TEACHING PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY THROUGH VIDEO DIARIES

Duke Dunkin Biber, University of West Georgia

ABSTRACT

The current generation of college students is often marked by their complete use of and reliance on technology. Students no longer use technology as a supplemental tool but as an integral part of life that impacts their thinking, learning, and behavior. The purpose of this article is to describe video diary techniques that are used in undergraduate psychology courses to promote engagement, learning, and expression. Through emotional disclosure, theory reflection, and real-life application, video diaries provide a method of learning that could be beneficial to the current generation of students. The initial feedback from students supports the importance of such a learning tool to their learning, personal reflection, and workplace applications.

Keywords: technology, psychology, learning, reflection, application

INTRODUCTION

Recent research emphasized the importance of experiential learning through internships, research, service, and leadership to student outcomes and engagement (Coker et al., 2017; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017). Experiential learning, or high-impact practices, can have a positive impact on students’ transition to college, mental health, social connectivity, and learning (Finley & McNair, 2013; Stebleton et al., 2014). High-impact practices with broad and deep learning opportunities are most advantageous to student learning (Coker et al., 2017). Hands-on learning in higher education helps students develop new ways of thinking, learn to view the world through different lenses, and promotes mindful learning (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). Experiential learning can include a wide variety of activities but is often difficult to implement in the field of psychology. Methods of particular interest for psychology students are video diaries and video reflections.

Regular written diaries and journals have been shown to produce positive health benefits through self-disclosure (Buchwald et al., 2009; Dincel & Savur, 2019; Faccio et al., 2019; Muhammad, 2012; Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016; Twomey, 2011). Self-disclosure is the act of emotional expression, which can be done in written form or verbally (Tardy & Dindia, 2018). Through written diaries, individuals experience improvements in awareness, learning, personal and emotional growth, understanding concepts and the structure of theory, and engagement (Abednia et al., 2013; Kelley et al., 2015; Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018). Furthermore, personal reflection helps individuals become more aware of themselves and their environment and acquire cognitive strategies, and it promote overall the metacognitive processes of learning (Abednia et al., 2013; Cashmore et al., 2010; Garza & Smith, 2015; McCrindle & Christensen, 1995).

A NEW GENERATION OF STUDENTS

The current generation of college students includes Generation Y and Generation Z. Generation Y (i.e., Millennials), includes individuals born between 1982 and 1999 and is largely defined by technology and the beginning of the digital age (Biber et al., 2013; McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2014). Generation Y can be described as impatient and having a high adaptability for change, expectations for mentorship and feedback, and a desire work-life balance and to find meaning in work (Adiguzel et al., 2014). Generation Z (i.e., iGeneration) includes individuals born between 2000 and 2010 and...
is marked by their complete use and reliance on technology (Cooper, 2019). This generation does not view technology as a tool but as part of life. This perspective impacts their thinking, learning, and behavior (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2016). Generation Z currently makes up nearly one third of the population in the United States (Levine & Dean, 2012) and can be described as competitive, focused, entrepreneurial, independent, socially conscious, and impatient (Miller, 2018). While some qualities are similar between the two generations, researchers consider each generation of students distinct (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2014). As such, it is important to tailor learning and reflective practices to fit best the needs of each different generation.

Generations Y and Z are currently entering and beginning to complete college education. The transition from high school to college is developmentally challenging and stressful (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). The difficulty of this transition is evidenced by the health decline of Generation Z, with research describing Generation Z as more overweight and sedentary; less spiritual; more depressed, anxious, and stressed; and more likely to attempt and commit suicide than Generation Y (Collins et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2010; Twenge, 2017; Twenge et al., 2018; Weitzman, 2004). These generational characteristics are especially important for students pursuing a degree or profession in the field of psychology because they need to understand the barriers to their success as well as ways to promote well-being for their potential clients.

While expressive and reflective diaries have proven beneficial to mental, social, and physical health and learning (Felten et al., 2006; Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016), the current generation of students may benefit from other modes of experiential learning. With the current generation of college students relying more heavily on technology as part of everyday life, it is crucial to incorporate technology into the learning of psychology in higher education (Lederman, 2012). Furthermore, most college students have complete access to the internet and some form technology, whether it is a computer, laptop, or tablet (Park et al., 2014). One technique that can prove beneficial for applying classroom concepts and learning is video diaries. This type of experiential assignment in higher education may seem like a natural progression from traditional written diaries for emotional disclosure and information processing. With the increase of hybrid and fully online higher education classes, technological- and distance-based learning and interaction is needed (Nguyen, 2015). Furthermore, with the rise of online and distance learning, techniques are needed to overcome the isolation involved with distance learning and facilitate student interaction (Conrad, 2015). This article describes the video diary techniques used in undergraduate psychology courses to promote engagement, learning, and expression.

**VIDEO DIARIES AS A TEACHING METHOD**

A shift in teaching and reflection has been applied in undergraduate psychology courses, from written discussion posts to online, video-based reflections. Students (n = 70) in undergraduate psychology courses at a Southeastern, midsized university participated in video reflections as a source of learning. These video reflections, from 5 to 15 minutes in length, included a prompt (i.e., viewing a video) by a renowned researcher or psychologist on a given psychological topic. Students were then asked to create a video diary or reflection including the criteria described in Table 1. Each week, students recorded a video of themselves responding to each prompt with a 5 to 7-minute recorded video post.

**Table 1. Video Diary Constructs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What have you learned about the field of psychology?</th>
<th>What psychological theory is discussed in this video?</th>
<th>How does this apply to your personal life?</th>
<th>How can you be an agent of change or awareness?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are required to reflect on what they learned and the important statistics or facts that seemed relevant.</td>
<td>Students are asked to pinpoint what psychological theory is discussed in the video. If no theory is explicitly stated, students are asked to reflect on what psychological theory may apply to the topic.</td>
<td>Students are asked to process what they have learned and how the statistics and theory could personally apply to them. Students tend to reflect with openness, honesty, and vulnerability regarding the topic at hand.</td>
<td>Students are asked to brainstorm methods to promote awareness of the psychological topic or issue. They are asked to reflect on how they could facilitate change in their family, community, or city.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This technique of video reflection and diary provided the opportunity for students to present information in a recorded video of themselves multiple times throughout the semester. It also allowed for critical reflection, or the process of exploring awareness of a topic, the assumptions of a certain topic, and how to integrate topical theory into practice (Giles, 2010). Video reflections instill in students the acquisition of knowledge and comprehension, synthesize information and how to evaluate theory and apply such theory and knowledge to their own lives (Brierton et al., 2016). Rather than posting written discussions, students engaged in the video diary assignments with preparation and planning, in-depth analysis, and content, including a minimum of a 5-minute presentation.

At the midpoint and end of the semester, students participated in evaluations of the video diary assignments. At the end of two class periods, they were asked to respond to open-ended statements with written responses discussing their perceptions of the assignments. Students completed these anonymous evaluations using a paper-and-pencil format. A graduate student collected the responses while the instructor was not present in the room during evaluation so as to not coerce students into responding. For example, students responded to:

1) “Describe your overall perceptions towards the video diary assignments.”

2) “Explain any benefits you believe you experienced from the video diaries.”

3) “Explain any drawbacks from having to complete the video diaries.”

Overall, the student evaluations and feedback regarding the video reflection assignments were positive.

After engaging in the video reflections, the students expressed the importance of recognizing and learning about mental and emotional wellness and the theories associated with such information, as well as coping mechanisms to apply in their own lives. The students also indicated how such assignments prepared them to work in a professional setting, like engaging with technology, using critical reasoning, and being able to summarize scientific research in a generalizable and understandable fashion. The students even described how the video diaries and reflections helped them feel more comfortable in seeking counseling for themselves and learning skills to work with future clients. The student feedback is supported by previous research on the impact of video diaries on learning, transformative learning, and integration with real-world application (Roberts, 2011). Students’ perceived benefits of high-impact, experiential learning, like video reflections, is that it improves mental well-being and emotional coping and increases feelings of belonging and the motivation for community engagement (Fink, 2014; Finley & McNair, 2013; Stebleton et al., 2014). However, further research is needed to evaluate this tool as a method of learning for undergraduates in the field of psychology.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

With their reliance on technology, video journals and diaries are one form of applied learning that could benefit the current generation of college students as they learn psychological theory and application and the need to engage in emotional disclosure. Students can reflect on tenets of psychology as well as how to apply psychological theory to their personal college experiences. Students also feel comfortable using technology and may be more likely to emotionally disclose given the private format of a video submission than in open discussions in class (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Initial feedback from student evaluations and peer reviews of this teaching method indicate that it fosters positive experiences and enjoyment and provides valuable introspection along with an extensive understanding of course content and real-world application. Further research is needed to examine the learning outcomes from such modes of teaching and to understand the potential drawbacks of video diaries. For example, students may not have access to the required technology to be able to record themselves. Other students may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed if constantly required to post videos of themselves, whether in private or on a discussion board. Instructors should consider offering alternative modes of submission for students who express anxiety, embarrassment, or difficulty completing this type of assignment.
REFERENCES


Twenge, J. M. (2017). iGen: Why today’s super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy—and completely unprepared for adulthood—and what that means for the rest of us. Simon and Schuster.