

Blogs As A Learning Space: Creating Text of Talks

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Abstract- This paper explored the pedagogical preparations taken by the researcher in integrating blogs to the traditional classroom experience as well as its use in online classes as a tool for students to write about what they have learned in class and relate it to everyday life. The researcher utilized web blog, combined Facebook and Multiply blogsites, in the online teaching. Utilization of blogsites to supplement the traditional method of teaching was a welcome innovation for most students. The study involved thirty-eight (38) enrolled students of the course English 111. The familiarity and convenience of facebook and multiply blogsites makes learning and complying to requirements an enjoyable task. Blogs as a learning space for English 111 was an effective teaching methodology appreciated by the students. However, the integration of blogs in the traditional teaching learning process requires preparation and planning on the part of the teacher so that applicable and timely activities could be given to the students.

Keywords- blogs, blogsites, learning space

I. INTRODUCTION

The increasing prevalence of the use of the internet in virtually every aspect of life has led everyone to gravitate towards it as the universal medium of communication or medium of expression. The freedom that the internet grants its users is unheard of in the old world of written, spoken and broadcasted media, as less and less scrutiny, bias and

pressure to conform is experienced. Freedom of expression is uncurtailed, therefore allowing people to be more expressive and creative in voicing out their opinions or points of view. Not to mention the ease of use, its accessibility and availability all around the world, and endless possibilities for media, limited only by the technology of its time and the availability of the hardware and/or human resource.

One of the most popular embodiments of freedom of speech in the internet is the web log, or, as most commonly called, a blog. This is akin to an online diary or journal, where users are allowed to upload texts containing their opinions, viewpoints, or even narrations of their experiences. A lot of internet sites have already accepted blogs as the medium of expression for the majority of internet users, supplanting messaging services and even e-mail, and are now providing more and more services catering to the whims of the online blogger. As a result, more and more communities are adopting blogs as their way to communicate to the outside world, be it corporations, small business, celebrity personalities, athletes, or even students and educators alike. However, the use of blogs so far has been mainly for promotion, or informational, or even vanity. The practical use of blogs as a tool in, for instance, education, has not yet been widely explored or utilized to its full extent.

In education, the most widely used form of instruction has been the traditional classroom delivery. This has been the norm for thousands of years, and its effectiveness cannot be understated. However, in this modern day and age, technological advances

have allowed us to use certain facilities and services that will not replace, but rather augment, the traditional classroom experience. This allows the educator to teach outside the box, to approach the art of instruction from different angles, and to give a refreshing new image to the role of instructor in the process of learning for the student. The use of multimedia, online communities, distance learning, and online courses are just some examples of how the modern instructor has leveraged technology to enhance the learning experience.

And now with the advent of blogging as the main medium of instruction for this generation of students, with sites such as Facebook and Multiply getting headway in the preference of the majority of the blogging community, we are now inclined to look at blogging as an advantage and further increasing the capability of the instructor.

Facebook¹, founded by Mark Zuckerberg and fellow computer science students Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes², is a social networking website launched in February 2004 that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc.,³ with more than 500 million⁴ active users in July 2010.⁵ Users can add people as friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Additionally, users can join networks organized by workplace, school, or college, as in this case, a facebook account of the course English 111.

Multiply⁶, the same with facebook, is also a social networking website which allows users to share media - such as photos, videos and blog entries. The website was launched in March 2004 and is privately held with backing by VantagePoint Venture Partners, Point Judith Capital, Transcosmos, and private investors headquartered in Boca Raton, Florida.⁷ Multiply has over 11 million registered users.⁸

Allowing a similar approach as one would with an online community, but only offering the necessary feature of

communication and back-and-forth discussion, it enables students and instructors to optimize the flow of discussion through both channels. Knowledge is not anymore spoon-fed to students, but rather it is now students and instructors collaborating, with the student receiving the traditional learning content, and the instructors receiving feedback on the learning experience in real-time, allowing them to adjust and/or conform to his/her audience in the shortest amount of time.

But as in any integration process, there are obviously things to consider in using blogs as a medium for instruction. It is important to determine at what level or part of the educational process should blogs be integrated so as to use them properly, and also for it to not interfere with the existing standard and become a hindrance rather than a facilitator of learning.

This paper explored the pedagogical preparations taken by the researcher in integrating blogs to the traditional classroom experience as well as its use in online classes as a tool for students to write about what they have learned in class and relate it to everyday life. It involved thirty-eight (38) enrolled students of English 111 section BHA handled by the researcher during the first semester of 2010 – 2011. The researcher utilized web blog in online teaching. The topics covered were the following: 1). Simple Present Tense, 2). Simple Past Tense, 3). Future tense, 4). Present Perfect Tense, 5). Past Participle of Regular and Irregular Verbs, and Past Perfect Tense.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher is guided by the Engagement Theory⁹ advocated by Greg Kearsley and Ben Shneiderman in the conduct of this study.

Engagement theory was developed intended to be a conceptual framework, a model, for technology based teaching and learning. The theory posits that students must

be meaningfully engaged in learning activities through interaction with others and worthwhile tasks for learning to occur.

The role of technology in this theory is to facilitate all aspects of engagement, the use of web log in this case, increase and improve students' participation in the required course activity. Technology provides an electronic learning milieu that fosters the kind of creativity & communication needed to nourish engagement.¹⁰

Engagement theory is based upon three (3) concepts: Relate-Create-Donate.

Relate. Through time, students have been taught and trained to learn and work in their own. However, through blogs, students have the chance to relate and collaborate with their classmates' expressed/posted opinions. The learning environment could increase students motivation to learn by participation and collaboration with fellow students of the course.

Create. This second component makes learning creative, purposeful activity. Students will focus their efforts on creation of ideas in answering a specific assignment/activities posted on the blog website. This would be more interesting to students than answering their traditional textbook activity.

Donate. This third component stresses the value of making a useful contribution while learning. Students who know they have an audience other than their teacher write more credibly, accurately, and carefully. Blogging represent a democratization of information dissemination providing each student with the opportunity to publicly present their thoughts. Seeing their work published on the web is a great motivator for them. The learning environment increases students' motivation and satisfaction. This component is consistent with the objective of the College of Arts and Sciences in instilling in the students the desire for precise thinking as well as correct and appropriate means of expression.

The researcher believes that engagement theory represents a new paradigm for teaching and learning in the digital age where blogging may play a positive role in student participation, expression and interaction.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed a descriptive method combining the qualitative and quantitative types of research. Descriptive research endeavors to describe systematically, functionally, accurately and objectively a situation, problem or phenomena (Garcia, 2003). Qualitative is used to discuss the pedagogical preparation done by the research to integrate blogs to the traditional classroom experience. While, quantitative is used to describe the students' view of blogging.

After the integration of the blogs in the traditional classroom method, the students were given the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire is consisted of four (4) questions that tackled the following students' view: 1) reasons for participating in the blog, 2) blog as a medium for facilitating learning, 3) blog as a medium for student interactivity, 4) blog as a medium for reflection, and 5) transferability of blogging as a learning tool.

IV. PEDAGOGICAL PREPARATION

At the initial stage, The researcher created an online learning environment that integrates blogging as part of the teaching-learning process in the course English 111 encouraged students to write about what they have learned in class and relate it to everyday life. Two (2) blog sites were utilized: the multiply.com and the facebook.com.

The facebook.com blog site is currently the most popular among students. The account created for the online course was named ENGLISH COURSE. However, facebook could only handle up to 160

characters during the time of the blog integration in English 111. With this limitation, it was difficult to use it as a blog space. The researcher used facebook as announcement dissemination board utilizing its "status update" feature which surely reached its target studentry due to its popularity.

A second blog site was created to combine with facebook, the multiply.com. It was named ENGLISH 111 BHA. The best feature of multiply is that it can hold large amount of files be it photos, videos, blogs, links, etc. Each entry are arrange chronologically. For this study this blog site holds the main online classroom of English 111. This is where the activities, announcements, and information were posted. This is also where the students post their blogs in compliance to the teacher's posted requirement.

The integration of blogs to the traditional classroom teaching-learning was initiated by requiring students to have themselves become members of the **English Course facebook Account**. This initial step is very well known to the students as facebook is very popular and that most of the students have their own facebook blogsite.

Entries are posted in the English Course facebook and multiply blogsite to keep students informed on what to expect from the course for the preliminary grading period. Different activities were posted in the blogsite, namely: 1). Topics, BLOG assignments (1-8) using different strategies like plain texts entries, pictures, and linked videos for students' learning experience. The topics covered for this study were the following: 1). Simple Present Tense, 2). Simple Past Tense, 3). Future tense, 4). Present Perfect Tense, 5). Past Participle of Regular and Irregular Verbs, and Past Perfect Tense.

1. Students' View of Blogs as Part of the Learning Experience.

For reasons of participating in the blog activities, majority (54%) of the students

realized the importance of participating in blogging activities as part of the learning process and that they have to perform excellently in all activities.

Perceiving blog as a medium for facilitating learning, majority of the students agree to strongly agree that blogging assisted them in learning lessons in English 111.

Of the thirty-eight (38) students, 55 percent revealed that blogging in the course English 111 increased the meaningful intellectual exchange more broadly. Blogs offer an innovative way for students to engage in reflective writing on classroom topics in a familiar medium.

Given the choice of participating again in a blog activity without grades equivalent, twenty-six (26) or 68% agreed, while 20 percent strongly agreed. This is consistent with Lorrie Jackson's online article that students loved to blog. Seeing their words published on the Web is a great student motivator. Students who know they have an audience other than their teacher write more credibly, accurately, and carefully.

When asked if they would like to see blogging used more widely in English courses as a learning/assessment tool, 12 percent opined that it should be used in all subject, while, a equal percentage of 39% said that it should used in most and in some of English subjects/courses. This shows that 100% of the students are agreeable that blogging should be used in English courses as a learning/assessment tool.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Utilization of blogsites as a supplement to the traditional method of teaching is a welcome innovation for most students. The use of popular blogsite like the facebook is familiar and very convenient for them such that it makes learning and complying to requirements an enjoyable task. Students' learning need not be confined to the four walls of the classroom but can be achieved anywhere, anytime. Blogs as a learning

space for English 111 is an effective teaching methodology appreciated by the students.

The integration of blogs in the traditional teaching learning process requires preparation and planning on the part of the teacher so that applicable and timely activities could be given to the students.

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