Chapter 7.12

Blogging Minds on Web–Based Educational Projects

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ABSTRACT

Weblogs are radically redefining the way people obtain information and the way they teach and learn. This chapter examines issues and problems of typical Web-based educational projects as gleaned from the literature. It then reveals the potentials and advantages of the Weblog for enhancing those existing Web-based educational projects. It also proposes a new framework which integrates the Weblog as a means for Web-based educational project design, development, and implementation. Finally, it presents a case study which incorporated Weblogs in a specific Web-based educational project - the development of a professional portfolio.

INTRODUCTION

Online information and communication is changing the way people interact and learn. Today, the Web is no longer just an information repository or a place to search for resources. Traditional Web applications typically consist of browsing and searching on the Internet and are essentially a reading operation. In contrast, the new Web (Web 2.0 or Read/Write Web) is a place to find other users, to exchange ideas and thoughts, to demonstrate creativity, and to create new knowledge. Web 2.0 applications, such as blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, and podcasts, have emerged in a rich, interactive, user-friendly application platform that allow users to read and also to write to the Web.

Among these Web 2.0 applications, "Weblogs were already so popular by the end of 2004 that the

Merriam-Webster dictionary chose it as it 'Word of the year for 2004,' and the bloggers were ABC News' 'People of the Year'" (Richardson, 2006, p. 2). As Downes (2004) pointed out, "a February 2004 report published by the Pew Internet & American Life Project noted that at least 3 million Americans have created blogs, with similar numbers being seen worldwide. And schools have not been immune from this trend. While nobody can say for sure just how many students are blogging, inside the classroom or out, it seems clear that their numbers are equally impressive" (p. 16). In fact the recent Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Teens and Social Media* (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, &Smith, 2007), offered this description of this movement:

The number of teen bloggers nearly doubled from 2004 to 2006. About 19% of online teens blogged at the end of 2004, and 28% of online teens were bloggers at the end of 2006… Some 55% of online teens have profiles on a social network site (SNS) such as Facebook or MySpace and those who have such profiles are much more likely to be bloggers than those who do not have social network profiles. Two in five (42%) teens who use social networking sites also say they blog. And, in keeping with the conversational nature of social media, social networking teens are also interacting with others' blogs. Seven in ten (70%) social networking teens report reading the blogs of others, and three in four social networking teens (76%) have posted comments to a friend's blog on a social networking site (p. 3).

Although there is no official definition of a Weblog (also known as a "blog"), "in its most general sense, a Weblog is an easily created, easily updatable Web site that allows an author (or authors) to publish instantly to the Internet from any Internet connection" (Richardson, 2006, p. 17). Winer (2002) defined Weblogs as "often-updated sites that point to articles elsewhere on the web, often with comments, and to on-site articles. A weblog is kind of a continual tour, with a human guide whom you get to know" (¶ 2).

Despite of their huge popularity within our society, Weblogs are not widely and deeply explored in education. In fact, research suggests that blogs have not impressed educators. They doubt that Weblogs can promote thoughtful and measured response. Their view is that "blogging honors the impulsive, the careless, the superficial – anything goes: what matters is that you get a place to say whatever you like in public" (Ganley, 2004). As Downes (2004) indicated, "one of the criticisms of blogs, and especially student blogs, is that the students write about nothing but trivia" (p. 16). Hence, if the educational community is to accept blogs, it seems crucial to provide and share more constructive ideas on how the adaptation and implementation of Weblogs can impact real-world teaching and learning. For instance, it is necessary to question the effectiveness of using a Weblog as a vehicle for supporting Web-based project design, development, and implementation. This chapter examines issues and problems on some of the most existing Web-based educational projects as gleaned from the literature. It then reveals the potentials and advantages of the Weblog for enhancing such projects. It also proposes a new framework which integrates the Weblog as a mean for the Web-based educational project design, development, and implementation. Finally, it presents a case study which incorporated Weblogs in the professional portfolio development.

ISSUES, TYPES, AND PROBLEMS OF EXISTING WEB-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

Throughout the history of technology integration, Web-based educational projects have played a central role in major educational innovations, including information literacy, inquiry-based learning, and performance-based assessment.

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