# Using Blogs As A Tool To
# Facilitate Students' Reflection

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## Abstract

In this age of computer mediated technology, blogs for reflective journal writing have been introduced as an integral component in many courses in universities. In keeping with this trend in using blogs for reflection, first year law undergraduates who are required to take a course in English for Law had to write a reflective journal to allow students to reflect on their learning and record their responses to what they have learnt. This paper was based on an action research study to investigate the extent to which blog writing facilitates students' reflection and the effectiveness of teacher input to enhance their reflection. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to collect data. Two questionnaires were used to collect data on students' response and experience on blog writing to facilitate reflection and effectiveness of teacher input. Blog postings were also collected and analysed for instances of reflection. The findings indicated that blog writing enhances and facilitates students' reflection and that introducing a model of reflection enhanced the quality of reflection in students' entries to a great extent. Blogs have proven to be useful platforms for students to reflect on their learning although students need much guidance on how to better structure their reflections.

**Keywords**: blogs, reflection, model of reflection, teacher input, reflective journal

## Introduction

In recent years, the emergence of computer mediated technology has created new opportunities for language teaching and learning. "The use of computers in the classroom has increased tremendously, and it is quickly becoming one of the learning tools used in language classes." (Nadzrah, 2005).   In this scenario, the blog has emerged as a common computer mediated tool and blogs for journal writing are increasingly being introduced as an integral component of many courses in universities. In fact, Strampel and Oliver (2008, p. 991) assert that "the move to use blogs for journal writing type activities is almost unavoidable with today's technologically-savvy cohort."

A blog is defined as "a web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual." ([http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/b/blog.html](http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/b/blog.html)) while a reflective journal can be described as a document that the learner writes to record the progress of his learning. For the purpose of this study, the terms 'blog' and 'blogging' /e-journals and reflective journal writing will be used interchangeably.

In keeping with the current trends in using blogs for reflection, a study was conducted on ten law undergraduates who are required to take English for Law, a course offered to all first year law undergraduates. The blog was introduced as a platform for students to post their reflective entries since studies also show that students perceive blogging as an interesting and motivating learning environment. (Nadzrah & Kemboja, 2009)

The reflective journal complements the objectives of the course which generally aims to equip students with the skills to read legal texts. Legal texts are demanding in terms of complexity of sentence structure and content and as such, it is useful for students to constantly reflect on and assess their understanding of these texts. Also, the nature of legal cases is that they usually refer to precedents in that practitioners need to reflect on previous cases and decide on the principle to be applied in the present case. Therefore, having the students write their reflections would provide a platform for them to analyse what they have read or learnt better.

Studies conducted also point to the growing popularity of blogs being used as educational tools. Blood (as cited in Nadzrah 2009) observes that "bloggers use this environment for self-expression and empowerment as writing in blogs helps people become more thoughtful and critical in their writing." Moreover, the idea of using blogs is similar to the use of journal writing (Mcleod, 2001 as cited in Lowe, 2004). Therefore,this study was conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of using the blog as a tool in encouraging law students to be reflective in their blog entries.

**Blogs and Blogging**

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) describe a journal as one form of narrative writing often associated with reflective practice and that journal entries can also be reflective assessments of events, where the writer shares questions about these experiences and often shares thoughts with others.

Studies done support the use of reflective journal writing (read blogging) for trainee teachers in their professional development (Vethamani 2006; Yang 2009). In fact, this form of writing has also been advocated in the field of nursing and occupational therapy. Reflective journals were also used in a work integrated learning unit in a business course (Larkin & Beatson, 2010). In these studies, the kind of reflective journal that has been advocated is in the form of e-journals or blogs. This is not surprising as Warschauer and Healey (1998, p.62) state that "the rise of computer-mediated communication and the Internet have reshaped the uses of computer learning at the end of the 20th century."
Further, it was observed in a study done on teacher trainee professional development that the respondents found blogging enjoyable and "useful in their learning process" and that

generally blogging allowed them to "express opinions, share ideas, help them to develop confidence in expressing their own viewpoints, say things they would not have said in class and also ask questions they would not have asked in face to face discussions." (Vethamani, 2006).

Holly and Mcloughlin (1989) and Farrell (2004) support the view that journal writing facilitates reflection. In fact, journal writing is described as a "powerful method for documenting and learning from experience…." (Holly & Mcloughlin, 1989). It needs to be mentioned that the online reflective journal writing allows for a 'real' audience whereas in the conventional journal writing setting, the teacher is the only reader. This is indicated in a paper by Arena & Jefferson (2008) as "blogging lets many more become engaged. Blogging can be a place where we can make connections and dig deeper into how and what we are learning…" It is obvious then that the blog becomes a useful tool for reflection as reflective thinking is "the kind of thinking that consists of a subject turning over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration" (Dewey ,1933). Yang (2009) observes that the participants in his study considered technology (with reference to blogs) a useful platform for reflecting and communicating with each other. A study which focused on using blogs as one element of a learning activity to promote reflection found that by communicating their thoughts in writing with the blogging community, the students found that they were both thinking about and evaluating their own learning. (Strampel & Oliver, 2008). Reflection occurred but mostly at the descriptive level. "Blogs can support self-expression, self-reflection, social interaction, and reflective dialogue on the part of student teachers."(Deng & Yuen, 2009, p. 877). The positive effects of blogging on critical reflection have been reported in a study that explored the application of blogs in student education and noted that the depth and breadth of student reflectivity were enhanced via blogs (Chai & Kim, 2010).

It seems that in encouraging reflection, the students need to be continually engaged. Reflective 'conversations' encourage peer feedback which can benefit students by further encouraging them to reflect and assess their own learning. A 'conventional' journal may be lacking in this respect. Thus, using the blog may help in enhancing students' reflection.

**Models of Reflection**

Reflection increases the value of the learning process and enhances students' ability to handle and process concepts. This lends support to the importance of reflection in the learning process (Ong, 2004). However, Platzer et al (1997) identified that learning through reflection is more effective if there is an understanding of frameworks that encourage a structural process to guide the act of reflection. A preliminary analysis of blog entries by students enrolled in a Computer Applications course showed that the level of reflection did not appear deep. This result is similar to that found by Langer (2002), cited in Chan K.K. & Ridgeway (2006) who opined that guidance on how to write reflectively is necessary. Larkin & Beatson (2010, p.6) observed in their study that most student reflective journal submissions "focused on describing events with little or no analysis." Subsequently, the teaching team agreed that including a more structured

approach by introducing frameworks for students to refer to when writing their reflections would enhance the quality of students' reflection. Gelter (2003) observed that reflection doesn't appear to be a spontaneous everyday activity in our professions or daily life. This suggests that students would need to be provided with some input and guidance on how to write more reflective journal entries.

There are several models of reflection to help students engage in the process of reflection, such as Gibbs' framework for reflection (1998), Kolb's model of reflection and John's structured model of reflection (1994). Although all the models include the essential dimensions of reflection, that is, description, analysis which includes interpretation and evaluation and a plan for action, each of them provides a different way of doing so. Kolb (1984) states that learning takes place in four stages in a cycle and consists of 4 steps. Step 1: Concrete experience, Step 2: Observations and reflections, Step 3: Formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and Step 4: Teaching implications of new concepts in new situations. Gibbs (1988) identified a series of 6 steps, which make up a cycle, to aid reflective practice as follows: Step 1: Description, Step 2: Feelings, Step 3: Evaluation, Step 4: Analysis, Step 5: Conclusion, Step 6: Action plan. Johns' (1994) model is quite structured and is based on five areas, namely description, reflection, influencing factors, alternative strategies and learning. The Royal Melbourne Institute Technology University (RMIT) University in Melbourne, Australia has introduced a model/formula, Formula D-I-E-P, to teach reflection to help out their students in the Student Learning Centre. This 'formula' consists of four steps: describe, interpret, evaluate and plan.Although all the models look different, an analysis of the models shows that there are three elements which are common in all the models: a description of an experience, reacting to the experience and planning for future action.

**Description of Research**

The research questions addressed were:
a. To what extent does blog writing facilitate students' reflection?
b. How effective is teacher input in enhancing their reflection?

**Background to the Study**

ZZZE English for Law is a compulsory course offered to all first year law undergraduates by the General Studies Unit of this university. The course essentially focuses on equipping students with the necessary reading skills required in comprehending legal texts. Apart from this, students are also expected to undertake a project which involves library research and fieldwork and write a reflective journal. The evaluation components of the course comprise a research project, reflective journal, short test and final examination.

The aim of the reflective journal is to allow students to reflect on their learning and record their responses to what they have learnt in class or read. Each student is to submit a total of 4 entries by the end of the semester(14 weeks). Upon examination of the entries submitted for the conventional journal, it was observed that although students did manage

to reflect on their chosen topic/issue, it was done with little interest or enthusiasm. At times there was not much reflection; only a summary or an opinion of what they had read or heard. Some students even resorted to lifting ideas from other sources and including these in their entries. However, a more important underlying reason seems to be that the reflective journal administered in this manner means that the teacher is the only person who reads the entries and responds by writing a comment. There is no real audience. Thus, this conventional mode of reflective journal writing was replaced by the blog in the present study as a tool for students to post their reflective entries.

**Sample**

Participants comprised ten first year law undergraduates from this university and they are enrolled in a compulsory English course during their studies, English for Law ZZZE1162. Two participants were selected from the five classes. They were selected on a voluntary basis since it was assumed that volunteerism will mean a sense of commitment and interest on the part of the participant. Only three participants out of the ten participants had experience in writing in a blog.

**Instruments**

Three instruments were used in this study. The first was a questionnaire comprising statements on students' response and experience in blog writing to facilitate reflection and perception on teacher input (Chan & Ridgway, 2006). The questionnaire was based on a 5-level Likert scale. (Appendix A). Some questions were adapted from Vethamani (2006) who did a study on blogging and trainee teachers' professional development. The second instrument was a questionnaire comprising 'open-ended' questions to obtain students' responses after they had completed their blogging activity (Appendix B). The third instrument was the blog entries made by the ten participants which provided an in-depth analysis of the four stages of reflection as in the D-I-E-P model.

**Data Analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse the data. Students' responses to the first questionnaire (Appendix A) were analyzed quantitatively using frequency count to quantify the data on students' perception of the blogging experience and teacher input.

A qualitative methodology of inquiry and content analysis (Vethamani, 2006; Strampel & Oliver, 2008) was employed to examine the open-ended questionnaire and blog postings respectively. Two forms of content analysis of the postings were carried out for the purposes of the study. First, the entries were analysed for the four stages of reflection using the D-I-E-P Formula/Model by the Royal Melbourne Institute Technology (RMIT) University, Melbourne, Australia. This model was also used as a guide for students to structure their reflections. The researchers selected this model because it is more straightforward as it has fewer number of steps and easier for students to reflect on their experiences. The model consists of four steps: describe, interpret, evaluate and plan.

Also, each step has questions to guide students to come up with a clear and structured explanation of their learning experiences. (Figure1). Second, the entries were also examined to identify issues that the students reflected on regarding their learning experiences.
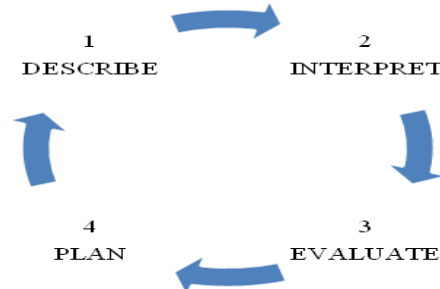


Figure 1:  The D-I-E-P model adapted from RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

**Procedure (Research Action method)**

**Stage 1**
Instructions were given on how to create a blog in Week 3. Students were to reflect on their learning experiences so far and to record their responses in the form of entries in the class blog. The instructor provided some general ideas on what students could reflect on. They were given a week to do.  As it had been only a month since the students had begun the course, it was assumed that they would not have much to reflect on in terms of their learning. Also, although students had access to the Internet and were familiar with blogs, they had practically no experience of contributing personally to any blog. This was with the exception of two students who had their own (personal) blogs.

**Stage 2**
Students were to post a second entry (Week 7) and these were examined for instances of reflection based on the selected D-I-E-P model.

**Stage 3**
Questionnaires were administered to gauge students' perceptions towards the use of blogs to facilitate reflection and teacher input.

**Stage 4(Intervention 1)**
Students were given input and guidance in the form of notes and explanation on what reflection is. A model of reflection and language expressions to be used were introduced. A sample reflective entry based on the model was discussed and students were told that they were to structure their next reflective entry (the 3$^{rd}$ ) in this model.

**Stage 5**
Students posted their third entry (Week 11) and these were again examined for instances of reflection.

**Stage 6(Intervention 2)**
Entry 3 was discussed with the students with reference to the model of reflection discussed with them earlier. They were guided on how to improve on the quality of their reflections and to use this input given during this session when writing their fourth and final reflective entry in week 14 (Appendix C).

**Stage 7**
An 'open-ended' questionnaire (Appendix B) was administered specifically to gauge students' perception of the effectiveness of teacher input and guidance in enhancing their reflections. This would give an indication of the effectiveness of the use of the blog and the input provided by the instructor to enhance reflection. The fourth entry was again examined and analysed for instances of reflection. (in comparison with the other three entries).

**Findings/Discussion**

The findings of the study are presented in three parts. In Part 1 the quantitative information obtained from the questionnaire and participants' written responses (unedited) to selected questions in the questionnaire are discussed. Part II focuses on the content analysis of participants' postings in the blog while Part III will present the findings from the 'open-ended' questionnaire

**Part 1: Students' Response and Experience on Blog Writing (Based on questionnaire in Appendix A)**

**The blogging experience**
It was found that the respondents viewed the blogging activity and experience favourably as they found it comfortable reflecting through a more interesting medium although seven respondents had no previous experience writing in a blog. Shahsavar and Tan (2011) found that students viewed the use of blogs in a learning environment positively due to its ease of use for communicating purpose and conducting online discussions.

Table 1: Students' responses to their blogging experience

|   |   | SDA | DA | N | A | SA | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | This is my first experience writing in a blog. | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 10 |
| 2 | Writing in the class blog is an enjoyable experience. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 10 |
| 3 | I feel comfortable reflecting using the blog. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 10 |
| 4 | Contributing to the blog made the course more interesting. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 2 | 10 |
| 5 | I like reflecting through the blog. | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 10 |
| 6 | I will continue to blog for reflection after the course | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 10 |

\* SDA: Strongly disagree,  DA: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree,  SA: Strongly agree    R: Respondent

**Self-Expression through the Blog**
The findings in Table 2 indicate that the students generally regarded the blog as a space that allows them the freedom to express themselves without feeling embarrassed. As one respondent said,

> *"Blogging helps me share and express on everything I have learnt, **without speaking it loudly in public**."*
>
> *(R8)*

Table 2: Students' responses to self expression through the blog

|   |   | SDA | DA | N | A | SA | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Writing in the blog helps me express myself | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 10 |
| 8 | The blog gives me an opportunity to reflect/say as much as I want. | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 10 |
| 9 | Writing in the blog allowed me to say things I would not have said in class | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 10 |
| 10 | Contributing to the blog enables me to share my ideas | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 10 |

**The Blog as a Tool in Facilitating Reflection**
The following are what respondents wrote in relation to Q11:

> *"Helps me to reflect on issues that have not been discussed enough in class.*
>
> *(R7)*
>
> *"Helps me express my feelings on it."*
>
> *(R5)*
>
> *"Express my ideas better, certain things I have learnt only when I started to write in the blog."*
>
> *(R2)*
>
> *"Able to express myself after class, I mean how I feel about the class and what I have learnt.*
>
> (R1 )

According to Table 3, seven respondents felt that they learn to reflect through reading friends' entries (Q12) and often read their peers' reflections in the class blog (Q13). This indicates that since the blog is an 'open' medium of communication, it provides students with the opportunity to read their friends' reflections and this directly facilitates their own reflection.  This would not have been possible with the conventional mode of journal writing.  Some of the comments from the respondents were:

> *"As friends' entries are different from mine, I will learn to think from a wider perspective."*
>
> *(R8)*

*"Gives me a brief picture of reflections. And from there I was able to do my reflections."*

*(R5)*

*"I can get ideas…."*

*(R6)*

Table 3: Students' responses to using the blog as a tool to facilitate reflection

|    |                                                          | SDA | DA | N | A | SA | Total |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|---|---|----|-------|
| 11 | Writing in the blog enables me to reflect on what I am learning | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 10 |
| 12 | I learn to reflect through reading my friends' entries/reflections | 0 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 10 |
| 13 | I often read my peers' reflections/entries in the blog. | 0 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 10 |

**Students' Perception of Input Provided By Instructor**
The comments from the respondents clearly indicate that they think that input given by the instructor is crucial in assisting them to be more reflective:

*"My instructor really helps me to be reflective."*

*(R7)*

*"Input…………form…….a clear guideline for us to develop our ideas."*

*(R6)*

*"………it helps me to be reflective and I think it's crucial."*

*(R5)*

*"Input is the guidance and instructions given by the instructor."*

*(R4)*

*"It is very helpful and can generate some idea to us. "*

*(R1)*

Table 4: Students' responses to perception of input provided by instructor

|    |                                                          | SDA | DA | N | A | SA | Total |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|---|---|----|-------|
| 14 | Input given by the instructor helps me to be reflective | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 10 |
| 15 | I need more information/instructions on how to reflect | 0 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 10 |

The results above suggest that students would need to be provided with more guidance on how to write more reflective entries.

**Part II: Analysis of blog entries/postings**

To address the second research question, the blog entries were analysed using the D-I-E-P Formula (Figure 1) that was used as input for the respondents during the intervention stage in the research process. This model consists of four steps: describe, interpret, evaluate and plan, hence D-I-E-P.

The analysis is discussed in two stages: the pre-intervention and post-intervention. Entries 1 and 2 were submitted in week 4 and week 7 respectively (pre-intervention) and entries 3 and 4 in week 11 and 14 respectively (post- intervention). The duration of a semester is 14 weeks.

**(Note: In the section below, R refers to Respondent(s), D to Describe, I to Interpret, E to Evaluate and P to Plan. The language in the entries was not edited.)**

**Pre-Intervention Stage**

Entry 1

Entries were rather unstructured and written more like diary entries with very little reflection. They were mostly descriptions of the happenings in campus over the first four weeks. As it had been only a month since the students had begun the course, it was assumed that they would not have much to reflect on in terms of their learning. Although the entries focused on self (since the nature of reflection is that it involves the self and therefore is personal), there were very few learning experiences or none. Still, descriptions of their first impressions of campus life and the law course indicated that the students were making attempts to familiarize themselves with this relatively new medium and were comfortable and gaining confidence with it

Table 5: DIEP presence in respondents' entry 1

| | Entry 1 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | D | I | E | P |
| R1 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R2 | ● | ● | ● | |
| R3 | ● | | | |
| R4 | ● | ● | ● | |
| R5 | ● | | | |
| R6 | ● | | | |
| R7 | ● | ● | | |
| R8 | ● | | | |
| R9 | ● | | | |
| R10 | ● | | ● | |

Table 5 shows the presence of the 4 steps (DIEP) in the respondents' first entry. All the 10 respondents had included step 1 (D). 1 respondent (R1) had all the 4 steps in his entry, although there was no specific learning experience and he still mostly described an event. 2 respondents (R2 & R4) had 3 steps (D-I-E). These exhibited some form of interpretation and evaluation, although this was not fully expanded. R7 had 2 steps (D-I)

and R10 had 2 steps (D-E). This shows that although the students had little reflective ability at this stage, they were able to look back at a certain event or experience and assess these. Only one respondent (R1) had Step 4(P) while the rest did not. R9 gave an opinion on a social issue.

Below is an excerpt from an entry which mostly focuses on description rather than reflection:

> *Actually I want to persue my studies in education but the UPU result after I completed my SPM had changed my vision through of my life. Eventhough I had received so many offer to persue my studies from JPA, Institusi Perguruan and Matriculation, I had decided to choose law as my priority field to pursue my studies.*"

(R3)

Entry 2

Examination of the second entries in particular showed that they were still mostly descriptions of events or experiences in campus with very few instances of reflection. If any, these reflections did not focus on any one specific learning experience. However, there were some attempts to explore and explain events and learn from them

Table 6:  DIEP presence in respondents' entry 2

| | Entry 2 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | D | I | E | P |
| R1 | ● | ● | ● | |
| R2 | ● | ● | | |
| R3 | ● | | | |
| R4 | ● | | ● | |
| R5 | ● | ● | | |
| R6 | ● | ● | | |
| R7 | ● | ● | ● | |
| R8 | ● | | ● | |
| R9 | ● | | | |
| R10 | ● | | ● | |

Table 6 shows the presence of the 4 steps (DIEP) in the respondents' second entry. All the respondents had included step 1(D).  2 respondents (R1 & R7) had 3 steps (D-I-E). R1, however, did not write on any specific learning experience. 6 respondents (R2, R4, R5 & R6, R8 R10) only had 2 steps (D-I/E).  R5 did not focus on self while R6's posting was not properly structured and seemed to be rambling on a number of different issues with no clear focus.  2 respondents (R9 and R3) still had only 1 step (D) which dealt with their own opinion. Below is an excerpt from entry 2: (section in bold indicate attempts to interpret and evaluate)

> *My mid-term examination was just over.* "*I found out that there is much more effort I should put in. I was so frustrated when I am asked to give my*

*own opinion as answers in exams and tutorials while I am an undecided*
*one. I can give my opinion but not the legal opinion like what had been*
*required by the lecturers. I am totally doubt. It is a challenge for me.*
*There is many questions in my mind, wondering how can I completely*
*understand an article well……..An effective time management is necessary*
*for this moment. There is a lot of knowledge I am going to learn, so far I*
*found out that mind-mapping learning skill helped me a lot. It helped me*
*to simplify complicated topics in my studies."*

(R1)

**Post-Intervention Stage**

Entry 3

There is a significant improvement in terms of reflection in at least 7 of the 10 entries analysed. There were more instances of respondents attempting to move from the description stage to the interpretation and evaluation stage and focus on one specific learning experience. 8 respondents had attempted to follow the D-I-E-P model although 3 out of these 8 still appeared to be confused with the interpretation and evaluation stages. This tied in with the post-intervention questionnaire findings which indicated that 6 (out of 10) respondents had referred to the input provided when making their third entry while 5 found it difficult to differentiate between the interpretation and evaluation stages.

Table 7:  DIEP presence in respondents' entry 3

| | Entry 3 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | D | I | E | P |
| R1 | ● | ● | ● | |
| R2 | ● | ● | ● | |
| R3 | ● | ● | | |
| R4 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R5 | ● | ● | | |
| R6 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R7 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R8 | ● | ● | ● | |
| R9 | ● | | | |
| R10 | ● | ● | ● | |

Table 7 shows the presence of the 4 steps (D-I-E-P) in the respondents' third entry. 3 of the respondents (R4, R6 & R7) had all the steps (D-I-E-P) in their entry and focused on one learning experience although one was confused with I and E stages (R6). The planning stage was not elaborated, (only one to two sentences).  4 respondents (R1, R2, R8 & R10) had 3 steps (D-I-E), but some were not properly structured (R2, R6, R10). 2 respondents (R3 & R5) had only 2 steps (D-I) and 1 respondent (R9) still had only one step (D).  This shows that majority of the students were able to reflect better and had a more structured form of writing after being taught the model of reflection during the first intervention.   Therefore, providing students with a structure and a model to follow

promotes better quality reflection and enables them to reflect and develop their writing to a deeper level (Samuels,2007; Ong, 2004).

Below is an excerpt from entry 3 which indicate that entries are becoming more introspective and reflective in nature and also focusing on specific learning experiences.

> *Withtin this week,we will going to finis up our MLS,CONSTI and CONTRACTS lecture. However, my curiosity and uncertainty on all the compulsory subjects make me frustrate and I really unsatisfify with my own performance. I still grapping in a dark tunnel and don't know where is my final station to stop by. I have the feeling that the things happening around me really challenging my own ability. I hate this kind of feeling because I afraid that I can't make it and will be thrown out from the "express train'in my lecture hall. I already realise that I can't just stick to my outdated method to catch out my academic.*

(R6)

Entry 4

There was a definite and significant improvement in the respondents' entries after the second intervention. All 10 entries focused on one specific learning experience/topic and have a proper structure with regards to the model of reflection introduced.

Table 8:  DIEP presence in respondents' entry 4

|  | Entry 4 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | D | I | E | P |
| R1 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R2 | ● | ● | ● | |
| R3 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R4 | ● | ● | ● | |
| R5 | ● | ● | | |
| R6 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R7 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R8 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R9 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| R10 | ● | ● | ● | |

As seen in Table 8, 6 out of 10 respondents (R1, R3, R6, R7, R8&R9) followed the D-I-E-P model closely, this time with a definite plan for improvement included, as compared to the third entry. However 2 respondents (R3 & R9) appeared to be confused between the I and E steps. Still, it was a huge improvement when compared to their Entry 1 and 2. 3 respondents (R2, R4 & R10) had 3 steps (D-I-E) while 1 respondent (R5) only had the two steps (D-E).  It is also significant that 6 respondents (R2, R3, R6, R8, R9 and R10) had even employed the language phrases taught by the researchers in their postings. Below are excerpts from entry 4:

(phrases in bold indicate instances of students using the language phrases given as input. These were not evident even in the third entry. Respondents were also focusing on one specific learning experience)

> ***What I learnt from this situation*** *is I must not settle the problem by my own if I find it very difficult to do that but we must consult with the other person as every person had their own perspective about the way to settle my problems.. Settle the problem by myself cannot settle everything but its only can hurt own feeling time by time...*

(R3)

> ***For me, the most significant experience is*** *... after attending Constitution lectures and tutorials, not forgetting the scolding that we get for every tutorials because we didn't prepare or rather we did prepare but then not as much as what she expected from us, I still love Constitution*

(R2)

> ***This experience make me feel that*** *if I am not meticulous in doing my work , the effect will not only happen on myself but the people that work with me as well. This understanding is essential to help me develops a positive characteristic and personalities.*

(R6)

**Overall Content Analysis of Pre- and Post- Intervention Stages**

Table 9 shows the overall content analysis of the pre- and post-intervention entries for instances of reflection. There is a significant difference and improvement in the entries in relation to the increased incidences of the next three steps of Interpret, Evaluate and Plan in the reflection cycle.. It is thus evident that respondents had moved on from the first level of description to the other key dimensions of reflection: analysis, understanding or new meaning of new knowledge acquired and action. There is an effort to both analyse an event or experience, in terms of thinking about it and explaining it, and also evaluate in terms of what the event or experience means for them and their progress as a learner. In other words, entries were more introspective and thus, more reflective.

Table 9: Content analysis of pre- intervention and post-intervention stages

|  |  | **D** | **I** | **E** | **P** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-Intervention | Entry 1 | 10 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
|  | Entry 2 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| **TOTAL** |  | **20** | **9** | **9** | **1** |
| Post Intervention 1 | Entry 3 | 10 | 9 | 7 | 3 |
| Post Intervention 2 | Entry 4 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 6 |
| **TOTAL** |  | **20** | **19** | **16** | **9** |

**Part III: Students' Response on Effectiveness of Teacher Input (Based on questionnaire in Appendix B)**

There were five parts to the teacher input given to the respondents: a model of reflection, guided steps with questions, language phrases, sample entry and explanation given by the instructor/ researcher. (Stage 4 -see Procedure) Blog entries were also examined to identify issues that respondents focused on as this would ascertain if students reflected on the concepts taught in their law courses.

NOTE: Q refers to Question

**Clarity of Input**
Eight out of ten respondents found the input given was clear (Q1) and all 10 respondents found the explanation given by the researcher (with regards to the input) easy to understand. (Q3) These questions were asked to ensure that all respondents had clearly understood the input and knew how to structure their entries as per the model and language structures introduced.

**Effectiveness of Input (Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7)**
The respondents valued the input provided and found it useful and effective in helping them in writing entry 3 and 4. This is also in tandem with the findings of the first questionnaire in which 7 out of 10 respondents indicated that they needed more information/instructions on how to reflect. This is also evident in the qualitative analysis of the entries in the post- intervention stage where there is a significant improvement in the quality of the entries in terms of reflection, structure and focus (see table 9). The results are also significant as the second questionnaire was administered after respondents had posted their fourth entry. (See also analysis for entry 4 above).

However, 3 respondents indicated that the Interpretation (I) and Evaluation (E) steps in the D-I-E-P model were rather hard to differentiate. This could be because they had **not** referred to the input when making their third entry (Q5). This is indicated by 4 of the respondents because they thought they had understood it (the input) "well enough" (R4) and "because I thought I could remember." (R5) However, it is pertinent to note that **all** 10 respondents had referred to the input given when posting entry 4 where the D-I-E-P structure is evident in almost all the entries.

**Issues that Respondents Reflected on in Their Blog Postings**
There are more instances of respondents reviewing topics being studied in their law course, their experiences of group work, time management, and problem based learning. This serves to show that reflective writing is indeed a useful and meaningful way for law students to constantly reflect and assess their understanding of complex legal texts and cases. In a study done by Chan & Ridgeway (2006), "nearly 80% of students said that writing weekly journals helped them to review the concepts and content taught in class. This provides positive evidence that writing a journal via a blog can contribute to students' reflective thinking."Moreover, writing in a blog further adds to this dimension of reflection as now there is a 'blogging community' (the class) which allows one to

"make connections and dig deeper into how and what (one is) learning." (Arena & Jefferson, 2008).

**Conclusion**

To conclude, data from the first questionnaire indicate that blogs facilitate reflection. Generally, respondents found journal writing through blogging a comfortable and an enjoyable experience and stated that writing in the blog gave them the opportunity to express themselves and share ideas. In addition, it helped them reflect on what they were learning and they also learnt to reflect through reading their friends' entries. Respondents also indicated that they would like some guidance and more information on how to reflect on their friends' postings. The post-intervention entries and second questionnaire findings showed that teacher input and introduction to a model is effective in improving the quality of their reflection. Also, topics reflected on in the entries indicate that reflection via blogs plays a significant role in helping students from the Law faculty review and assess their learning and understanding of the content courses.

It is recommended that students be provided with more opportunities to reflect on. From the analysis, we have managed to observe a change towards the right direction in entry 3 and 4. This was approximately about 10 to 14 weeks since reflection via blogs was first introduced to the students. Reflective capacity has to be learnt and it requires time and effort in order to practice reflective thinking. More samples of reflective entries as guidance could be provided to further clarify the reflective model chosen. Further research could be conducted on the extent to which peer and instructor's feedback facilitate reflection, as this dimension was not looked into in this study. Another recommendation would be to invite lecturers from the Law Faculty to view the blogs postings in order to provide them with an insight into their students' thoughts and learning experiences pertaining to their courses.

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### APPENDIX A

**Using Blogs for Reflection in ZE1162 English for Law.**

**Name:**                                                                                    **Set:**

Instructions: The following statements deal with various aspects of using blogs for reflection in ZE 1162 English for Law. State the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by ticking (/) the appropriate space. Information given will be used strictly for research purposes. Thank you.

|   |   | SDA | DA | N | A | SA | Total |
|---|---|-----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| 1 | This is my first experience writing in a blog. | 3 | | | | 7 | 10 |
| 2 | Writing in the class blog is an enjoyable experience. | | | 1 | 3 | 6 | 10 |
| 3 | I feel comfortable reflecting using the blog. | | | 1 | 4 | 5 | 10 |
| 4 | Contributing to the blog made the course more interesting. | | | 1 | 7 | 2 | 10 |
| 5 | I like reflecting through the blog. | | | 2 | 4 | 4 | 10 |
| 6 | I will continue to blog for reflection after the course | | | 4 | 3 | 3 | 10 |
| 7 | Writing in the blog helps me express myself | | 2 | | 4 | 4 | 10 |
| 8 | The blog gives me an opportunity to reflect/say as much as I want. | 1 | 2 | | 3 | 4 | 10 |
| 9 | Writing in the blog allowed me to say things I would not have said in class | 1 | | 1 | 5 | 3 | 10 |
| 10 | Contributing to the blog enables me to share my ideas | | 1 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 10 |
| 11 | Writing in the blog enables me to reflect on what I am learning | | 1 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 10 |
| 12 | I learn to reflect through reading my friends' entries/reflections | | 2 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 10 |
| 13 | I often read my peers' reflections/entries in the blog. | | 2 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 10 |
| 14 | Input given by the instructor helps me to be reflective | | | 1 | 6 | 3 | 14 |
| 15 | I need more information/instructions on how to reflect | | 1 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 15 |

**\*Please write a comment on your response to these questions**

**APPENDIX B**

**ZE1162  English for Law**
**Using Blogs to Enhance Reflection**

**Comment on the following:**

1. Was the input given clear?

_____

2. Was there any part of the input which you found confusing?

_____

3. Was the explanation given easy to understand?

_____

4. Which part of the input given did you find most helpful in understanding how to reflect? Cross (x) the corresponding box below.

| | |
|---|---|
| Model of reflection | |
| Guided stages | |
| Language items/ phrases | |
| Sample | |
| Explanation provided by the researcher | |

How was it helpful?

_____

5. Did you refer to the handout given when making your third reflection?

_____

6. If your answer to No. 5 is No, indicate why.

_____

7. Did you refer to the handout given when making your 4th reflection?

_____

8. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the input given?

_____

Thank you for your cooperation.

**APPENDIX C**

REFLECTIVE WRITING WORKSHEET

**Describe** objectively what happened.

Answer the question – what did i see and hear?

**Interpret** the events - explain what you saw and heard. (Your new insights; your connections with other learning; your feelings; your hypotheses; your conclusions.)

Answer the question, "What might it mean?" or "What was the reason I did this activity?"

**Evaluate** the effectiveness of what you observed/learned - make judgments clearly connected to observations made.

Evaluation answers the question, "What is my opinion about what I observed or experienced? Why?"

**Plan** how this information will be useful to you.

What are your recommendations? (Be concrete.) Consider: In what ways might this learning experience serve me in my future?

Adapted from:Hampton, M. (2009). Reflective Writing: A basic introduction. Retrieved in July 2009 from www.port.ac.uk/departments/ask/filetodownload.73259, en.pdf

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