Exploration of Self through Journaling

Learning to document my own thinking

via Digital Tools supported by Visual Items

CrCrTh 693

Final Paper

Spring 2016

Prof. Peter Taylor

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Content

"It takes courage...to endure the sharp pains of self-discovery rather than choose to take the dull pain of unconsciousness that would last the rest of our lives."
— Marianne Williamson, A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"

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Introduction

New generation can be more familiar with blogging- journal-like- but people have been journaling ever since writing was invented. My major motivation to journal is to discover where my thinking goes to and what affects my thinking. The common reason of journaling can be a respond to this question: "Who am I?" But, for me, it is not. Because me and my thinking are still evolving. There can't be a constant definition of me. My reason is to document how my thinking has been evolving, which cases affect it, which travels change my perspectives about the world or which people/degree/class inspire me.

Where I have been and where I am going? What makes me: happy, angry, frustrated, anxious, moving forward, etc.? Journaling brings me closer to my own thinking journey. I see when I discover myself and get more clear answers.

I always would like to keep journal but delayed it. This process became a big change for me. Action research class provided me more time to make research, find out similar works, plan my own steps and implement my own action for journaling. New tools I discovered allowed me to focus on my thinking and feelings. They decreased the time needed and archiving. Stored data, texts, notes or pictures, are easily accessible right now. New strategies helped me to record my visions about some general or personal cases. I found out new prompts for self-discovery that enrich my potential of writing. For example, focusing on a specific topic and going deeper about it helped me to discover new insights about myself. Another sample is a regular practicing.

I've been researching about journaling for four months and but practicing for two months. It has almost become a habit of mine. But I still have to practice it regularly and make it a part of my life to gain its full benefits. Journaling became a reform for me and in order to make it sustainable and systematic, I tried to build myself as a constituent. I tried to increase the knowledge and capacity about it. I followed some methods like listening to myself, organizing

my writing and finding out my own concerns to be solved via journaling. Then, I could learn from them and understand my past and current condition. I read many different participatory action learning methods, produced my own timeline, and used online journal app. In order to enhance my confidence as a constituent, I shared my work-in-progress in class and analyzed what went well or not. My long term success will be to articulate my own needs and decide on my own strategy I'll be discovering during journaling. From the beginning to now, I have also practiced cycles and epicycles of action research of Peter Taylor. This paper will be about what I have learnt from my own past and current evaluations of journaling, how I arrived to this point with the help of reflective facilitators and how group works in class and peer comments helped me. Moreover, I will share my own action research model: NWGRPPDE. I know it seems likely weird because to show change is not easy but possible. I did it.

Why journaling?

While working on my capstone of CCT program, I've designed many different trainings, workshop, course and club for students and colleagues. Also, I've experimented various tools and strategies that are supporting critical thinking skills and creativity. Then, I discovered the importance of daily reflection, sharing and writing. This paper will tell you my own progress at journaling and its benefits for self-discovery. Also, I will share my own model of action research that has been designed during my own action time.

This final paper of Action Research class done with Peter Taylor provided me to represent the readers how my own thinking can become more visible by experimenting with new tools. This course became a vehicle to enhance my interest in documenting my inner journey.

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I wanted to pick up the practice of journaling and took an action plan. I preferred to change something in my personal life. I've been expecting to experience and learn from journaling about my own thinking journey. I'd like to be clear about setting goals and keeping my track.

This is important because I can reflect on my thoughts and feelings daily. I believe that some of them will inspire and motivate me. It won't be easy to change habits. In order to encourage my personal development, I had to find strategies and tools that will enable to manage my writing flow regularly and track my progress. My aim is to be able to get a concrete sample that will represent my meaningful product at the end of each specific time period in my life. This product could be an art representation, short movie, photobook, or narrative story. Moreover, this is an action research process and I learnt from my instructor's comment and syllabus that there has to be a situation that I should evaluate how good my idea is and what the effectiveness of my action. So, my product should include some ways of showing others' comments and ideas about my change during the process. The opportunity of this dialogue provide an evaluation of me and my action. I can embed a video that reflects their thoughts, a thinking box that represents their feeling or a storyboard that shows their opinions into my final product in the future.

Why digital tools?

I preferred using digital tools instead of notebooks while journaling. Digital tools have some criteria that affected my decision. These are:

- They are accessible from everywhere. You can reach and write down whenever you want. You don't have to carry your notebook with you everywhere. If you travel very often, you can reach your own previous entries. It is online and in your pocket.

- Digital tools I have used, Day One and HSTRY, are very user-friendly. You can do journaling even when you are in bed or in dark. Even if you feel tired, you will never ignore journaling.

- Digital tools never takes space in your room. Over years, you have to find space to keep all written documents or notebooks if you use notebooks.

- You can categorize your entries with the help of tags. Those could be about relations, politics, nature, culture, sports, art etc.. After writing your entry, you can add some tags. This makes you to find something later easier. Also, you can see the progress or changes in your thinking when you filter the tags because it will call all entries that are tagged by specific keywords.

What I have discovered about my previous unsuccessful attempts to do journaling?

I was thinking that I couldn't do journaling because either I was lazy to keep journaling regularly or delaying it all the time. However, I realized that what I need is the digital tools. Because I have a busy life and I don't have enough time to carry a notebook, open it, write down when ideas are flying in my mind. When I delayed writing, I could forget them as well.

Some cases, people, news, music, or atmosphere can inspire me to create new ideas. If I delay writing, I can't remember sometimes later or miss that inspirational moment to reflect my thinking. Also, embedding that moment's picture or any related visual to tell my story is working better for me. Moreover, some web-based interactive timeline provides me to connect photos on my phone and Facebook/Twitter/Instagram accounts to only one Timeline account to represent my thinking on a historical scan. I could see changes and similarities on my thinking.

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When I shared my idea of journaling online via app or web-based timeline, one of my peer warned me about the possibility of losing data because it is online and can be lost in the future for some reasons. After her warning, I decided to save them as a copy on my desktop as well. Also, my instructor asked me how I can be sure about whether digital tools distract my attention or not. It was like finding a solution for counter-proposition for me. After pushing me to think about it, I discovered about myself that I'm willingness to try to be incredibly disciplined in documenting the milestones in my life because the most precious thing is time. Working online causes distractions, I'm aware of that. Then, I seek some ways to prevent it.

In order to stay focused, I had started to use some tools, MindTools, that showed me how much time I spent on different tasks last year in Metacognition class, CrCrTh655. Also, this year, I found out some tools to understand where my time is going and wasting time on social media. These tool are online too because I have to face my concern to overcome it if I need. I didn't use them because I didn't need them as I did last year. They are for just in case. It's true that I had some break to increase my productivity. Also, listening to inspirational music helped me to focus on. Some Spotify categories, a music app, like "Deep Focus", "Peaceful Piano", "Intense Studying" and "Music for Concentration" helped me to rescue myself from distraction.

Other online tools, that manage your time, track your web activity and provide reports on how much time you spend on certain websites. Then, you can compare your data to your previous ones. Communication, social networking, learning could be options. If you like, you can customize that it can block certain sites, remind you what opportunities you are missing if you spend too much time on a certain one. I believe they can work for people who need them. Finally, I can say that journaling on notebook is still a bigger challenge for me than overcoming online distractions as previous chapter tells my reasons.

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Cycles and Epicycles of Peter Taylor

In this part, I would like to share what I have been done in Action Research Class, CrCrTh693 in CCT program. Prof. Peter Taylor has provided some tools and processes useful in the different aspects of action research on our wikispace.

There were nineteen different tools and processes as our written assignments or participation items in class but I would like to talk about evaluation clock, free writing, strategic personal planning, focused conversation, think-pair-share and QFKA. (I deleted the table.)

I will mention how these tools/processes helped me for different phases of cycles and epicycles of Peter Taylor below.

Evaluation:

With the help of evaluation clock, I try to find out the answer of what I need to change with the help of action research class. Evaluation clock is a tool that address the whole picture of condition and provide you some steps to see components of your plan framework. You can adjust your plan for the next possibilities. Then, you can create your own design that compares different situations and helps your decisions. It includes steps that pose general questions, notes about observations and comparisons, measurement variables, evaluation and methods to think about your action step.

I examined two different paper in class for evaluation clock. Then practiced same steps for my own topic. I thought this tool can be used to evaluate and find what is missing in your process. It is like a rubric to check your action. I discovered the variables of journaling and which tools are used to evaluate the differences before and after journaling via evaluation clock.

You can see my other thoughts of evaluation process below:

- Active reading and participation, dialogue on written assignments and peer comment, group sharing in class helped me.

- I was behind two deadlines because I had some visitors from Turkey and spent all week to visit some independent schools. I asked extended time from the instructor and he said yes. His permission helped me to keep my track.

- I couldn't write down long sentences. Most of them were looking like notes. Then made a decision to do a visual storytelling. Tried to integrate visuals and my ideas/feelings and presented it as a video.

- I tend to write my Daily thinking in Turkish. Feeling deeper in Native language.

- Clarified my thoughts and emotions.

- Getting to know myself on a deeper level.

- Discovered things about my writing inspirations and dispositions.

Constituency building:

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I would like to give an example of how journaling helped me to see what is stuck in my life and what I changed after my action step. The journal prompts provided me to look deep inside myself for discovering my hidden or ignored thoughts. My ideas/feelings about cultural differences, behavioral patterns, environment or teaching practices can be visible firstly for me

and then for others if I share. Some of those were what I haven't previously recognized. I could develop the ability to make it a habit and to see trigger something I think about around me. Another example could be to face your old memories. When you feel stuck in them, you can journal about them later and evaluate your previous actions and reflect on your thoughts for your next steps in life. Old love stories, regrets, or turning points can prompt your writing and show your changes in your thinking. To improve our thinking, reflection and less judgmental atmosphere while writing are vital. Capturing details and going deeper in journaling entries are good examples of reflections of my mental and emotional pictures on paper/screen. Recording my current feelings and experiences provided me the opportunity to reflect immediately and the chance to see changes on my thinking journey over the semester.

In my action research process, I try to build my own constituency. Mostly, free writing and strategic personal planning helped me. Free writing was an exercise that helped me to observe inner thought in my mind, and listen to my heart. While building myself as a constituent, it provided the opportunity to understand my inner inquiry that wouldn't start to be visible if I never practiced. I could discover my delicate feelings because it is private and there is no judgmental factor around you. You are free while writing continuously for a set period of time.

They provided time me to think about my own thinking and made them concrete while writing down them independently. I identified my priorities and to do list. Thinking about why I need to change something in my personal life or how I can do it are my parts of my constituency building.

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Reflection and dialogue:

With the help of focused conversation, we talked about the steps of class and process of action research and shared our ideas about how syllabus works. Former students, Ted, shared his own experiences and helped us to give an idea about how this class will go on. In focused conversation, I paired with someone in class and talked about the first chapter. Mostly, tried to relate them to our own topics. Then, talked about how to store sources, workbook and brainstorm action strategies. This could be an example of my dialogue process I had experienced during the class.

For reflection, I can say think-pair-share can be my example. This tool is important to engage people in class. We assume that everyone takes the course by internal motivation factor but if they don't, this activity helps people to think and share what they've experienced so far with others.

Planning:

With the help of Peter Taylor, I ordered QFKA (questions, finding out, knowledge, action) for my project on fourth week. Starting with questions is important for me because if someone doesn't have any question in his own mind, knowledge could be meaningfulness, time consuming and useless. Questions in mid drives our enthusiasm and inquiry. Then, I could clarify what I need to find out and which tools are need to take action. I discovered two different web-based tool: Day One and HSTRY as tools.

Then, my personal strategic plan was looking like as below. When I had practiced it first time, there were more items but this time I tried to put less items because I would like to focus on each deeper.
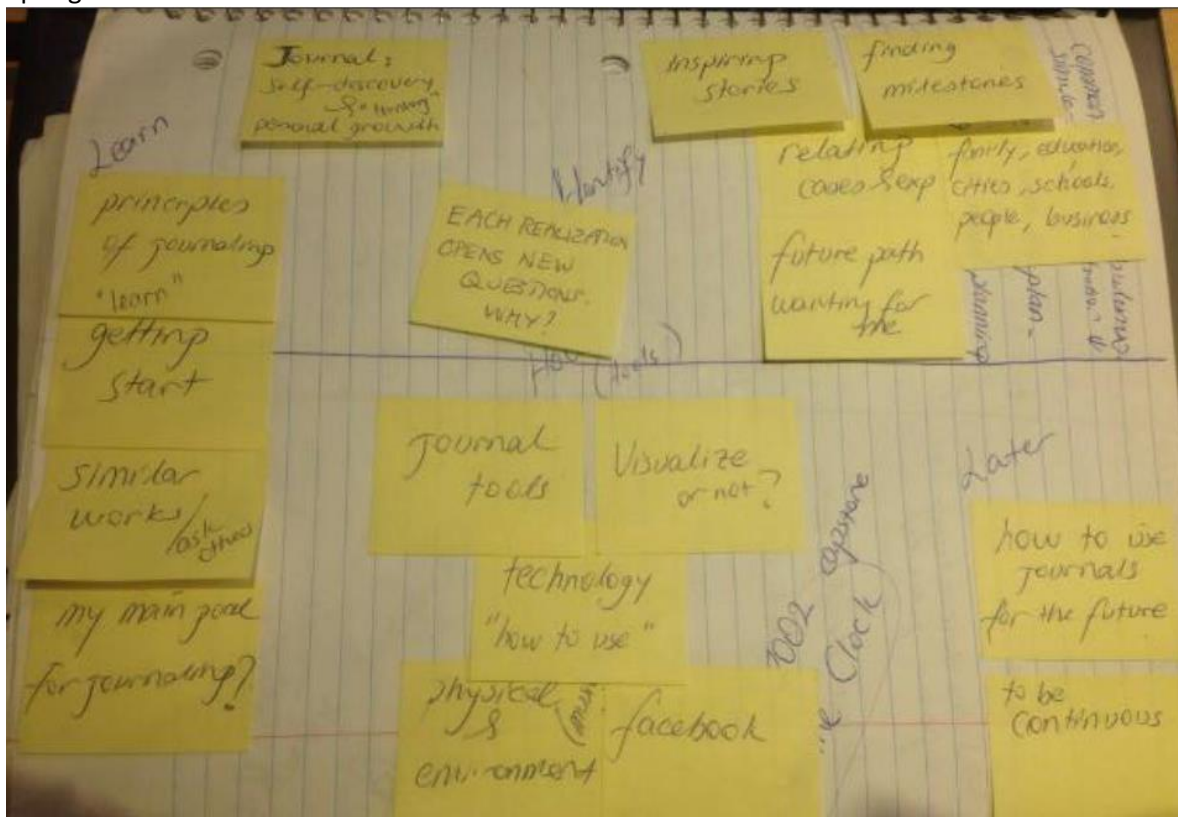
Experience in Practice and Tools

Willingness to journaling and having a comfortable setting are not enough to start. Creating space, time and providing tools and agreeing on those with your company in your life are another important things to think. Also, beginning with identifying your own need and setting your own goals.

When I wouldn't know where to start, I tried to stay positive and preferred to complete these sentences to get me moving.

I'm grateful for…., I like….., I prefer….., I realized that…..etc.

These helped me to see clearly what have happened in my life and allowed me to recognize how I like to feel or how I work better.

Before starting a day, to remind myself being grateful and staying positive was my thing to do. This is affecting my daily mood positively when I looked back at that journal. You see the world with less prejudice that keeps you open to what will be happening around you.

Documenting my thoughts about terrorism, teaching or new travel destinations represent the current Sinem at that time period. I was always caring storing memorable things and recording what I've seen and thought. Now, technology and digital tools provides us great and various options to do what we want. Seeking truth for yourself, seeing the difference between your two separate notes and discovering who you are amazing for me. I know that there is no right or wrong answer. This is my own personal development process. These are what makes me.

After starting journaling, you begin to observe closely around. Normally, I was doing it every time but rarely recording. With the help of journaling tool, DayOne, I had a chance to clarify my desires. When journaling, one word or one thought calls another. These could be your desires or fears. But I explored that my wishes are more than fears. This is happening continuously. If I achieve to keep myself away from distraction, I feel surprised when I look at that my writing that tells many different possibilities, rich views and various perspectives.

I also think that I've been journaling in different ways like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter beside DayOne. I've been using them mostly for different goals consciously. I have done this for three years because others' sharing/reaction/feedback didn't satisfied me. For example, I don't prefer adding same people as friends on different social platform because some of them don't like the art of picture and I don't add them on Instagram because mostly I upload pictures of city view, landscapes and patterns that represent my visual thinking. I put some caption for them that are mostly related to my current feeling or thinking. However, I prefer Twitter for personal and professional interests. I follow people or organizations which can be enlighten my thinking and develop a network. Also, I've been sharing my thoughts about current social,

politics, and economical, educational and other trends. I share personal pictures, memories or videos on Facebook and receive reactions from others. Sometimes, I share inspiring art and music videos.

One of the favorite things I could do with cellphone is to take picture of screen. When I see an event, picture or news on the phone that can be helpful for me to make my job better, I take photo screen picture and keep them in a separate folders depending on their types. I have a huge number of documents. I can use them as my resources later.

Sample prompts and questions:

When I was at 20's,

When I was at high school,

When I was teaching at my first years,

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Sinem's Action Research Model: NWGRPPDE   (Change is not easy.)

Firstly, I would like to define what NWGRPPDE means. It is capitals of Needs, Willingness, Goals, Review, Practice, Pause, Design plan/process and Enjoy learning.

This model is created by steps I have followed for my own action research. I made a decision to share it with you because it worked for me. As you see above, my topic is Exploration of Self through Journaling, Learning to document my own thinking via Digital Tools supported by Visual Items.

I tried to make journaling regularly and this class, readings, tools, process of PT's cycles and epicycles helped me to achieve it. I used all tools and completed all assignments. However, I had some difficulties to fit my own progress into PT's cycles. Instead of following them, I preferred create my own path and discover my own steps to take action and see the result. Then, this model appeared. Some steps are similar to PT's ones but also I added some more steps.

In upcoming paragraphs, I will describe what each steps mean for me.

1) Identify NEEDS:

- Why you are taking this action?

- Say what you are going to do.

- This step needs self-awareness and self-directedness about your needs/interests/desires.

- You can use some mindtools to identify your own weakness and strengthens.

2) WILLINGNESS:

- This is your own journey. Create it.

- Don't delay being yourself.

- Listen to your inner voice.

- Think about how much satisfaction you will have at the end.

- Don't stop your own intellectual development.

3) Set GOALS:

- Exactly what is you want to achieve in your personal/professional life.

- When you will end this process?

- Is action relevant to your need?

- Find satisfying goals.

- Follow your own inquiry.

4) Literature REVIEW:

- Make academic research.

- Ask other people.

- Search other similar works done before.

- Seek alternative ways.

- Discover new tools.

5) PRACTICE/ Implement:

- Use technology if it fits.

- Make it easier.

- Integrate different disciplines.

- Make it fun.

- Experiment on yourself.

6) PAUSE to Think:

- Catch inspirational moments.

- Create inspiring time and spaces

- Think about your own thinking.

- Think about steps you have taken so far.

- Stop implementing for a while.

- Think about missing points.

7) DESIGN your own plan and process:

- Document your thinking journey.

- Take notes during the process.

- Identify what went well or not.

- List to do things.

- Record what you done.

- Reflect on what you have done.

- Create your own steps.

8) ENJOY Learning:

- Continue to learn

- Do it continuously if action needs.

- Enjoy exploration of your own strength to complete something.

- Celebrate learning.

- Be proud of yourself.

- Inspire others to do their best or take their own action.

- Build your own meaning of your life.

Next steps taken

- In order to promote creativity, I could be completing these half sentences: If it was possible, I would….. or If I were….., I would…….

I didn't spend so much time on these because my main/first goal was to think about the past and present mostly and what had happened already in my life. This action research period was not so long in terms of my action.

- I would grade the level of my happiness, sadness or productivity if I were starting to journal now. Sometimes, writing down all feelings could represent us more details but grading could be efficient way to compare my mood later.
  Also this method could allow me to see how long it would take to change my feeling.
- Run a project in which students/adults/immigrant children will document themselves and their own life via digital tools and combine text and visuals. Then, they will share their story/journal with others. It will increase the common language, the interaction between two different cultures or the understanding between people.

Conclusion

Finally, I could write about accomplishments, time wasting activities, long and short term goals, big ideas, grateful notes, dates/places and even other details, readings, movies, events, inspiring people, news, physical activities, travels notes, health, purchases (shopping patterns) and music etc.

For this course, I designed a short part of my progress via HSTRY that is a web-based interactive timeline tool. I embedded some memories, pictures, journal entries and anecdotes that will show how I document my thinking and how many different ways I can share it with others. My long term goal is to design a larger timeline that will show the milestones of my all entire life. Also, I kept journaling on Day One regularly for 40 days and had 71 entries so far.

You can see their screenshot below.

DAY ONE : Journaling App

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HSTRY: Interactive web-based timeline: To share with others

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