journal writing box,' it is hoped students will frequently change styles to avoid boredom and repetition.

The second objective of the workshop is to introduce students to Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Thinking and provide examples of journal entries at each level of the Taxonomy. The levels are 1) knowledge (ability to recall facts, concepts or principles), 2) comprehension (ability to interpret information), 3) application (ability to apply previously gained knowledge), 4) analysis (ability to break material down), 5) synthesis (ability to analyze parts and put them together to form a new whole), and 6) evaluation (ability to make judgments). This objective was identified as a result of observations that most student journal entries from field courses seem to be at the 'knowledge' and 'comprehension' levels with few entries appearing at the 'synthesis' and 'evaluation' levels.

The authors deliberated and debated over which cognitive model to use in the workshop to teach students about higher levels of thinking. Indeed, many other models could be used, including Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993), the ICE Approach to Assessment and Learning (Young & Wilson, 2000), and Cole's Taxonomy of Student Journal Entries (Cole, 1994). However, for our purposes, Bloom's Taxonomy is used because it is a fairly straight forward evaluative tool and it has been used in other journal writing research (Hettich, 1990).

TABLE 1

Types and Examples of Entries Presented in Journaling Workshop

Type of Entry	Sample entry
Personal reflection and self discovery	"Why am I so excited about the solo? I think I'm looking forward to being totally independent. This search for independence seems strange. I don't understand it but feel a need to escape the support I need from others. I am very social and always try to support others. Why? I need to prove to myself that I can do it on my own. Who knows...maybe I'll just sit under a tree, get really cold, and feel lonely."
Group dynamics	"I know that each of us in the group will have preconceived ideas about each other based on things we've heard from others. I think that it will be very important for each of us to forget these ideas and get to know each other in the group for ourselves. This is our chance to drop expectations from the classroom and just be ourselves with each other."
Professional development	"Today I learned the retraced figure 8, the Munter's hitch, and the clove hitch. I know I'll need those for my job at camp this summer."
Sense of place/ Connection to place	"I had a truly incredible day today. We walked to beach and were getting wood together for a fire when we saw a whale close to shore. We watched it for a while and figured out that they were grey whales - a mom and baby whale. Learned that they travel between Baja and Alaska (calving in Alaska). Saw all kinds of behaviours such as spyhopping, sounding, and spouting."
Transfer of academic theory to field course	"I think that our group is in the 'storming' stage of Tuckman's model. We argued over which campsite to choose and it took way too long."
Transfer of field course to academic theory	"We had a talk from an ecotourist whale watching outfitter today and a tour on the ocean. Now I could go on, but after seeing 'ecotourism' in practice today and doing all those readings for class, I've made up my mind. I believe that ecotourists are those tourists who have the intent of learning about a scarce resource by visiting and/or recreating in it. It seems to me that ecotourism does have tremendous impact that can almost be more devastating than traditional tourism because it can be so sneaky."
Factual information	Date, location, weather, group members, length of travel, flora/fauna seen, events, etc.

The third objective of the workshop is to encourage students to write more creatively in their journals. This objective was identified because we had noticed that

many student journal entries are written in plain text, with little use of colour or visual additions to the entries. Furthermore, in the past, many students have indicated that they have felt 'burnt-out' from journaling, a feeling that has been noted by other researchers who have investigated student perceptions of journal writing (Anderson, 1992). With a view to encouraging students to feel more engaged with their writing and creative in their entries, students are provided with numerous examples and illustrations of creative journal entries. A selected sample of the creative techniques includes making visual entries, billboards, polar passages, marginal notes, annotations, acronyms, concept maps, and labels. Students are encouraged to include maps, drawings, letters and other artifacts from their field trip. While certainly not exhaustive, this list of creative journal entries was 'borrowed' from numerous sources, including Raffan & Barrett (1989), Scheider (1994), Walden (1995), and Janesick (1998). Students are also encouraged to use pencil crayons, paint, crayons, tape, and glue to enhance their journal entries.

To conclude the workshop, participants are given an opportunity to write a journal entry that reflects what they learned in the workshop. They are asked to write one journal entry by explicitly choosing one type of entry, one level of Bloom's Taxonomy, and one creative technique. The egg paint that was created at the beginning of the workshop from burning their negative sentiments about journaling is available if the students want to paint part of their entry.

In general, students have been very receptive to the workshop. They have indicated that they are interested in learning more about journaling and this workshop seems to satiate their initial needs (Dyment & O'Connell, in press). Clearly, if recreation and leisure professors are going to expect that students use journals, then it is imperative that instructors guide our students to maximize the potential of this learning tool. The authors encourage recreation and leisure professors to utilize all or parts of this workshop to enhance the journal writing experience of their students.

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