

Draw-And-Write Method Deepens Student Engagement and Transforms Student Perspective in Measurable Ways

AN INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Student engagement, motivation, and transformation are hot topics in academia: What is the most effective teaching approach? Does it work? Is it worth the time and effort required to adopt a new method? Is the method multidisciplinary, and if so, how is it applied? According to Rudebock (2016), higher education by its very nature is transformative due to the many opportunities in the university setting that expand knowledge in various disciplines. Helping students learn by finding useful multidisciplinary teaching methods, such as the Draw-and-Write Method, is one step that academics can take to transform the student learning experience and facilitate higher levels of understanding and student transformation.

Cranton (2016), reports that educators, especially those wanting to foster transformative learning, are going outside the cognitive realm by incorporating more creative and innovative learning experiences. Dating back to the 1970's, many studies have advocated and supported the use of art and multisensory approaches to enhance learning. Literature review of articles in education shows that the draw-and-write concept appeared in 1972 when Wetton pioneered the method for health-related research (Angell, Alexander, & Hunt, 2015). The draw-and-write research method has been used in health sciences, social care, and elementary education research for many decades. A key theme identified in some of the draw-and-write literature relates to enabling participation and appropriate for a broad range of ages and abilities (Angell et al., 2015). Additionally, neuroscience researchers suggest that using multiple senses creates memory pathways that help enhance students' comprehension and recall (Doyle & Zakrajsek, 2019). Neuroscience studies show that human senses work in cooperation with each other; "when two or more senses are used together, learning and memory both get a boost" (Doyle & Zakrajsek, 2019). Creative arts and multisensory approaches also teach students how to become present in-the-moment and how to spend time in contemplation and reflection, both of which open and enhance creative processes that help students learn (Rudebock, 2016). The Draw-and-Write Method translates a narrative form into a visual form, creating a transformative multisensory learning process which facilitates shifts in student perspectives and deepens engagement in transformative ways.

The study described here, applies the draw-and-write method to college-level courses, a combination not found in the literature, in the Humanities and Sciences. Dr. Linda Breslin first presented the draw-and-write study in 2018 at the Transformative Learning Conference. The study targeted English Composition I students to examine and measure the effect of drawing on three areas of the students' performance: 1) description changes, 2) sentence structures, and 3) students' attitudes and engagement levels regarding the assignment. Kristen Gregory attended Breslin's session and was truly inspired. Gregory decided to incorporate the Draw-and-Write Method into a preexisting Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) assignment in a freshmen-level Healthy Life Skills course. Gregory teamed with Breslin to design the multidisciplinary study presented at the 2019 Transformative Learning Conference and discussed below.

The purpose of the extended study was to measure the affects of drawing on students' depth of comprehension, focus, engagement, and transformation level by using the multidisciplinary study design.

The study included four sections of Composition I and four sections of Healthy Life Skills students. The English Composition I students were assigned a three-task narrative essay: 1) create an essay draft, 2) draw pictures of the support used in that essay draft, and 3) revise the essay while considering the drawings. The Healthy Life Skills students were assigned a goal-setting project: 1) select a personal goal that can be achieved within sixty days, 2) draw what the goal looks like “now,” before efforts toward the goal are taken, and draw what the goal will look like once achieved after sixty days. Both researchers wanted to measure how drawing affects students’ understanding of assignment objectives, focus on assignment, depth of engagement with the assignment, and attitude toward the assignment. Researchers created a comparative content analysis and reflection questionnaire to use as a qualitative data collection instrument, measuring the effects of the Draw-and-Write Method.

A common, dominant category that emerged in both courses, across all classes, was “future use of the assignment.” Students in each class overwhelmingly agreed that the assignments should be assigned in future classes, proving the effectiveness and validity of the Draw-and-Write Method. The completed draw-and-write assignments created a multi-sensory learning experience that spoke to students’ creative sides. Researchers found that the method produced a creative context that increased students’ level of engagement, focus, and understanding. Student questionnaires indicated that students appreciated the opportunity to “draw their topic into meaning” and appreciated the opportunity to visualize, verbalize, and hear their ideas before writing the ideas.

The mind connects ideas in many ways and we, as educators, are frequently searching for inspirational ways to transform and enhance our classrooms and teaching methods as well as student learning experiences. No matter the level of drawing ability, students enjoyed participating in the pre-writing activity and recommended its continuation in future courses. In many disciplines, the draw-and-write method may be a helpful, transformative action for students that enables deeper connections and understandings about their assignments, disciplines, and selves.

SELECT REFERENCES

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