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4.2.5 Learning Diary

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In the DigiCare project, the learning diary was utilized as a reflective learning method. The learning diary facilitates a reflective process in which students document their learning experiences, discussions, readings, and observations. It offers a space for personal reflections and insights, allowing students to gain a deeper understanding of their own learning journey. Additionally, the learning diary provides valuable insights to teachers, enabling them to gain a better understanding of their students' learning processes and tailor their future learning goals accordingly. In this chapter, we will outline the basic principles of writing a learning diary and provide a list of recommended reading materials for those who wish to delve further into this pedagogical approach.

Reflection is a deliberate and purposeful process that involves contemplating one's actions, whether during performing them or after they have been completed (Schön, 1991). Through reflective thinking, students can analyze and evaluate their learning process (Hoa & Tuan, 2021), which aids in monitoring their growth from being novices to becoming experienced learners on their path towards achieving professional competence (Moon, 2008). Moreover, reflective thinking skills have been found to correlate with student learning outcomes (Ghanizadeh, 2017).



A learning diary serves as a tool for personal reflective thinking for students.

A learning diary serves as a tool for personal reflective thinking for students (Reyes-Santander & Ramos-Rodríguez, 2015). By using a learning diary regularly, students can enhance their reflective skills and cognitive processes (Reyes-Santander & Ramos-Rodríguez, 2015). While reflection typically focuses on learning specific content, a learning diary encompasses more than just reflection. It is at its best when strongly linked to and supporting the learning of content knowledge (Murtonen, 2013).

Before implementing a learning diary, it is essential for the teacher to establish clear objectives, determine appropriate content, and define the assessment criteria aligned with the course objectives and the learning group (Murtonen, 2013). Instructions in the use of a learning diary is necessary to ensure that students understand its purpose (Murtonen, 2013) and how to utilize it as a reflective tool through its various phases (Figure 20) (Gibbs, 1988). While some students may naturally produce detailed descriptions of their learning process, others may require more structured instructions regarding the goals of reflection (Hoa & Tuan, 2021). However, it is important to note that there are no universal guidelines that apply to all situations when it comes to using a learning diary. The task instructions provided by the teacher are crucial for both students and teachers alike. Insufficient guidance or unclear instructions regarding the writing of a learning diary can present challenges, particularly when it comes to assessing and grading the diary entries (Murtonen, 2013).



Figure 20. Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988, modified)

Assessing learning diaries can indeed pose challenges (Murtonen, 2013). However, providing feedback is crucial for the learning process, and it can be divided into two types: summative and formative assessment (Tekian, 2017). Clear instructions for the learning diary enable easier numerical assessment since the connection between reflection and content knowledge becomes clearer (Murtonen, 2013). Nevertheless, unlike formal assessments, a numerical score alone may not provide accurate information on the strengths and weaknesses of a student's reflective abilities (Tekian, 2017). When designing assessment criteria for learning diaries, it is essential to determine the extent to which content knowledge, the ability to articulate one's learning process, and the

development of competence in these areas contribute to the overall assessment. Peer assessment can also be utilized as a method for evaluating learning diaries (Murtonen, 2013.)

In a review examining the level of student reflection in learning diaries used in higher education, it was found that primarily students provided descriptions of events, while only two studies achieved a higher standard of reflection (Dyment & O'Connell, 2011). The level of reflection in learning diaries can be assessed using various assessment tools. Many of these tools encompass assessment areas related to the number of perspectives students consider regarding their actions, the influence of the learning context (e.g., learning environment) on students' thinking and activities, the impact of students' own thoughts and emotions on the situation at hand, the influence of students' prior knowledge and experiences, self-recognition of one's own learning capacity, and reflective deliberation on different alternatives for one's actions in the learning situation (Préfontaine et al., 2022.) Reflection competence can also be categorized into three areas: the knowledge attained by students, discussions on patients' attitudes, and students' ability to apply flexible skills (Hoa & Tuan, 2021).

In the DigiCare project pilots, students were engaged in writing a learning diary while practicing coaching with real clients or relatives outside the classroom, utilizing coaching models such as GROW or 5A (Read more in Chapter 4.1). The students were provided with comprehensive instructions and guidance on the purpose and objectives of writing a learning diary during the orientation class. The guidelines emphasized the importance of reflection on their own activities and experiences rather than simply describing their actions during coaching sessions. Furthermore, students were instructed to maintain patient confidentiality and anonymity in their learning diaries.

To facilitate the reflection process, students were given supporting questions and ideas to stimulate and guide their reflection. They were encouraged to reflect on their overall learning process throughout the pilot. In the DigiCare pilot, the learning diaries written by the students were assessed using peer review methods (Read more in Chapter 4.2.6). This involved exchanging and reviewing each other's learning diaries among the participating students. Through this peer review process, students had the opportunity to share their experiences and learn from the experiences of their peers during the coaching pilot.

It is important to note that the use of learning diaries as an assessment method in the study course varied among the partner universities in the DigiCare project. As a result, a common set of evaluation criteria was not established.

Read mor about Learning Diary

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