Blogs in education

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ABSTRACT

Educational blogs are used to allow educators to interact with students from any location. Teachers sharing ideas through blogs is a promising way to communicate teaching ideas and allows multicultural teaching methods to be disseminated. The blogs that tell the educator how to use technology within the classroom are informative as many teachers would have no idea about such teaching methods. Research based blogs allow users to see different educational topics discussed in more depth. This paper provides an overview of the impact blogs are having in an educational context.

Introduction

A blog is a website that is maintained by an individual or group with regular updates of information; this information could include diary entries, descriptions of events or in this case educational material. In most blogs readers can supply comments to blog entries, this allows them to ask questions, add information to the blog post or simply comment on a good/bad post. Recently blogs have become more media focused with the inclusion of art (artblog), photographs (photoblog), sketches (sketchblog), videos (vlog), music (MP3 blog) and audio (podcasting) (Morris and Terro, 2005). Micro blogging has also emerged as a popular format with blogs such as twitter becoming extremely popular with both celebrities and the general public. Blog search engines have also emerged such as Technorati which tracks over 112 million blogs. A person that has a blog is called a blogger and when you are maintaining, adding to or reading other blogs, this is referred to as blogging (Hill, 2005).

As 2004 commenced, blogging really started to make its mark, but it was playing the role of a mainstream news service due to the fact that bloggers began to provide nearly-instant commentary on televised events, instead of the more traditional online diary blog which was not as popular. An example of this is in the December 2004 Tsunami which had people blogging about the events that occurred. Here blogs such as Medecins Sans Frontieres were created, which used SMS text messaging to report from affected areas in Sri Lanka and Southern India so that people could read about the extend of the damage. The term blog came about with the two words web and log combined together and then shortened by Jorn Barger in 1997. The term was then shortened by Peter Merholz in May of 1999. Justin Hall who began eleven years of personal blogging in 1994 while being a student at Swarthmore College, is generally recognized as one of the first bloggers. Before blogging came about there were several other similar communities such as Usenet, email-lists and Bulletin board systems. However the blog evolved from the on-line diary where people would keep a blog of their personal lives, the first of these personal blogs started in 1995. Most of the writers called themselves diarists and journalists. After a slow start, blogging rapidly became popular: the site

Xanga, started in 1996, had only 100 diaries by 1997, and over 50,000,000 in December 2005. It was the launch of Open Diaries in 1998 that helped blogging become more popular, as this was the first blog community where readers could add comments to other writers' blog entries. Others started blog communities including Pita.com, Diaryland, Blogger.com and Lifelog. The pioneer of weblogging tools is Dave Winer who changed a blog from just a website to frenzy within the computer world. One of his most significant contributions was setting up servers so that blogs could make a sound to indicate when it has been updated. In 2001 Andrew Sullivan's blog and Ron Gunzburger's Politics1.com became one of the first broadly popular American blogs. These blog on US politics. User manuals also started to appear for the novice users. This helped the blog become a modern phenomenon, as people who just heard of them but could not actually figure out how to start their own, could now do so. The importance of the blogging community gained rapid respect and importance, in actual fact journalism schools started to teach about blogging, the difference from blogging to journalism. A year later from this, in 2002, Markos Moulitsas Zuniga started up DailyKos which had up to a million visits a day during peak events, it has now become one of the most trafficked blogs (Hill, 2005).

When the war in Iraq began, it also started the first blog war. Iraqi bloggers started to read other blogs from America and their views on the war in Iraq, they seen that the Americans were naive to what was really going on and so they joined blogging to get their message across. One of the most memorable blogger was a man called Salam Pax, who published a book of his blog to show his views of the war and open others eyes to it. Blogs played an important role in opening up peoples eyes to the brutal facts of war. Blogs were also created by soldiers serving in the Iraq war. Such blogs were referred to as milblogs, which gave readers new perspectives on the realities of war, as well as often offering different viewpoints from those of official news sources.

There are many different types of blogs, from personal to educational. A personal blog is one where the blogger uses it as an online diary, posting views on anything that they consider interesting. A career blog is one which is used to dictate a

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professional journey, demonstrate expertise, or network out to other professionals. It shows the bloggers career moves through all jobs throughout their lifetime, but has little of no ties to his/her employer. A paid blog is one where a person is employed to blog for a living, this can be done to promote the company, log onto other blogs to tell others of the company, or to raise search engine relevancy so that the company becomes more well known. Cultural blogs allow the bloggers to discuss their preferred music, sports, theater, arts, and popular culture. These are among the most read blogs within the blogging community because people like to talk to others with the same interests and it is a great way to meet new people that have the same things in common. Almost like a chat room. Topical blogs focus on just one topic. An example of this is the Google blog which only covers news about Google. These types of blogs need to keep the readers attention and meet the readers needs so that the amount of readers and comments keeps increasing. The business blogs help promote the businesses in which they are created for as they are free and easy to maintain. The stock market is a popular subject of blogging where both amateur and professional investors use blogs to share stock tips. A moblog or mobile blog, consists of content posted to the Internet from a mobile phone. However it may require special software to do this blog. Collaborative blogs can be created by everyone or limited to a group of people. An example of a collaborative blog is Blogcritics, but now thinks itself as an online magazine more than a blog. Educational blogs were created for students and teachers alike and are growing in popularity. Students can use blogs to record what they learn and teachers can use blogs to record what they teach. For example, a teacher can blog what homework students are required to carry out, including links to Internet resources, and recording each day what is taught. This way if a student is off sick they can quickly catch-up, the teacher can use the blog as a course plan, and finally new teachers can refer to if the teacher falls sick or leaves. This type of blogging can motivate students to do more reading and encourage them to improve their writing style, due to the presence of viewers that will go through the blog, making the students conscience of what they are doing and writing as thousands of people could be reading it. Spam blogs which are often referred to as splogs, are a form of high-pressure advertising. They are generally like spam e-mails, often linked to each other to increase their Internet presence. Political blogs are among the most common forms of blogs. Most political blogs are news driven, and most political bloggers will link to articles from news web sites so that they can add their own views on the subject. Other political blogs feature original commentary, with occasional hyperlinks to back up the blogger's talking points (Holtz, 2006).

A wiki is a collection of information in WebPages that can be added to or edited by any user. Wiki's encourage an online community to build a large store accurate of information. An example of a wiki is Physiwiki   it provides information on human Physiology and is completely student built and maintained. Online wikis are also renowned for inaccurate information as any user may add, edit or delete information. Social networks are already widely used by students, educators today have now begun to use them to comminute with their students. Groups may be created for a class or an entire school; a pupil may look at announcements, assignments, see deadlines and chat to their fellow students or teachers. An example of this is the University of Ulster's Facebook entry where new students have used this page to introduce themselves. Yet Social

networks have also been connected with cyber Bullying and unlawful activity. Video allows teachers to upload videos of them lecturing or just information filled presentations to the web. This allows students from around the globe to watch and learn. You tube has been used by teachers to teach students outside the classroom, users may subscribe to the educators video and are alerted each time a new video is posted. It is also possible to create a group that will allow students and educators to post up videos to do with their school or class. An example of a you tube channel being used buy a university is The Vancouver Film School this page features all of the students videos as well as a few portfolio videos.

There are a number of reasons to integrate blogs into the curriculum. A blog could make education demand oriented and participant-centred which is excellent for self driven learners who need individual feedback. This open approach to information allows the user to be curious and imaginative. Blogs can encourage pupils to be active throughout the period of learning and allows access to information in any time or place. There are also drawbacks however as supply orientation is a large part of the educational structure of many schools and some have other commitments and cannot visit a blog as much as others. It is also worth noting that within the comment system, people may not feel the need to ask questions as questions will be made public

Educational Blogs

An E-learning bog is a blog which is designed to educate the reader in the art of E-learning. E-learning is pedagogy empowered by digital technology. Digital Chakie is an e-learning blog focused on allowing educations using ICT to discuss ideas that will help to facilitate the best educational outcomes for their students. Founded in 2006 by a group of educators Digital Chakie is an open group blog is to allow geographically separate educators to collaborate. The categories are listed down one side with a tab menu at the top of the site allowing users to navigate to the main areas of the website (Figure 1). It also has an RSS feed option allowing educators to get posts quickly and easily. This blog allows users to register so they can comment on blog posts to supply more information. Their goals are to:
• Openly discuss educational issues, particularly related to learning technology
• Allow individual bloggers the opportunity to share their posts with an audience beyond their own blog
• Share discoveries, resources, accomplishments, excitement and areas of interest
• Present ideas for integration of learning technology into the curriculum
• Provide technical assistance to other teachers and trainee practitioners

Figure 1: Digital Chakie

An example of a post is an article titled my evolving 2nd Life focused on an educators experience in the virtual world 2nd life. The blogger speaks about setting up a lecture theatre within 2nd life and warning educators of pranksters that place malicious code in certain objects in 2nd life.

Eduwonk is a blog written by Andrew Rotherham, co-founder and Publisher of Education Sector. Occasional "guest bloggers" contribute to the blog. Eduwonk.com concentrates on education news, analysis, and commentary. Eduwonk has an RSS feed option and a Facebook group allowing members to join and communicate with the bloggers. An example of a post is "Science!" which describes the change in the stem cell policy and how that will effect education. The author discusses the controversy this issue would bring within a class room environment and how progressive movement within America and how it has influenced the education system.

Education in Texas is a blog which focuses on evoking change in the education policy of the educational system within the state of Texas and across the nation of America. It is written by Mike a science and technology teacher from Texas. Education in Texas is a Blog spot blog, and uses one of their basic. An RSS feed of the site is available. An example of a post details how the author received a pay raise but this was offset by the increase in oil prices.

Absolutely intercultural is a blog about HCI (human computer interaction) within the classroom with a strong emphasis on intercultural learning within education. The site provides an RSS feed and podcasts with each of its posts that the user can subscribe to using iTunes. An example post titled Culture discusses the culture of piracy.

Abject learning written by the Emerging Technologies coordinator at USC's Office of learning Technology aims to render the sensible incomprehensible. Once again the blog supports RSS feeds and makes use of audio and videos for online lecturing. An example of a post entitled I want to support the human sensemakers discusses a company that seeks to help people embrace digital media, Last fm and the rise of other music resources such as spotify.

David Lee King's blog researches library websites. This blog supports RSS feeds on both the comments and the posts allowing users to see both the comments and the posts. The site allows the user to share the posts on the site through a number of different sharing sites such as Digg or Reddit. There is also a recent photo's application from his Flickr page allowing the user to see he recently taken photographs; he also has a similar application for his videos. An example post is What Can You Do with a Facebook Page discusses how his online library now has a Facebook page, how to set up a Facebook page and examples of Facebook posts on his page.

The open classroom is written by English teacher Joe McLeay and concentrates on how teachers can interact in different ways with their students. This open Classroom is on Blog spot blog hosting which is a free service allowing a user who has not much experience in website building (such as an English teacher) to build and maintain a simple blog. An example of a post entitled Getting Started in ICT by Rachel Boyd outlines how other teachers can be overwhelmed by web 2.0 and posts a video of a lecture called Eating the Elephant.

Remote Access was created by a teacher who writes about how to use the internet within the classroom and the possibilities technology in the classroom can bring. It has RSS feeds and allows bloggers to add it to their favourites on "Technorati

Favourites". The use of you tube videos throughout the blog allow readers to see what the blogger is describing in their post. An example of a post called The Hive discusses developing a brand for his classroom and a video of the different activities within "The Hive".

Chatty's blog is the creation of a year 10 student detailing points of interest as well as the students work. The student is clearly accustomed to the web as he has used many widgets, self developed images and videos. There are comments left by both teachers and fellow students. Student blogs are a way for the students to communicate their views and inform teachers about what they are doing. Advantages of student blogs are that students may find blogging fun, yet they do not think of it as learning and there is more incentive to read, students will read their fellow students posts and research on other websites. Disadvantages of student blogging are that online bullying may occur therefore the blogs have to be properly monitored so to prevent this.

Videoblogging is similar to blogs, with the exception that it presents the blog in a video format. A factor which is influencing the popularity of videoblogging is the video iPod which is capable of playing video files (Farkas, 2005). A videoblog is a video clip that includes sound for users to view much Podcasts (Weynand, 2006). Often, Videoblogs contain text or captions to explain what is happening. Videoblogging has taken a while to gain followers however due to the uptake of broadband, it is becoming more ubiquitous. Videoblogging became more popular around 2004. One of the main organizations to evangelize was Yahoo! who started a videoblogging group. Users who were creating videoblogs moved to the Yahoo! service as it provided a larger audience where more people were able to view their blogs. In November 2000 Adrian Miles posted the first ever known video blog. It was not until 2004 when Steve Garfield (a videographer and video blogger), brought the concept to a much larger audience. The Yahoo Videoblogging Group was started by Peter Van Dijck and Jay Dedman (Dedman, 2006). They attracted a small group of people calling themselves vloggers. Video blogging then began to receive media attention from outlets such as the New York Times (Boxer, 2005). The first videoblogger conference was held in New York and classes teaching vlogging sprang up. VlogMap.org launched Google maps and Google earth so that they displayed vloggers throughout the entire world. By the end of 2005 Yahoo Videoblogging Group had well over 1000 members and the number is rising rapidly. Vloggercon is a site where vloggers go to meet and learn from each other. Some of the video topics include community, politics, journalism, music, iMovie, final cut pro, Rocketboom and Blogger. The site owner also has videoblogs about his trips shopping, family days out and work meetings. Chuck Olsen is a US documentary maker & video blogger. He is also the producer of the documentary film 'Blogumentary' This film explores the impact of blogging on media and politics. BBC radio also hosts video blogs. There are video blogs on many subjects relating to entertainment (Stolarz, 2006).

Conclusion

Blogs allow pupils to get in contact with each other for educational reasons yet this could also lead to cyber bulling or other people leaving threatening comments on children's blogs. The creation of a private network of blogs for a school would allow each pupil to have their own personal blog that only allows members of that school to contact them. Teachers sharing

ideas through blogs is a promising way to communicate teaching ideas and allows multicultural teaching methods to be disseminated. The blogs that tell the educator how to use technology within the classroom are informative as many teachers would have no idea about such teaching methods. Research based blogs allow users to see different educational topics discussed in more depth.

Educational blogs are a sub form of weblogs. For many years in the past and possibly for some in the future, it has been hard for bloggers to agree on a term that best describes weblog; they are continually re-defining and debating the correct term to illustrate this genius invention. However, the typical definition of weblog which is commonly used is that a weblog is a live journal or application which can be updated immediately without any problems. Blogs can range from all sorts of things such as, a diary of personal events or thoughts; a list of fascinating websites; a list of exciting computer games and so on, the list is endless, it allows individuals to communicate about certain topics of interest.

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