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Special issue on “Blogging as an Educational Technology”

Blogging is a collaborative tool widely used by the Internet users. Blogging technology allows users to create knowledge by means of collaborating with others. Communication and collaboration is central to the constructivist theory in education. Constructivist theory states that we create and apply new knowledge through collaboration with others. Blogging technology allows users to construct new knowledge as well as apply and analyse existing knowledge by sharing their own knowledge with other users. This issue of the newsletter focuses on looking at the educational opportunities of blogs. The issue starts with an introductory paper on blogs. This paper by Schroeder looks into how blogs can be used as a collaborative tool within the classroom in constructing knowledge. Furthermore the paper also outlines how to start and run a blog.

Fujiuchi in his paper argues that blog is not just a simple tool “but a learning experience”. He looks at how blogs can be used to teach students the skills they need for their academic and professional life. Guthrie and Schutt in their paper look at how blogging can be used to enhance instruction, especially in literary and writing courses. They look at the possibilities of using blogs for collaborative writing as well as annotations. Davis in her paper shares a project where fifth grade elementary school students who used blogs to communicate with other educational bloggers. In her paper she looks at how blogs were used in cooperative learning and how they increased social, academic, and technological participation.

The next paper looks at how blogs contribute towards the development of communities of practice. Ruth in her paper argues that by sharing knowledge openly through blogs individuals move from “periphery to a central position” in the quest for knowledge. She looks at the importance of blogging as a reflective process as an educational tool using examples from a project where students journal their learning process. Jinks and Drexler looks at a project third grade students and university students can both mutually benefit from using blogs.

Garcia and Suzuki looks at blogging as means of disclosing knowledge. They state that the reflections within the blogs become public disclosure of knowledge. According to them this disclosure will expand the realm of knowledge as the public will know some hidden knowledge about the individual while the individual will learn some knowledge that he/she was blinded of. However, they cautioned about the privacy and confidentiality of this knowledge as blogs are used within the Internet. The paper by Strobel and Nicolaidou talks about blogs as a substitute to process portfolios where process portfolios are used for self reflection. They provide examples using a project where Wordpress was trialled and positive feedback was received from both students and teachers.

Keegan in her paper outlines two case studies where students used blogs to get support from teachers and peers during there placement. She looks at the potential of blogs in providing psychological and social support while the students are in placed abroad for there placements.

Donovan and Lee looks at the potential of blogs in organisational learning. In their paper they talk about how blogs contribute to make tacit knowledge explicit within organisations and create an environment to “find out what we know”. Finally, Lee in his paper looks at the potential of using podcasting with blogging technology. He looked at an analysis of different tools to find the best mix of podcasting and blogs. This issue of the newsletter covers a variety of aspects of blogging as an educational technology. It provides interesting ideas, theories, conceptions and viewpoints for readers.

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Ready, Set, Start Blogging!

Imagine a classroom where: Students read and write daily journals that will later be transformed into a polished paper published on the Internet. Teachers post the day's activities and assignments for students and parents to view online. Students collaborate on solving a problem or creating a knowledge network. Students maintain journals for easy access, editing, and teacher feedback online instead of paper-based. Students view, listen to, and share videos and podcasts. Students create multimedia portfolios to demonstrate learning. Research notes and links are compiled and shared among an entire school. All of the above examples are just a few examples of how blogs can be used to enhance learning. But why should we use blogs in education?

Possibly the strongest argument for the use of blogs is their constructivist nature. Blogs support constructivist models by offering ways to communicate, organize, reflect, create, and collaborate. Constructivist theorists argue that we learn through others and by applying new knowledge to preexisting knowledge. By including collaboration in the classroom, we can help students question and construct their own knowledge, apply and analyze what they've learned, and build a strong foundation for lifelong learning. The types of learning that result from blogs and their ease of use should endorse their inclusion in the classroom. For instance, blogs can be set up quickly and easily as individual or group blogs, allowing users even more flexibility in how they are used. Blogs eliminate the need to understand complex html code or pay for web space. Blogs offer many attractive templates to choose from which enhance and personalize a student's work. And blogs make accessing and working on your writing convenient, since everything is stored online.

Okay, so blogging supports constructivist learning, is easy, and convenient. But for someone who has never used a blog, it would be helpful to also understand what a blog is and how to use one. The word "blog" is a blended word, derived from both "web" and "log." Sometimes blogs will be referred to as weblogs. "Blogging" refers to the act of writing to or interacting with a blog. And of course, one who blogs is a "blogger." Then, there is a new word called "blogcasting," which refers to putting a video- or podcast on a blog, but I'm not sure about this. When researching the history of blogs, I ran across the word "bloggerish," which I suppose must be an adjective due to the "ish" ending. (Please understand that I am also an English major). Add to this fascinating lexicon the word "blogquest" which is a way one can use blogs in WebQuests and you'll get the feeling that blogs are taking over. Actually, that might be the case, as blogs are now an intrinsic element of many websites. But that's enough about the various words. Now you need to know something about the software.

To create a blog you need a computer and Internet connection. For a starter blog, blogger.com is a good choice, as it is easy to use and yes, free. Simply go to <http://blogger.com>, set up an account and start blogging. You can set up a group blog, insert images to your blog posts, change or adapt your template, and as you become more experienced, insert html code to customize your page even further. Some other blogging sites are listed at the end of this article.

So, now you have a blog set up and know how to use it. How will you know when and how to use blogs? In most classrooms, blogs are appropriate if you want your students to read, write, or collaborate. It's really that simple. The subject areas of language arts, history, and speech communication most naturally benefit from blogs. Think of the blog as the technology tool and then include it in your instructional strategies.

For instance, do you want your students to solve a problem? Then, you might set up a group blog or several group blogs, assign your groups a problem, and have them use the blog to record their discussions, findings, and progress. At the end of the lesson, you might want them to synthesize their writings, and publish a final paper to their blog, responding to comments from other students. A final piece to this lesson might be a group presentation of the solution (or not) either through a podcast or live discussion.

Do you want your students to write a critical essay, short story, or collection of poems? Use blogs. Not only will students appreciate not having to keep track of and edit a hard copy, but will look forward to viewing teacher and student feedback to their writings. An entire semester's worth of writing can be accessed, organized, and revised for a final paper, for instance, which can be submitted for publication to a school newsletter, newspaper, or other resource.

Don't have web space on your school server? No problem once you set up your blog. You can post daily blogs to students and parents about homework assignments, daily activities, or just comments on the day. Parents will not only appreciate the time and effort you've spent on writing about your day, but will also be able to easily post comments for you to read at your convenience.

Once you understand how blogs can be used in different instructional settings, you will instinctively turn to them to enhance learning. As with all new technologies, you need to step outside of your comfort zone and be willing to make mistakes. Start small, with a few projects using blogs and then experiment and branch out a bit. I think you will find that your students will appreciate your extra efforts with technology and will support you in this process. So start blogging. Now.

Blogging sites

Blogger.com (<http://blogger.com>) - One of the first (and still very good) free blogging service where you can create individual or group blogs.

ELGG.net (<http://elgg.net/index.php>) - Another free blogging service that offers space to upload files and other enhanced services, such as RSS feeds.

WordPress (<http://wordpress.com/>) - Another free and easy to use blogging software.

Edublogs (<http://edublogs.org/>) - Blogging software for educators and students. Offers private blogs for students and also includes wikis.

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/>) - Sort of a photoblog, with ways to upload images and share with groups.

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The Human-Powered Blog

Introduction

The blog itself is a tool, a simple online web application that creates dynamic databases driven websites, with reverse chronological content (journal style), automatic archival of all content, and allows various ways to link to the content (i.e. RSS feeds, trackbacks, etc.) In the end, blogs are human-powered, taking on the personality and creativity of the blogger(s) that provide content for each blog. So let's take a look at how the simple tool of the blog can be incorporated as a learning technology.

The Online Journal

First, think back to any occasion where you may have found the journal format to be useful in an academic setting.

- **Writing Exercise:** You may have students keep a *journal* to practice their writing skills on a regular basis. At the end, the *journal* can be turned in, and used as an assessment tool to see the progression of each student's writing skills throughout the semester.
- **Research Tool:** you can assign students to keep a research *journal* to maintain a frequent record of the progress in experiment or project. This can develop a good habit for the student
- **Mentor Communication:** A professor can ask a Ph.D. student to maintain their notes in a *journal* so that they can provide better advisement in the development of a dissertation and thesis. This *journal* can provide a record of not only what the student is currently working on, but the thought process that led the student to the present research.

These are three quick examples of how a journal can be used in an academic setting. Now look through the previous examples, and replace the word *journal* with *blog*. You now have three examples of how you can use a blog in an academic setting, but with a few added benefits:

- **Instant publishing** with a click of the "publish" button.
- **Instant access** to the journal content the moment it is published.
- **Instant feedback** through the built in commenting system.
- **Wider audience** of the online community, or at least to an audience that is allowed access to the blog.

The journal format is widely used in an academic setting, though not always in an obvious way, and can be easily adapted to use a blog instead. Still these suggestions will only provide a way to get people to use the blogs. Next I would like to talk a little about becoming part of the academic blogger community.

First Steps to Scholarly Publishing

Blogs provide a simple venue to allow students to publish. This does not guarantee that the student will publish scholarly level writing, but it does get them into the habit of publishing their ideas. They are also publishing to an informal "peer-review" environment, where the student can receive comments, suggestions, and even some visibility of their ideas among peers. At the same time, students as bloggers can participate in an academic blogosphere (a community of blogs), and contribute their ideas and thoughts to issues involved in their subject areas or future professions. This can lead to developing their own network of professionals that he/she can rely on for future reference in their academic life. Students may even begin to make a name for themselves in their professional community, leading to future opportunities in the long run. Blog etiquette relies heavily on giving credit where credit is due. You will oftentimes see blog posts that include links to the original posts or resources that inspired a post. Although not all students will provide proper citations in their blogs, they are still learning the value of providing and receiving credit for their ideas, and possibly the consequences of not giving credit. Heated online rivalries have resulted when proper credit is not provided. This interaction can help students experience the importance of proper citations in scholarly and professional research, and provide the basic skills that can be applied to professional writing in the future. Finally, a blog can encourage the development of basic research habits. In order to maintain a blog, and provide frequent updates, it is necessary for the blogger to keep looking for topics to write about. This can be topics discussed in class, the headlines from a newspaper, or a quick review of recent band they have seen. What is important is that the blogger must maintain a constant awareness for things to write about. Depending on how we guide these students in their search for these topics, we can help develop the basic foundations that can lead to professional research skills in the future.

Conclusion

What I hope to make others aware of is that we should look away from the blog as just a simple tool. Instead we need to think about how the blogging experience can be applied to teach the skills students will need in their academic and professional future. When you take a step back and look at the process of blogging, and the skills that develop from participating as a blogger in the blogosphere, we can see that blogs are not just a learning tool, but a learning experience. Our role in the end is to help guide them in the use of blogs, and to make students aware of the skills they are learning and how they can be applied to develop higher level skills.

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Integrating Blogging in Writing Courses: Examples and Opportunities for Action

The purpose of this article is to discuss how blogging is integrated in writing courses and provoke reflection as to how you could take similar action in using blogs in your courses. While reviewing the resources provided in this article, use the following canonical questions to direct your thoughts and discussions:

1. What are the possibilities for using blogging to enhance your instruction?
2. Is it likely to create a more authentic and/or appealing learning environment for the learners? Why? How?
3. Could this technology/method help reduce your workload?

Blogging and Writing Courses

A blog is a type of website, which allows users to make postings (i.e. to *blog*) that resemble an online journal or diary. Most blogs make use of text; however, users have the capability to communicate using photographs, audio (podcasting), and videos (vlog). This application, which is very popular among teenagers and young adults, belongs in the family of open source software, i.e. applications which are freely available for public use. But what does a blog have to do with writing courses?

Dr. Jill Walker, Weblogs: Learning to Write in the Network: "Weblogs are good as learning journals ... but all these things could be done in a paper notebook - though the knowledge that other people are (or can be) reading is important. ... What's more important to teach our students is network literacy: writing in a distributed, collaborative environment. ... Bringing network literacy to the classroom means jolting students out of the conventional individualistic, closed writing of essays only ever seen by your professor." (http://huminf.uib.no/~jill/archives/blog_theorising/talk_at_brown.html)

Many students use blogs to keep personal journals and share their thoughts with the world. Building on this trend, faculty are increasingly using blogs as electronic journals. At a minimum, blogs allow students to comment and reflect on assigned readings in a creative and collaborative process. However, the potential benefits of using blogs in the writing classroom can be so much more. The very nature of a blog is its work-in-progress characteristic. Students often struggle with revising their work beyond the first or second read. Blogs provide opportunities for students to experiment with multiple versions of a paper as well as a means to solicit feedback and suggestions from their peers. Additionally, blogs give students an opportunity to see how other students employ writing and editing strategies in their work. A benefit for professors is the ability to maximize feedback. Whether writing a few choice suggestions on how to improve a paper or highlighting select techniques in students' work, blogging offers a means to authentically interact with students.

Faculty can take advantage of the interactive capabilities of blogging to encourage students to discuss, collaborate, and elaborate on posted assignments. Whether you teach on-campus or at a distance, you could guide students to use blogs in group projects and to produce collaborative writing work. The creative nature of online, collaborative work can emphasize the value of authorship and proper citation. Taking pride in their writing, can in turn lead students to genuinely realize the value of writing and the wrongs of plagiarism.

What follows are a few of many examples of the integration of blogging in the writing classroom. Before reviewing these examples, we encourage you to revisit the canonical questions presented in the introduction of this article and use them to guide your reflection.

Examples of Blogs in Rhetoric and Composition

Using blogs to write collaborative novels

Deborah Gussman, Assistant Professor of Literature at Richard Stockton College uses blogs for several of her courses, including her class in rhetoric and composition (<http://caxton.stockton.edu/bookish/>). For example, some of her students used blogs to write *Tripping* and *High Wire*, two novels, as part of their course work. Each chapter of these novels is written by a different person, who is noted by the title of the link along the side. Reflecting many of the advantages of blogging discussed earlier, these novels represent authentic, creative and collaborative blog products. You can view *Tripping* at <http://caxton.stockton.edu/novel/>. *High Wire* is available at <http://caxton.stockton.edu/noveljordan/>

Essays, Annotations and collaboration across classes

Several Literary Research courses at the Richard Stockton College, NJ, have utilized blogs as course websites to allow interactive communication between instructors and students. Furthermore, students used blogs to annotate essays, which were assigned in the courses. An example, available at <http://caxton.stockton.edu/mumbet/>, demonstrates how students were assigned to annotate a specific section of *Slavery in New England*. In a different example, two Literature Research classes, taught by two different professors, collaborated to annotate Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (available at <http://caxton.stockton.edu/log/>).

Collaboration space for rhetoric instructors

The Blogora is an initiative of the Rhetoric Society of America and is hosted by the Computer Writing and Research Lab (CWRL), part of the Division of Rhetoric and Composition at The University of Texas at Austin (<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/>). "The Blogora provides a collaborative space for connecting rhetoric, rhetorical methods and theories, and rhetoricians with public life" (<http://rsa.cwrl.utexas.edu/>). In keeping with the experimental nature of the CWRL, the instructors in the Division of Rhetoric and Writing (DRW) have developed "Blogging Pedagogy." This blog provides a place which allows professors, "... to share their thoughts, successes, failures, and frustrations about teaching," in addition to sharing ideas about assignments and pedagogical issues. Visit Blogging Pedagogy at: <http://pedagogy.cwrl.utexas.edu/>

Starting Your Own Blog

You've seen some examples of how blogs can be used in your classroom, so what are some blogging tools and how do you go about starting your own blog? What are some further ideas about using blogs in writing practice? Perhaps blogs can even be part of the class content! Barclay Barrios (Writing Program, Rutgers University) answers these questions in the "Blogs as Writing Practice" blog. Barrios has collected resources for making blogs and ideas about how to use blogs in composition courses. To access these resources, visit: <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/barrios/blogs/write/index.html>

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Thinking & Writing Wrinkles Bloggers

A group of fifth grade elementary students from J. H. House Elementary School in Conyers, Georgia, who engaged in an educational blogging project titled "Thinking and Writing Wrinkles Bloggers" during the 2003-2004 school year, found that blogging for an authentic audience motivated them to write and write and write some more. The project's goals were to facilitate the process by which ESL (English as a Second Language) students develop their communicative language skills and to provide students of different ethnic backgrounds the opportunity to learn much from each other. My underlying premise was that blogs could be used as an effective tool to foster cooperative learning between native English-speaking students and ESL and provide opportunities for increased social, academic, and technological participation. In addition, I felt that the native English-speaking students could also enhance their language skills and have the opportunity to practice helping others with skills they had already internalized. Finally, I was sure that participation in cooperative learning experiences would improve language achievement and interaction between the two groups of students. Blogging did all that and more!

Students were introduced to blogging through the class blog, "Thinking & Writing Wrinkles." Initially, I posted articles and the students contributed to the class blog through the commenting feature. After a few weeks, each student created their own blog. I shared the project with other educational bloggers, who visited the student blogs, read the posts and, in turn, added their thoughts through the commenting feature. As the students engaged in these discussions, they were really amazed that other people were so interested in what they were writing and learning. The continued dialogue between both students and teachers was incredible. Receiving feedback from others on the comments section of the blog made the students feel valued. When somebody affirmed their thoughts, they were encouraged. The authentic audience motivated the students to believe they had something important to say. They began to show real ownership of the project and they wrote even more.

I used the class blog as a springboard for class discussions. In an excerpt from a post, "Think Possibilities", I encouraged their discussions:

"I have been reading some very interesting posts from some of my blogging friends this week. They make me think. In turn, I will then write on my blog and others begin to think about what I wrote in response to a friend's post. Sometimes I write about something I have read that makes me want to explore and find out even more about what I think and others think. It's a great way to learn - it's real, it's a way to share and grow with others, and it is an exciting way to learn. Now I have to be motivated, I have to work hard, and I have to really think and write about things of interest to me. What's great about it is that I am part of a community that really cares about education. You won't believe what our main focus is in our edublogging community - you guys and all the students from many different states and countries. We view blogs as a place to give you a voice and we want to oversee that process in ways that will make you good thinkers and continue to develop as good citizens of our world. Writing what you think and writing it well can be one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself. You are writing to learn. What's even better is that we can have a lot of fun on the journey."

This type of dialogue, teacher-guidance, problem solving, and peer collaboration enhanced the process of using writing to make meaning. Connections emerged from a variety of sources, and their writing evolved in a way that showed what they knew and how they were thinking.

One of the students in the project could speak no English when the year began. Other ESL students translated what we were doing and what we were talking about. He would share his thoughts with us and a student would help him translate those thoughts to English. He would then blog the translation himself, following our discussions. As the year progressed, he became more and more independent and ended up being one of the "helpers" for other ESL students in the group. A testament to blogging as an effective tool for facilitating language development!

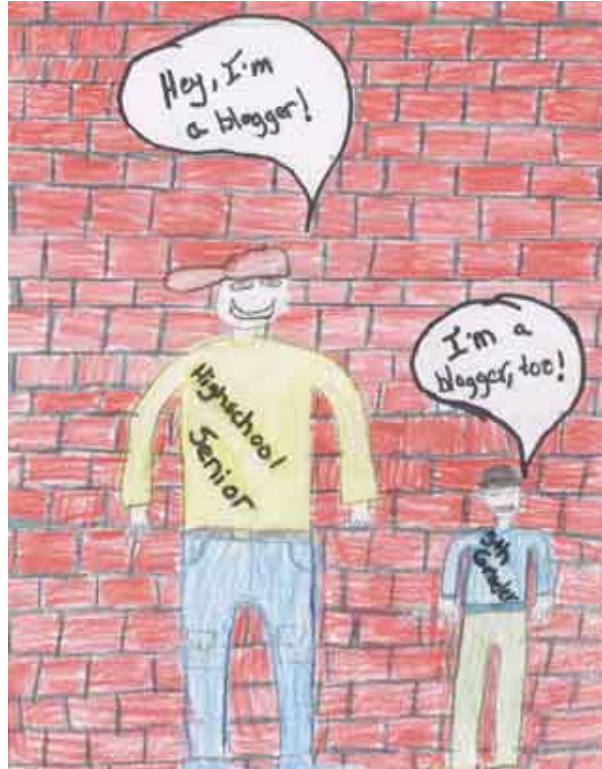
A side blog on idioms was one of the many language experiences built into the project. A place to talk about idioms, their meanings, and their origins--students wrote sentences and stories, and illustrated them using idioms in a fun way. This helped the ESL students internalize those hidden meanings. On the blog students wrote and responded to each other's idioms providing the needed practice in using the English language. They "got a kick" out of learning idioms and vocabulary usage soared! This love of language led to an end of year ABC book project, "A Block on Blogging." Students brainstormed words about blogging, added idioms to the list and created delightful illustrations as you can see from "K" below.

K

K-12, keyboards, knowledge, kids, kind

kick up our heels

K-12 stands for **kids** in kindergarten through 12th grade and we love to blog. People say that young kids can't blog but we disagree. We write good posts with catchy titles and we bump up our writing by using blogs. We type away on the **keyboards** on the computers and gain **knowledge** as we write. We enjoy getting **kind** words from people who have read our blogs. When we get to the lab and find that we have bunches of comments, we celebrate by **kicking up our heels**.



We did “kick up our heels” in joy when the year ended with quite a “connection”! We heard from Pat Street, an author of idioms, who told the students their work was the cat's pajamas!

Links:

Thinking and Writing Wrinkles Blog - <http://itc.blogs.com/wrinkles>

ABC Blook on Blogs - <http://www2.gsu.edu/~coeapd/abc/>

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Bloggging and Journaling are the same, but different

There are many technologies that have been developed that assist in the sharing of information and hence the development of knowledge. Since Tim Berners-Lee wrote the specification for the World Wide Web in 1989 (Berners-Lee, 1990), many different ways of using that specification have developed. Perhaps the use closest to that envisaged by Berners-Lee is the WebLog – a “space for sharing information” (Berners-Lee, 2005).

The weblog, or blog, developed from early efforts to maintain a log of pages visited on the World Wide Web (see for instance Rebecca’s Pocket). Since those early days, tools such as Del.icio.us and CiteULike have developed to maintain these records. Blogs are more often now used to journal activities in the sense that an individual may update their blog or journal with their daily activities and many other aspects of their professional and personal lives as well as research interests and progress. Specific use of blogs can be made within education as a space for reflective journaling of work and learning undertaken and learning processes engaged in.

Communities of practice

One of the potential features of blogs is their contribution to the development of communities of practice. Communities of practice allow individuals to move from the periphery to more central positions within a disciplinary or practice group (Lave and Wenger, 1991). By sharing knowledge openly, blogs and wikis allow newcomers to quickly appropriate information and knowledge central to the group. Blogs in particular allow individuals to negotiate their way into a new field of knowledge, weighing and balancing different viewpoints. The interactive nature of blogs, the ability to cross reference and critically analyse traditional and non-traditional sources of information, allows a multi-disciplinary approach to knowledge.

Currently, in a project designed to examine the use of Wikis in education at Griffith University, Queensland Australia, a course in information and communication technologies (ICTs) requires students to create wiki pages about the core concepts of ICTs, specifically technical aspects, and social and business uses of technologies. In order to facilitate their work (and the assessment process), students are required to journal their learning journey. The requirement allows students to use any tool (eg word processors, blogs, spreadsheets etc) which best suits them.


The wiki being used for the course, TikiWiki, incorporates a blogging tool which students may use for the purpose of their journal. Each journal entry can link to any wiki page they have been working on as well as the reference material gathered from the World Wide Web. Thus students are able to revisit their work and maintain ownership of the pages and the information contained therein whilst sharing that information with the community of students in the course.


The course, Information Communication Technologies takes an inter- and multi-disciplinary approach to developing students’ understanding of the core issues at stake in the information age. Students not only deal with concepts about the technologies and their uses, but are able to reflect and present their viewpoints in the blogs beside factual information created in the wiki pages. Students of different nationalities are also able to connect the Australian-centric course content to issues arising in their own countries.

Use of blogs

In order to facilitate student understanding of how the blogs work, a number of teaching and related blogs were implemented. One blog, the ‘how to’ blog, contains posts by the instructor which show various techniques that can be used for learning. Figure 1 shows the blog entry which discusses the use of blogs for the Journal assessment item. This post is descriptive of processes and facilitative of student activity. The post was to present the blogs as one of a multitude of forms for a ‘Journal Assessment’ item which required students to keep a log or journal of their activities in the wiki.

USE A BLOG FOR YOUR JOURNAL ASSESSMENT

posted by Alison on Wed 16 of Aug, 2006 [11:14]   

You can post in this or other blogs (depending on their setup) by clicking on the  icon at the top of the blog page. Blogs to which you have permission will appear in a drop down menu at the top of the post page.

You can create a new blog by clicking on the [create new blog link](#) at the [top of this page](#).

When creating your blog, you can limit who can post to the blog (yourself or everyone) and who can comment (everyone or no-one).


For your [journal](#) assessment, I would advise the creation of an individual blog, but to also allow comments.

For each blog post, you can also set it as a private entry. This may be a useful way of tracking what you need to do and links to sources you want to remember (as well as using the bookmarks feature of the wiki).

Comments may be made to individual posts and to the blog as a whole.

Have fun!

@@@@@@@@

[Permalink](#) (referenced by: 0 posts references: 0 posts)  





[add comment](#)

Figure 1 'How to' use a blog for the journal assessment.

Another blog demonstrates the reflective nature of learning and teaching. This journal, maintained and posted to by the instructor only, reflects on issues of using technology in learning. As a blogger of many years, the instructor has appropriated the technology as an everyday part of reflective practice. However, this level of understanding of technology has the effect of forgetting the learning journey. Journaling the process of using the wiki for teaching and learning allows the elaboration of issues of using technology and working with students who have varying experiences.

Figure 2 shows a post which reflected indirectly on the post in Figure 1. The blogging feature in the wiki allows individuals to describe the purpose of the blog in a 'description' field. As a result of the two step process of setting up a blog, some students used the 'description' field as the 'content' of the blog post field. In order to utilise the blog, it must first be created and described. The blogging tool allowed the instructor to reflect on this and to realise the varying levels of information literacy of her students.

REMEMBERING THAT THIS IS LEARNING

posted by [Alison](#)  on Thu 24 of Aug, 2006 [08:40]   


It seems that I have forgotten that not everyone knows what I know. Generally, I'm very careful about presenting information and pitching it at the correct level. However, there is so much that I'm learning about TikiWiki?, that I'm forgetting that not everyone started where I did.

Luckily, the wiki is quite forgiving. It's so easy to fix things, although I am having a bit of a problem with some of the permissions. I want students to be able to navigate through the wiki easily, but I also need to be able to restrict what anyone else can see. I've managed to restrict what people can do, but there seems to be some permissions that are sticky. I don't want the polls visible to anybody, I don't want the last comments visible to anybody, but both of those keep popping up for anonymous views. The shoutbox is working exactly as I want it. You have to be logged in to see it. I've also hidden the blogs. I wonder if I can make just this blog and the 'how to' blog visible.

But yes, there is a lot I've learned. But I started at a fairly high level. The little things that I automatically understand are the things that I have to remember may well be very new to students.

Food for thought.

ETA: I have to change the individual permissions for blogs. I still need to find out if I have to change it after a new blog is created! Any volunteers?

 ETA = Edited to add



[Permalink](#) (referenced by: 0 posts / references: 0 posts) 0 comments [[view comments](#)]  

Figure 2 Reflecting on Learning

Student use of blogs

Students in the course are being provided opportunities to openly discuss their learning and gain feedback from both their peers and instructors. Reflections on both the face-to-face lecture and the collaborative lecture wiki page are possible within individual blogs and the wiki pages. This expands the learning potential within the course to include preparation for the lecture, interaction during the lecture and post lecture reflections. Such skills are becoming necessary within interactive and collaborative environments particularly within user-content-generated web spaces. The collaborative skills being developed provide a basis for both traditional and online interactions within a work environment.

Conclusion

Collaborative patterns of learning and working are becoming essential for individuals who will be working in the information age. Developing skills in these areas requires planning and practice. An instructor can use a blog to reflect upon processes, mistakes as well as triumphs in teaching processes using it as a journal of teaching practice, a journal of the journey of teaching. This provides a model for students and helps to demystify the process of learning. Further, the use of blogs as a journal of a journey of learning can enhance students' engagement in knowledge creation. Blogging allows activities to be recorded by individuals in effect creating a simple list of visited pages and found sources, however journaling, particularly a reflective process of engaging with information provided on visited pages and within found sources provides a more reflective and engaging space for learners building upon the technology of blogging.

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Educational Blogging Creates a Unique Partnership between Third Grade Students and University Students

Virtually all of today's American school-aged children will approach their studies as digital natives (Prensky, 2001). The consumption and manipulation of digital content and communication tools is part of everyday life. Whether it is an MP3 player, a cell phone, or the Internet, students are constantly interacting with the latest technology. Expertise may develop at home or with friends; however, this digital experience provides a foundation for teachers to build upon in a positive way at school. Web blogs (blogs) offer one of a number of digital learning opportunities for students, some of who regularly converse online with people from around the world.

Every technology integrated into the classroom must provide an enhancement or a new opportunity to teach or learn the classroom curriculum (Harris, 1998). In addition, the technology should be integrated with an intentional approach (Jonassen, 1999) to ensure learning will happen.

Blogs in the classroom can serve at least four basic functions: classroom management, collaboration, discussion, and student portfolios (Crie, 2004). Teachers can use the blog as a form of communication with students and parents. The comment feature makes blogging a forum through which students can communicate and collaborate. This can be done from the perspective of the whole-class, within smaller groups or individuals. Students can also use the blog as a means of communicating with children at other schools or even in different countries. The blog can serve as a discussion forum, open to all Internet users, or limited to the students in one class. Individual student blogs provide an ongoing portfolio of that student's work because each entry is dated and placed in chronological order.

The ability to comment on a blog offers the opportunity for others to provide feedback and therefore "scaffolding of new ideas" (Ferdig and Trammell, 2004, p. 1). Blogging can extend students beyond the classroom to the rest of the world by providing a venue to gain perspective from others. These multiple perspectives should offer countless new opportunities to reflect and learn. In addition, students can become subject matter experts through exposure to vast amounts of information, which increases student interest and ownership of learning (Ferdig and Trammel, 2004). There is so much more opportunity for diverse perspectives when the ability to comment is extended to the whole world.

Some teachers, parents and school administrators discourage blogging, concerned that the security of the child is at risk. Sadly, there are instances of adults taking advantage of children using the Internet. With this in mind, many schools prefer to limit access to the blogs or at least limit commenting privileges. Some blogging platforms offer the teacher the ability to approve the comments before the students have access to the content. While this method may place a little more administrative duties on the teacher, the depth and breadth of the comments may make it all worth it.

When teachers understand the educational value and implications of blogs, as well as, the security concerns of blogs, the decision to integrate blogs into the curriculum is natural. During the 2006-2007 school year, students in Mrs. Drexler's third grade classroom will begin to use blogs as part of their social studies curriculum with an additional emphasis on reading and writing.

The third grade students will blog using Class Blogmeister (<http://classblogmeister.com>), which is designed especially for school use. Read-only access will be given to all Internet users. However, the teacher will moderate and approve all comments for the added safety of her students. An additional security feature allows the teacher to limit the use of student names by replacing the full names with initials or simply a first name.

Internet users, including parents, grandparents, teachers, and other students will be encouraged to comment on student blogs. A group of prospective teachers at the University of Florida will be tasked with content-specific commenting on a weekly basis.

The third grade social studies curriculum will be the focus of the blogging project. Indigenous people and exploration of North America will be taught incorporating five strands of the National Social Studies Standards. For each topic, students will be given a specific aspect of a strand to research and ultimately present to the class. Each topic will follow a five-week cycle.

During the first week, students will post their topic while prospective teachers will offer support and ask questions about the assignment. In the second week, the students will write what they already know about the topic using a K-W-L format. The prospective teachers will research age-appropriate websites to serve as a resource to the students. The third grade students will have an opportunity to explore the websites provided and begin to summarize the main ideas. In response, the prospective teachers will offer support, provide new ideas or clarify any misconceptions. Week 4 will be a final post from the student that details their full understanding of their topic followed by any comments, questions or support from the prospective teachers. A class presentation of each students' learning will be the conclusion of the five-week cycle. This five-week cycle will repeat several times throughout the year.

The digital natives who fill our elementary schools, are already immersed in digital content. With this engagement in mind, blogging presents a unique chance for teachers to integrate curriculum with the common tools of a new generation of students.

This partnership between Shorecrest Preparatory School and the University of Florida is a win-win situation. The prospective teachers will engage in practice with communicating with young students and finding age-appropriate web resources, while the third grade students will benefit from the mentor relationship and a deeper understanding of their topic.

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Blogs As Teaching Ethnographies: Blogging Out

Blogs are currently acknowledged in mainstream educational media in USA as a trend for teaching languages, for teacher reflection (Freedman, 2006), a means for student self-disclosure (Harper, 2005), and for collaboration beyond classroom walls (Richardson, 2005). Their public nature is acknowledged (Catalano, 2005) and many caveats intimate institutional retributions and controls. This paper advances theoretical understanding of the nature of blog disclosure and control.

Communication theory offers many explanations for the widespread reach of technology in education; ethnographies are a viable means to inform that knowledge base through research. However cyberspace's infinite reach and nature presents an ongoing regulatory concern for privacy, identity and morality. Appropriateness of disclosed information must be cautiously encountered. Public reflection about teaching poses similar dilemmas. The subjective nature of the disclosure raises questions about its suitability as hard data. Notably, it also challenges teacher omnipotence. Can students witness teachers' vulnerabilities?

Reflections about teaching offer setting and context from which teachers become better teachers (Suzuki, 2004), a locus of advancing knowledge and education in action. In blogs, reflections become public disclosure: they allow the witnessing and modeling of vulnerable self-exploration and responsibility for learning. If teaching is a political act, then blogging reflections about teaching constitutes a source for liberation.

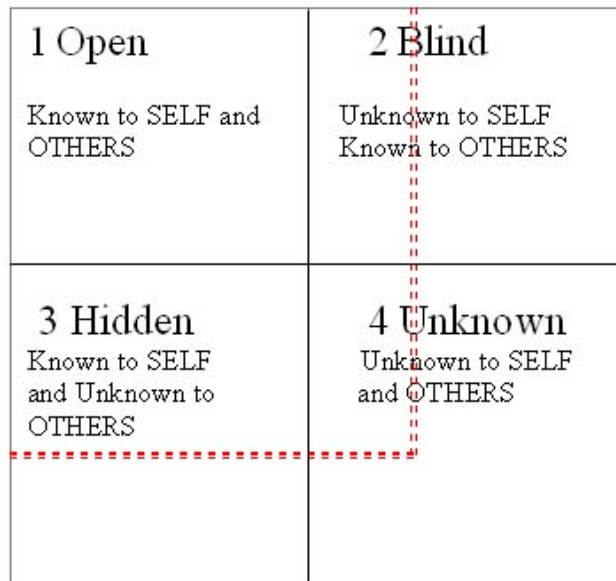
“Blogs both help these ethnographers create the object, and make visible the subjectivity of the researcher. The blog is therefore felt to be a context and a mode of communication, a hybrid tool for making, presenting and reflecting on the object that is furthermore exposed in a new way.” (Beaulieu, 2004: p. 151).

Disclosure as tension between the right to know, freedom of speech and privacy

Suzuki (2004) articulated how blogging's interactive capacity helps expand the writer's awareness and self-knowledge. This paper emphasizes that posts (disclosure) and comments (feedback) have great potential for promoting learning by increasing *public knowledge* about the writer's self-discovery. Understanding disclosure in human interaction and the impact of feedback in communication is useful in this process.

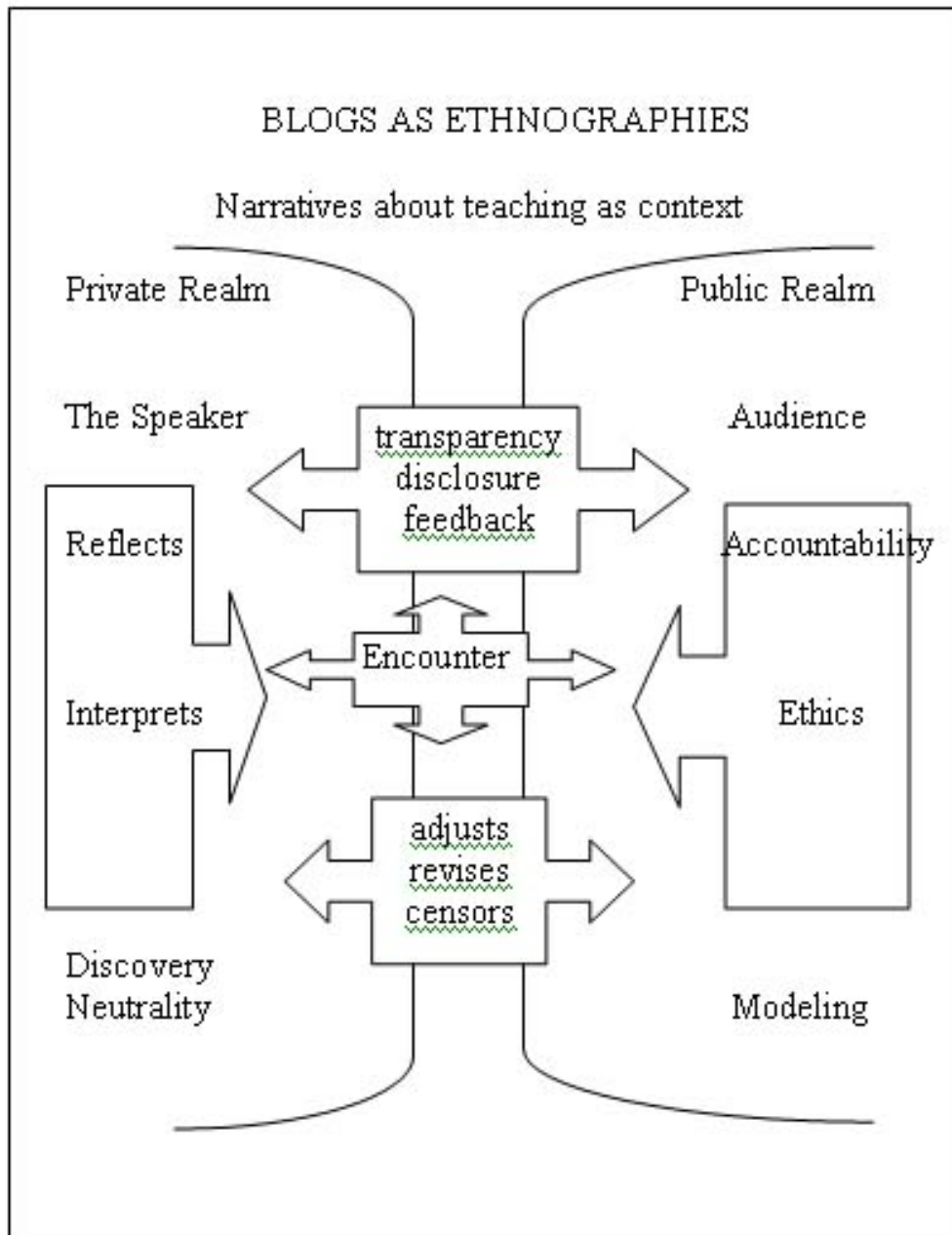
The "Johari window" (Luft, 1970) illustrates the awareness people have about their own behavior, as well as that known to others. Accordingly, human relations offer options among the following four quadrants:

JOHARI WINDOW



This human interaction ‘window’ between private and public knowledge is clearly evident in blogs. The Open quadrant is profitably enlarged: by disclosure to others what is known by the self (the Open and Hidden), and by making the self aware of what is known to others (in the Blind regions) through feedback. As a result of such shared discovery, the unknown becomes known to all. Consequently, teacher blogging reflections are a fertile ethnographic research context.

However, anonymity, privacy and confidentiality issues endure, hence blogger caution in the choice of text used for public disclosure. The filtering process for this linguistic representation leads to censoring and adaptation, captured in writing prior to publication, and/or editing after an encounter with the audience is acknowledged. Nevertheless, an increase in the Known area to both the self and other remains a universal learning goal attainable through disclosure. In reflections about teaching, the writer risks/trades vulnerability and exposure for an expanded awareness. “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly.” (Freire, 1970: p.47) Moreover, such teacher risk-taking and modeling secures an inclusive atmosphere conducive to learning. The resulting dialogue in blogs serves to publicly model empowerment and emancipation.



The ethics of disclosure and interpretation of classroom experiences

While teaching reflections are thus demonstrably fertile research context, ethical requirements must be addressed to strengthen blogging research significance and justify blogging prevalence. Accurate reporting and accountability to the audience are essential. Social sciences offer tools for promoting objectivity by descriptive and tentative accounts of field experiences. In the open context of cyberspace stronger reliance on *internal* censorship is required to defer potential inaccuracy claims. Barr Ebest's (2001) list of ethical considerations serves for responsible reflection in blog entries:

“... *consequences* refers to actions leading to the greatest good for the greatest number; *duty* to expectations and obligations based on the relationships among class members. *Rights*, to respect, privacy, confidentiality and right to refuse protection of their right and modeling how they can protect the rights of others. How *social justice* is furthered for those “least advantaged” because of their race,

class, or gender. And *ethics of care*, how role modeling, respect and collaboration are maintained.” (p.79-81).

Modeling of self regulation in blogs therefore constitutes a further significant pedagogical contribution over-and-above earlier mentioned models of risk-taking and learning. Last but by no means least, consideration of ethical issues serves toward free representation of experience beyond the need for institutional controls. By increasing teachers’ voices and securing public reflection as cultural ways in a global society we can witness benefits from vulnerability which as a civilization we have been unable to promote face to face.

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Blogs as ePortfolios – utilizations of a generic tool for a specific context

The educational challenge

For students to become independent learners, pedagogical strategies to help them engage in self-regulated learning processes, such as goal-setting, reflection and self-evaluation, as well as placing more emphasis on the learning process rather than the final outcome, become crucial.

In a classroom context it is important to help students set their own challenging yet attainable goals (Horner & Shwery, 2002) and monitor their progress in achieving them. Self-reflection is a critical aspect of monitoring (Levin & Camp, 2002) as it “allows students to evaluate their progress toward learning goals (and) alter their approach as needed” (Schunk & Ertmer, 2000, p.645). Consequences of students’ reflections are “deep, lasting learning” (Zubizarreta, 2004, p.7). Students should have control of their own learning (Paris & Ayres, 1999), be encouraged to document their progress towards achieving their goals, self-monitor (Pintrich, 2004) and self-evaluate to better understand their strengths and weaknesses as learners (Ash, 2000).

A pedagogical solution – Portfolios

One pedagogical way teachers can use to help students become independent, self-reflective learners is to have them create their own portfolios. The literature differentiates between two main types of portfolios, showcase (best work) and process (progress) portfolios (Nitko, 2001). A showcase portfolio focuses on final accomplishments, whereas a process portfolio is “a systematic and organized collection of evidence used by the teacher and student to monitor growth of the student’s knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Vavrus 1990, as cited by Cole, Ryan & Kick, 1995, p.9). It “contains work that a learner has collected, reflected, selected, and presented to show growth and change over time” (Barrett, 2005, p.2). A critical component of a process portfolio, is “the learner’s reflection on the individual pieces of work” (Barrett, 2005, p.2).

A technological implementation – blogging software

With advancements in technology, there has been an attempt to replace or complement paper-based portfolios with digital portfolios (Wyatt & Looper, 1999). Digital process portfolios are essentially “reflective tools that demonstrate growth over time” (Abrami & Barrett, 2005) that have the added advantages of an easier access to students’ work by a wider audience, the documentation of the learning process through a significantly easier modification of work and students’ increased motivation through the use of technology (Ash, 2000).

Although there are several commercial (i.e. Webfolio Builder, Keep ToolKit) and free portfolio systems (i.e. Elgg, OSPI) available, projects might have very specific constraints, institutional support for a complete system might be very limited or teachers might not have the necessary professional development. From whatever reasons, low-tech solutions utilizing generic tools might provide viable solutions. A generic tool in this context is defined as a tool that can be utilized in a variety of different ways (i.e. a blogging tool can be utilized as a static web page, a community space, or, as in our case, as a portfolio tool).

The project

Wordpress, a weblog system (www.wordpress.org) was set up and translated into Greek to investigate its potential value as a self-regulated learning support tool for student-created digital portfolios in Language Arts, for a school in Cyprus.

In addition to already existing portfolio-like features like access anytime-anyplace, password-protected personal work spaces, the capability to create, edit, and post work with a text-editor, to upload files (audio, video, and pdf) and to allow for teacher-moderated comments by registered users, the system was extended with additional support structures, such as specific categories for each student’s goal-setting.

We asked students and teachers about input into the process. Overall, both teachers and students had very positive comments about the use of such a tool in elementary education and immediately saw its value. Additionally to be implemented support structures suggested by teachers included templates, guidelines, rubrics and examples for goal setting, reflection, self-evaluation and providing feedback. A common theme was that teachers thought it was extremely important to set specific measurable evaluation criteria in the form of a list to develop students’ self-evaluation skills.

Conclusion

It is expected that the integration of a portfolio tool in the curriculum will lead to increased teachers' and students' reflection on their teaching and learning practices. Teachers' feedback and recommendations for the use of a weblog as a digital process portfolio tool to support self-regulated learning will be used to improve the particular tool. Suggested changes will be incorporated in the tool to initiate its use in upper elementary school classrooms to examine its effect on SRL practices.

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Blogging to enhance the support of international mobility students

This article reports on the initial findings from two case studies where blogs have been used to support international mobility students. Beginning with a brief explanation of the context of the study, we will then describe the implementation of the blogs and the preliminary evaluative feedback which indicates that blogs can be used to enhance the student mobility experience owing to their potential for increased pedagogical and social support.

Context of the study

ESMOS (<http://www.esmos.org>) is a project supported by the European Socrates-Minerva initiative, which aims at improving aspects of student mobility through online support. Within the project six European universities from Austria, Great Britain, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Bulgaria are collaborating to develop, evaluate and model the usage of mobile technologies and online tools to support international mobility students (study exchange and work placement). Through consideration of the issues surrounding the support of mobility students and the data from a comprehensive needs analysis study (N=300), the ESMOS partnership felt that academic, emotional and technical-practical support (Carnwell, 2000). of international mobility students would be enhanced through increased communication with tutors and peers during the phase abroad.

Blogs were trialled with students from Nursing and Social Work degrees in the UK and Austria, with the aim of creating online communities of practice which would enable geographically dispersed students to discuss and reflect on their placement learning experiences. Alongside the increased educational support, it was hypothesised that the peer-to-peer communication could enhance the social support of international mobility students, who have the additional challenges of homesickness and culture shock alongside increased educational demands of integrating theory and practice through their culturally diverse work-based learning activities.

Case Study – Adult Nursing

The first study involved ten nursing students from the University of Salford in the UK. Each student from an action learning set spends ten weeks on a clinical placement as part of their Independent Learning Module. The ethos of the blog was to provide tutor and peer support for learners during the independent learning process. Usually this is achieved through periodic meetings throughout the placement period, but this year two of the students from the group went abroad for their placements, and so the blog was used by all students as a placement journal to keep the group in touch; sharing key observations, feedback and learning experiences.

Before the placements began, the students had several face-to-face meetings to sort out technical issues and establish the rules for the blog. The first two weeks on the blog were spent ‘community building’ (Salmon, 2000). Once they were actually on clinical placement, each student posted one main entry every week on their chosen topic of nursing. Much of the individual learning on chosen topics had relevance to the whole group and this was facilitated by the tutor, who supported the students by weaving comments and encouraging discussion and debate. The blog became a kind of collaborative bibliography; alongside their topic-specific knowledge students would submit references and links with their own annotations, sharing information and resources that would be useful to others in the group.

Case Study – Social Work

The second study involved staff and students on the Social Work degree at FH JOANNEUM, Austria. Their students work at social organisations abroad and need advice and supervision during their placement in order to link theory to practice. The tutor developed a concept for eSupervision using a blog to support the students in their learning processes. The blog was chosen due to the ease with which students could produce online diaries about the experiences abroad. The blog would also facilitate peer-2-peer communication as the students could exchange their experiences through reading and commenting on the contributions of their peers.

Before the students travelled abroad they had several face-to-face meetings to give them a technical introduction to the blog in order to build confidence, to establish deadlines and to define the way to work together. The lecturer offered eight ‘appointments’ in the blog during the phase abroad to discuss the experiences in the different fields and countries. In preparation several questions were defined for the students concerning their learning objectives, their experience with the tutors, the institution, and the potential to train in social field

methods. The students could then ask questions concerning theory and to get some feedback from the lecturer or the group. The lecturer was able to supervise the students learning processes by giving feedback to the written reports, encouraging deeper reflection.

Preliminary results

First results have shown that the e-mentoring and e-supervision of students had nearly the same effect as face to face supervision. Initially, a lot of time and effort was needed to motivate the students to take part, to write their reports, and to write about their experiences. But for those students who went overseas, when confronted with problems in their organization abroad, their use of the blog increased markedly. Interestingly, the use of the blog increased significantly halfway through the placement for all of the students who went abroad. However, the majority of the students from the University of Salford stayed in the UK and their use of the blog remained constant. This indicates that the blogs were a useful psychological and emotional support tool for international mobility students, who experience culture shock and homesickness, and lack the social support networks which benefit their home-based peers.

Conclusions

In both of the studies, tutors and students found the blogs to be of real benefit in terms of pedagogical and conceptual support for their subject specific learning. However, an unanticipated finding was the potential for psychological and social support. The students were able to compare and contrast their own experiences with their peers, collectively discovering the best ways of overcoming obstacles and realising they were not alone. This crucial element of student support is vital for all students, but particularly for students who spend time abroad as part of their course. Although the studies were small in scale, the preliminary findings strongly suggest that due to their highly 'social' nature, blogs can be an excellent tool for international mobility student support.

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Realizing the Potential of Collective Learning through Blogs

Introduction

Interest in blogs in corporate environments is significant. To increase success with business blogs, it is essential to understand what they can contribute to organizational learning. In this article, we describe blogs, their basic character, and provide ideas for enhancing organizational learning.

Blog Basics

Blogs are personal websites with entries posted in reverse chronology. Visitors can usually write comments reacting to the author's content. Links - to other blogs, other web content, to RSS feeds - build a unique network to each blog.

Scoble and Israel (2006) claim blogs are nothing short of a revolution. The blogosphere (the global network of blog postings) inspires some disruptive behaviors alarming to business as usual, including:

Personal Expression Blogs appropriately provide a communication framework for individuals to share opinions and personal pronouncements with no editorial oversight.

Honesty The blogosphere prides itself on being honest and authentic. It is a self-regulating system in which community members confront those who promote false or misleading content.

Dialogue Seeking Blogs provide a forum for reflection and discourse. The act of posting a in-process thoughts invites readers to a conversation.

Immediacy This barrier-free medium eliminates time lags from idea creation to publication.

Blogs are most effective outside of the classroom in informal learning settings, so we intend to answer the questions "Do blogs enable collective and social learning? Do they enhance organizational learning?"

Collective Learning

Three organizational learning concepts illuminate the dynamics of learning within the context of blogs. First, the structures, motivation and social aspects of collective learning form the fabric of knowledge creation and sharing. Next, social cognition is important to the mental models produced within collective learning. Finally, learning as improvisation is natural to operating at the cutting edge, in an unpredictable and complex environment.

Organizational learning is a process of cognitive and behavioral change resulting from creating, distributing and using acquired knowledge in groups. Learning is "collective" when it occurs at the group level, comes from sharing previously unspoken yet understood knowledge, is generative in nature, and is articulated in the interactions developed in relation to work. (Brown and Duguid, 1991)

At the core of learning is making group members' implicit knowledge available by acknowledging work practices; surfacing assumptions; verifying factors, processes, roles and resources that contribute to performance; and assuring this knowledge remains accessible to the group during its continuing activities.

Interpersonal relationships are vital to organizational learning. Knowledge production has implications based on the social systems and structures of organizations. Learning and knowing are collective accomplishments occurring within situations. Araujo (1998) says these activities cannot be decontextualized and that situated learning depends on complex, dynamic and evolving environmental issues inherent in the workplace. Participation, relationships, competence and meaning making are elements that Wenger (1998) advances in support of a social theory of learning.

Work and learning are now less routine and more unsystematic (Tranfield et al, 2000), making the ability to improvise crucial in work teams. Barrett (1998) and Yanow (2001) imply that experts' artistic pursuits encourage assuming alternating roles of leader and follower, soloist and supporter. Some say that improvisation

is a feature of social cognition. (Akgün, Lynn and Byrne, 2003) Collaboration of this sort is inherent in collective learning.

If partnering, sharing know-how, increasing knowledge capital and putting it to use are relevant and valuable to effective organizational learning then learning technologies, like blogs, which support them are equally relevant and valuable.

Blogs In Organizational Learning

Given this understanding of organizational learning, we believe there are a number of untapped ways that blogs can enhance organizational learning, including:

Supporting interpersonal risks and expanding boundaries

Testing understanding, defending positions, negotiating meaning all serve individual and organizational learning by making tacit knowledge explicit. Blogs contribute an environment that permits "productive disagreement" which Amy Edmondson describes as enabling interpersonal risks such as sharing concerns and ideas, reporting errors, expressing disagreement, asking questions, and seeking help. (von Rossum 2006)

Facilitating collaboration toward shared practice

Group blogs form collaborative team workspaces involving tasks like information acquisition, implementation and dissemination, unlearning, thinking, intelligence, improvisation, sensemaking, emotions, and memory. (Akgün, Lynn and Byrne, 2003) Via RSS feeds, we see constantly emerging picture of the way an organization thinks. A substantial gain is building of organizational schema that allows executives to make seemingly intuitive, snap decisions with little data regarding specific situations.

Enabling connection with experts

Blogging and tagging posts, and enabling RSS feeds, we can assume that internal experts will see and comment on our ideas. We can search tags in the system to identify experts in our areas of interest, and contact them. Revealing our ideas advances our thoughts, confirms or rejects our ideas, helping us know whether to continue to pursue them. In the workplace, it can increase network connections, enhancing our reputation and improving our position.

Encouraging alternative perspectives

Blogs present employees with a context to "try on" new personas. These increase our collaborative capacity to take-in different ideas and share them with others. Being able to present ourselves positively in various situations requires projecting ourselves most appropriately to that situation. Self-reflection and mindfulness enhance this adaptability.

Uncovering what we already know

Companies struggle with the "if we only knew what we know" conundrum. Because of their two way nature, blogs can become an omnibus of enterprise information as people in different parts of the company blog and comment on related issues and tag them for retrieval. By revealing connections previously concealed, informational and social networks grow.

Conclusion

Critics might assert that much of what is discussed here isn't new. However, the compelling and pervasive nature of blogs suggests a new ability to bring learning to every person with an internet connection. Corporations seeking to leverage their human resources to the greatest extent can eliminate corporate amnesia, siloed information, and information hoarding by building a learning culture in which blogs can thrive.

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Using blogs and podcasting to facilitate delivery and self/peer evaluation of oral presentation assessments

Introduction

Blogs are continuing to grow in popularity as tools for enhancing learning and teaching, through housing both instructor-generated and learner-generated content. At the same time, podcasting (Curry, 2004), a technology that facilitates the timely delivery of digital audio to a user's computer as it becomes available, is receiving much attention in education spheres, particularly due to the myriad opportunities it presents for mobile learning, given the continually increasing ubiquity and social acceptance of portable MP3 devices.

The author is undertaking a project to investigate the potential for a combination of blogging and podcasting technology to act as a vehicle for delivering university students' oral presentations and facilitating peer and self-evaluation of these presentations for assessment purposes. An assessment strategy and technology model will be proposed and refined through several iterations, that will be evaluated particularly in terms of: (1) efficiency for academics/markers; and (2) effectiveness for both on-campus and off-campus students. The key aspects of the strategy and model that contribute to successful learning experiences will be distilled and examined, with a view to develop reusable learning designs.

Current applications of blogs and podcasting in higher education

Both individual/personal and collaborative blogs have found extensive applications in higher education. Learners benefit especially from creating their own blogs, be they for use as groupware tools, online learning portfolios and reflective journals, or simply as "soapboxes" for self-expression. By contrast, many existing educational uses of podcasting focus solely on disseminating instructional content such as lectures, rather than leveraging the technology's true potential for community-building and learner empowerment.

A number of institutions and projects have sought to find innovative uses for the technology that go beyond the mere recording and distribution of lectures. At Georgia College & State University (2006), various courses, including a number of study abroad courses, have been "iPod-enhanced" since Fall 2002. GC&SU is home to a number of initiatives that attempt to exploit the full potential of MP3 players and podcasting. One such example is the Special Education cohort, in which students are tasked with an assignment to determine the barriers to special needs students receiving the services they require. They visit schools to interview faculty members and administrators, using iPods with microphone attachments. Back on campus, the information collected is shared with other group members and analyzed. Finally, the students summarise their conclusions in podcasts to be shared with the rest of the cohort (Martin, 2005).

In Australia, a study at Charles Sturt University seeks to examine how short, student-produced 3 to 5 minute talkback radio-style podcasts, can be used to address the preconceptions and anxiety that other students bring into the university classroom (Chan & Lee, 2005). The production of podcasts by more experienced or senior students, geared towards less experienced, novice students, in a manner similar to peer teaching and mentoring (Lee, Chan & McLoughlin, 2006), can be a mutually beneficial exercise for both the student-producers and the student-listeners.

Proposed research methodology and technical implementation

Students are often required to deliver oral presentations during their face-to-face classes; this may form part of the assessable component of a course. The author believes that podcast-enhanced blogs can provide a means to extend these activities beyond the confines of the physical classroom, and also to promote inclusion for students located off-campus. This can lead to the hybridization of on- and off-campus cohorts for a true collaborative learning experience that transcends the barriers of time and place. The student presentations can be podcast and subject to peer and self-evaluation, with the standard features of blogs providing the necessary infrastructure for supporting learner interaction and online community building. Most blog server software is RSS-capable and therefore can be easily configured to support podcasting.

The project's methodology involves an action research case study in two cycles or stages. Stage AR-1 will be used to show "proof of concept" through a trial / pilot study involving students in an information technology/management course. Students will be asked to record their presentations in MP3 format for

podcasting, then use a collaborative blog to critically reflect on their work and elicit feedback from classmates. Interested students may optionally explore the possibilities of *vodcasting* (video podcasting) and/or *enhanced podcasting* (podcasts synchronized with images such as PowerPoint slides). Web-based surveys and one-on-one/group interviews will be the primary data collection methods, in addition to content analysis of the blog entries and podcasts.

A prototype technical implementation has already been constructed using the open source, PHP-based content management system, Nucleus CMS (The Nucleus Group, 2005). Postings on a collaborative blog are automatically syndicated via RSS 2.0 (RSS Advisory Board, 2005) as they are added by users, with any MP3 attachments being included in the RSS feed as enclosures, thereby podcasting them. Students can respond to their classmates' podcasts either in audio form (through another podcast), or using a standard text-based blog entry. The system does not require users to have an understanding of the underlying RSS/XML.

The research in AR-1 will follow a reflective pattern, leading to a revised plan, identified by a title and research questions leading to further actions, observation and reflection in the next stage, as suggested by Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) iterative model of the action research process. Stage AR-2 will involve the implementation of the strategies and technology model devised as a result of AR-1, for two subsequent offerings of the course. Data collection will be via web-based surveys, one-on-one and group interviews, discussion forum interaction, e-mail correspondence and lecturers'/markers' field notes. File metadata and server logs on the Nucleus server will also be analyzed to identify system usage patterns. Once again, the content of the blog entries and podcasts will be analyzed.

AR-2 will also see the development of a resource kit incorporating "HOWTO's" relating to podcasting, as well as a set of best practices and guidelines for using podcasting with blogs to facilitate oral assessments. A set of reusable learning designs will be created, formally specified (Oliver et al., 2002) and shared with other educators.

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