

Chapter 13

Incorporating Classroom Blogs in Teaching

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ABSTRACT

There are 1,518,207,412 websites in the world as of January 2019. These websites can be a personal, commercial, government, or non-profit organisation website. Websites are typically dedicated to a particular topic or purpose, ranging from entertainment and social networking to providing news and education. Blogs are another form of website and they have been in use for years, but it is more recently that teachers are including them as a learning tool in the classroom – as it provides many positive aspects to their students. When speaking about blogging in the classroom, we are running away from the academic writing and practising informal writing, which in many occasions takes off pressure and gives a voice to our students in a ‘safe environment’. This does not mean that it may be also used to publish assignments and essays, which do contribute to share and educate in particular topics and to practice writing.

WHAT IS A BLOG?

It is estimated that as of September 2020, there are about 2 billion websites (Hosting Tribunal, n.d.). These websites can be a personal, commercial, government or non-profit organisation website. Websites are typically dedicated to a particular topic or purpose – ranging from entertainment and social networking to providing news and education (Baker, 2019).

Many people would have heard of blogs, but do not fully understand what it is, or how creating or reading blogs can improve their lives.

A blog is an online diary or journal located on a website. The content of a blog typically includes texts, pictures, videos, animated GIFs, and even scans from old physical offline diaries or journals and other hard copy documents. Since a blog can exist merely for personal use, sharing information with an exclusive group or to engage the public, a blog owner (blogger) can set their blog for private or public access (Jamie, n.d.).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3756-5.ch013

Blogs are another form of website and they have been in use for years, but it is only recently that teachers are incorporating them as a learning tool in the classroom, because it provides many positive outcomes for students (CRISS, n.d.).

When speaking about blogging in the classroom, essentially we are running away from the more traditional formal academic writing and instead we are practising a more informal way of writing. By doing this, in many occasions, it allows us to take off pressure and gives a voice to students in a 'safe environment'. This does not mean that this style of writing may be also used to publish assignments and essays. In spite of that, the informal writing that can be found within blogs does contribute to sharing and educating in particular topics and to practise writing.

HISTORY OF BLOGS

The early years of blogging came about from 1994 to 1999. The very first blog (Links.net) can be traced to the year 1994, created by Justin Hall, a US freelance journalist. During this time he was a student at Swarthmore University and the content he created was not referred to as a blog. It was just listed as a personal homepage (Rioja, 2019).

The next milestone taken towards the invention of blogs occurred in 1997. The word 'weblog' was invented on 17th December 1997 by Jorn Barger who also invented his own blog labelled *Robot Wisdom*. The name was believed to have been derived from the act of logging the web during browsing hence 'web' and 'log' (Rioja, 2019).

The *Charlotte Observer* posted a blogpost on their news website during the same year. The journalist behind this was Jonathan Dube who covered the tragic Hurricane Bonnie (Rioja, 2019).

Just as the cumbersome, code-heavy blogs of the late 90s began to give way to more accessible solutions, in 1999 the word 'weblog' was dropped in favour of a simpler term: 'blog' by Peter Merholz. This year also saw the advent of three new blogging platforms: Xanga, LiveJournal, and Blogger. Xanga, a site that focused more on the social side of blogging (similar to MySpace), boasted 300,000 users at its peak but faded out of the blogging scene entirely (Themeisle, 2019).

As blogging became more popular, tools appeared to help people curate their blog reading list or market their own blogs. 2002 was a particularly big year for the blogosphere. People also started to monetise their blogs with sites like BlogAds, a precursor to Google AdSense (Themeisle, 2019). The first-ever blog search engine, Technorati, launched that November.

With the rise of blogging came a whole new style of blog: video blogs, or vlogs. The first vlog entry was created in 2000 by Adam Kontras. It's a short video that doesn't seem like much, but it was the beginning of a new form of content, and even more, a new industry (Themeisle, 2019).

The design aspect of blogs has evolved and grown more important, with each new iteration of the concept. Early platforms like LiveJournal and Blogger offered limited but simple customisation. This allowed people with no coding experience to create unique sites. Popular LiveJournal layouts also introduced some elements of design that are still common in WordPress themes (Themeisle, 2019).

The history of blogging is far from over. According to different estimates, there are millions of blogs live today. Plus, blogs are especially important to marketing: 85% of B2C companies and 91% of B2B companies use blogs or other forms of content marketing (Themeisle, 2019).

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