Chapter 61

The Role of Blogging in a Changing Society:
Theory, Practice, and Implications

Efi A. Nisiforou
Cyprus University of Technology, Cyprus

Nikleia Eteokleous
Frederick University, Cyprus

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educational blogs have remained a noteworthy component, even in an age of rapid technological development. The chapter makes an in-depth description of the blogging phenomenon as it tackles the most important findings of the international literature. It provides insights into the connection between teacher identity, within the context of higher education, by incorporating aspects of theory and practice. The practical tone reports on three case studies on the use of blogs in education. A set of evaluation criteria on blogging for educational purposes and a theoretical framework for utilizing blogging as a problem solving approach are addressed. Moreover, it stresses necessity for the development of a pedagogical framework that will guide blog integration as a learning-cognitive tool in achieving specific learning outcomes. The results underscore the importance of essential training for the effective implementation of educational blogging in teaching and learning environments. A compendium of terms, definitions and explanations of concepts are clearly explained.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter focuses on the use of Blogs in Higher Education, and blogging as a Web 2.0 activity. Blogging was chosen because of its unique affordances, which are further explained in a subsequent section. It provides a synthesis of the literature in the field alongside two illustrative examples of

how this tool is being used to support evidence-based practices. It draws out the benefits and potential that this appears to offer as an instructional and research tool in the frame of learning and teaching, and highlights the challenges and future implementations on teacher education. The review provides three case studies, which are reported elsewhere (Nisiforou & Eteokleous,

2012; Eteokleous & Nisiforou, 2013) and serve as the illustrative examples of the chapter. The case studies focus on the evaluation of blogging criteria on a basis of educational practice, which facilitate the online teaching and learning process. The contextual examples explore the extent to which blogs facilitate the educational practice by promoting communication, discussion, sharing of ideas, reflections on learning and teaching and the potential of blogs to be employed as pedagogical tools in higher education. The locomotive objective of the chapter is to draw on the existing body of background literature in this domain and synthesize empirical evidence on the usage of blogging in pre-service teachers' education.

The use of computer technologies in education is not a new research field, however due to the technological growth it has changed its shape and become more sophisticated in supporting the teaching and learning process (Cakir, 2013). While a wealth of literature focuses on learners' experiences regarding the benefits of blogs in higher education, this work is adding to this field from a less-reported angle; that of examining and defining blogs evaluation criteria from an educational perspective. This perspective lacks real evidence of empirical pedagogical blogging with reference to pre-service teachers' experiences within the framework of educational blogging, showing facts of their perceptions towards the affordances of blogs in teachers' practice and experience within today's educational milieu. The in-depth case studies that follow provide more specific indicators of the extent to which blogs can promote and facilitate the development of blended collaborative learning environments, by proposing the design of a possible valuable theoretical framework. Specifically, the practical part of the chapter seeks to examine blogs' potential to be integrated as tools that will provide a forum to share, discuss, reflect, exchange ideas and opinions, argue, provide feedback, and experience; essential ingredients of real learning. In

doing so this serves the dual purpose of building and strengthening the identities of both learners and teachers. Furthermore, the stages of development in the formation of online identities are the same in blogging as the steps found in the use of Virtual Learning Environments with those stages presented in the form of a pyramid in Salmon's (2000; Wallace, 2003) work on the five stages of development in online socialization. There is insufficient theoretical background on the framework to guide the identification and evaluation of blogs' content, activities and purposes when developed for educational use. Due to the lack of previous studies, the current chapter aims to provide its audience with adequate information regarding the possible guidelines and indicators (criteria); an attempt to develop a pedagogical framework in identifying the real benefits of blogging for educational purposes.

BACKGROUND: WELCOME TO THE NEW WORLD WIDE WEB

Computers have played a variety of roles in classrooms for over five decades, and their use evolved from "learning from computers," to "learning about computers," to "learning with computers," or in other words "computers as mindtools" (Dexter, Ronald & Becker, 1999; Jonassen, 2003; Eteokleous,2008). With the rapid diffusion of the Internet, new approaches to learning were created (Crosta, 2004), and as a result, the steady increase towards the interest in the development and use of online learning (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2004) to provide anytime and anywhere learning. Specifically, the technological advancement in information technology and telecommunications resulted in the development of the Web 2.0 and created the appropriate framework for user participation. In Web 2.0, users are Contributing, Collaborating, and Creating; the three key factors known as the 3C's (Ala-Mutka et al., 2009). Various online

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