Blogs in Education

Shuyan Wang
The University of Southern Mississippi, USA

INTRODUCTION

Blogs have been sprouting like mushrooms after rain in the past few years because of their effectiveness in keeping contact with friends, family, and anybody else who shares interests. Blogs have been used in every field in present society and are becoming the mainstream medium in communication and virtual communities. Politicians and political candidates use blogs to express opinions on political issues. Since the last presidential election, blogs have played a major role in helping candidates conduct outreach and opinion forming. Many famous journalists write their own blogs. Many film stars or personages create their blogs to communicate with their fans or followers. Even soldiers serving in the Iraq war keep blogs to show readers new perspective on the realities of war.

Blogs are increasingly being used in education by researchers, teachers, and students. Most high school students or college students belong to one form a virtual community as they share interests and daily news. Scholars have started blogging in order to reflect on their research. More and more teachers are keeping research blogs or creating course blogs. Students are keeping course blogs or personal blogs.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BLOGS

A blog, the short form of Weblog, is a personal Web site or page in which the owner can write entries to store daily action or reflection. Entries on a blog are normally listed chronologically and previous entries are archived weekly or monthly. Bloggers, individuals who write blogs, can publish text, graphics, audio and video clips as entry contents. Readers can search these entries and/or provide comments or feedback to the entries, which is called blogging.

Blogs were first used as a communication device between computer programmers and technicians to document thoughts and progresses during product building (Bausch, 2004). In December 1997, Jorn Barger started to use the term of Weblog to classify a few sites in which readers can input comments on posted entries. There were only 23 Weblogs in the beginning of 1999. However, after the first build-your-own-Weblog tool, Pitas, was launched in July 1999 and other tools like Blogger and Groksoup were released in August 1999, more people started writing blogs because these services were free and enabled individuals to publish their own Weblogs quickly and easily (Huffaker, 2004). In August 2001, a law professor at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville created a blog, *Instapundit*, which got 10,000 hits each day. In 2002, blogs on business appeared and got up to a million visits a day during the peak events. In the same year, blogs gained an increasing notice and served as a news source. Blogs have been used to discuss Iraq war issues and to promote communications between political candidates and their supporters. More and more educators created their personal blogs and attracted large number of readers. For instance, Semi-Daily Journal was created in February 2002 by J. Bradford DeLong, a professor of economics at the University of California at Berkeley. The average daily hit was 50,000. According to Glenn (2003), Henry Farrell, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Toronto at Scarborough, maintained a directory which lists 93 scholar-bloggers in 2003.

In 2004, blogs played a main role in campaigning for outreach and opinion forming. Both United States Democratic and Republican Parties' conventions credentialed bloggers, and blogs became a standard part of the publicity arsenal (Jensen, 2003). *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* declared "blog" as the word of the year in 2004. Blogs were accepted by the mass media, both as a source of news and opinion and as means of applying political pressure. A blog company, *Technorati*, accounts that 23,000 new Weblogs are created each day. This is also reported as "about one every three seconds" (Kilpatrick, Roth, & Ryan, 2005). The Gartner Group forecasts that blogging will peak in 2007, when the number of writers who maintain a personal Web site reaches 100 million.

Blogs have become increasingly popular among teachers and students at the same time. According to Henning (2003), 51.5% of blogs were developed and maintained by adolescents in 2003. A directory of educational blogs, Rhetorica: Professors who Blog, listed 162 scholar-bloggers as of July 28, 2006 (http://rhetorica.net/professors_who_ blog.htm). Most educational blogs, such as Edublog Insights (http://anne.teachesme.com/) and Weblogg-ed (http://weblogg-ed.com/), are places where educational bloggers reflect on what they are learning and experiencing. In fact, blogs and networks of blogs facilitate development of a community of learners and social interaction. The comments on blog posts can be powerful feedback tools; they offer immediate and detailed responses to the learner's thoughts and ideas.

BLOGS IN EDUCATION

As the Internet has become an important resource for teaching and learning, blogs are very useful teaching and learning tools in that they provide a space for students to reflect and publish their thoughts and understandings (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004). Readers can comment on blogs and have opportunities to provide feedback and new ideas. With hyperlinks, blogs assist students with the ability to interact with peers, experts, professionals, mentors, and others. Blogs provide an opportunity for students with active learning and a comfortable environment to express and convey their ideas, thoughts, and beliefs.

Beise (2006) did a case study where blogs and desktop video were integrated into a course on global information system (IS) management. The students were using the blogs as a means of online journaling, reflection, and interaction with other students. Some of the pedagogical approaches used in her course include (a) student teamwork in developing a Web site that presents research on an assigned region or country, (b) an online discussion on course readings, and (c) a synchronous chat on specific topics. Beise found that the blogs offered the opportunity for her students to discuss organizational, technical, and social issues encountered by businesses and individuals. According to Beise, individual students displayed significant reflection, critical analysis, and articulation of their learning from the course materials.

Richardson (2005) incorporated blogs into his English literature course in a New Jersey high school. He used the blog as an online forum for classroom discussion and found that this activity developed students' critical thinking, writing, and reading comprehension skills. His students created an online reader study guide for bees, using the Weblog format. In two years, the site (Weblogs.hcrhs.k12.nj.us/bees) has had more than 2 million hits. Richardson found that blogs motivated students to become more engaged in reading, think more deeply about the meaning of their writing, and submit higher quality work. According to Richardson (2006), the flexibility of this online tool makes it well suited for K-12 implementation. Teachers can use blogs to post homework assignments, create links, post questions, and generate discussions. Students can post homework, create a portfolio, and archive peer feedback, enabling a virtually paperless classroom. Collaboration is the most compelling aspect of blogs, which allow teachers to expand classroom walls by inviting outside experts, mentors, and observers to participate. For instance, the book's author, Sue Monk Kidd, wrote a 2,300-word response to Richardson's site.

Blogs are also used in research. The National Writing Project (NWP) purchased server space to investigate how the medium facilitates dialogue and sharing of best practices among teachers who teach in writing-intensive classrooms. Students joined in online writing workshops using blogging technology in a local NWP Young Writers' Camps, where teachers modeled this experiment after the NWP's E-Anthology, a Weblog of educators working together to develop and support each other's writing (Kennedy, 2004).

Online comments made in blogs offer the opportunities for learning with students. As in *Edublog Insights*, a Web site designed to reflect, discuss, and explore possibilities for the use of logs in education, Anne Davis (n.d.) states:

Some of our best classroom discussions emerge from comments. We share together. We talk about ones that make us soar, ones that make us pause and rethink, and we just enjoy sharing those delightful morsels of learning that occur. You can construct lessons around them. You get a chance to foster higher level thinking on the blogs. They read a comment. Then they may read a comment that comments on the comment. They get many short quick practices with writing that is directed to them and therein it is highly relevant. Then they have to construct a combined meaning that comes about

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