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International Blogging

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Abstract

As blogging has become a very popular media form for students in the informal classroom, educators are also using this to try to improve students' communication and English skills in the formal classroom. Why more instructors are not using blogging in postsecondary education in the attempt to improve student formal classroom communication and English skills? Since blogging is one of the most popular forms of media, educators can use this type of forum for class instruction. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the effectiveness of blogging in postsecondary education. The research question addressed to what extent blogging can be used to improve postsecondary education between students and instructors. A literature review was conducted through Google Scholar to locate scholarly articles and textbooks to support the use of blogging. The population for this study included college students and mature authors worldwide who wish to participate in the blog sites. Data collection came from student and researcher dialogue, and information the blog sites provided describing their sites. The results revealed that the literature supported the benefits of blogging in postsecondary education. The results of this study could help instructors recognize how blogging can improve communication and English skills among college students if used properly.

International Blogging

Some teachers are now using nontraditional methods of instruction, along with traditional, to involve students more in classroom participation. As the internet and Facebook are some of the most popular forms of media, instructors are now using blogs to make participation more interesting for students. Du and Wagner (2005) defined blogs as a personalized webpage that an author keeps in reverse chronological diary form. Instructors have used this form of media as it reduces social-context clues (gender, race, and status) and nonverbal cues (facial expressions and body language); these activities can be safer and more relaxed than sitting in a classroom (Hanson-Smith, 2001; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991). When students blog, they express their thoughts at their own pace and in their own space, this way they do not have to compete for their instructor's attention (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991), therefore, shifting the learning from teacher-centered to learner-centered (Fotos & Browne, 2004). The purpose of this paper was to post a question on three weblogs in an attempt to create a dialogue and demonstrate the effectiveness of these blogs.

Enhancing Learning

Along with other technological advances, blogs have become one of the most popular forms of media that students and professionals use to communicate on a daily basis. One blog I joined belonged to University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Living Routes: Study Abroad in Sustainable Communities, which is an international blog. Students study in communities across the globe where these communities are striving to live more equitable, just and sustainable lifestyles. The site suggested that these study programs prepare the next generation to bring sustainable ways of living into the mainstream. Students provided blog excerpts of their academic and field experiences of sustainability with pictures and the student's name. This blog

was beneficial as it provided its mission and examples of blogs from various countries (e.g., Costa Rica, India, Mexico, and Brazil) with dates.

Another site I joined was Learning Curves, an educational blog. I chose this site as it seemed simple, consisting mostly of blogs and, therefore, thought the blogs would be substantive and to the point. Unfortunately, this site does not contain a mission statement or other links to provide the reader with more information regarding its purpose. It is unclear as to the type of content one may be able to submit for publication. It is a simple daily newsletter composed of what authors wish to submit. I would not consider this blog advantageous as it seems unstructured and has no purpose.

The last site I joined was ‘absolutely intercultural!’, another educational blog. According to its authors, this site deals with intercultural issues relating to human intercultural communication. I chose this site as it deals with intercultural issues and the number of international podcast awards it has been awarded. The site’s authors feel that it is not only about passing on information but about starting an intercultural dialogue between the contributors and the listeners. I consider this site constructive as it provides opportunities in communicating with other authors and disciplines around the world. Though these blogs are of various styles, content, and purpose, Brooks, Nichols, and Priebe (2004) found that, regardless of the course the students were enrolled in, the majority of students preferred to write journal style entries.

Blogging Comfort Level

With the various blogging sites available for students and authors, it can seem intimidating for a traditional student who is trying to determine how to use them properly. When I began using all three of the blogs, I felt frustrated as I had a difficult time trying to research and determine the most suitable sites that would qualify for the criteria of the assignment. Once I located what I considered the most appropriate sites, I again became more frustrated as I tried to

figure out how to post my question, “What is your opinion in going back to school to get that dream job, is it worth it?” I learned that all blog sites are not created the same, depending on the authors’ style and purpose. After having posted my question and waiting some time in anticipation of getting a response, I was eventually amazed by the lack of participation that existed in my blogs. It was not until after this portion of the assignment was completed did I realize that I should not feel as frustrated as I did as everyone does not have to respond to any of the sites.

Experience in Blogging

My lack of blogging experience, except what has been required as a doctorate student in this program, prevented me from understanding how the concept worked. The biggest problem that I faced with blogging was that blog authors do not have to respond to any of the postings. When I posted my question, I automatically assumed that I would get an answer, even though it could take a few days. As a student, I have learned that not all students would respond to all blogs. Of the three sites, only one site received two responses, one of low quality and the other of what I would consider medium quality. The other two sites received no responses. It could be that my question was not interesting enough to provoke a response.

Use of Blogs

For many years as active duty and as a civilian (veteran), my current profession has used blogs to pass on information. In my current government profession, we use two forms of blogging, verbal and nonverbal. At the beginning of each shift, when one person relieves the other person, the person going off duty verbally updates the other on what has happened during their shift. This is quicker and more proficient as it may require an immediate response. During our shifts, what information needs to be passed on to the department is always emailed. Lui, Choy, Cheung, & Li (2006) suggested this as a journalistic feature that encourages personal

reflection, critical thinking, and rigorous writing composition. As these two forms of blogs have always been the norm for my department, I would not create any additional blogs as it would not be beneficial.

Conclusion

As blogging seems to be a simple form of communication between at least two participants, it can also be the most effective depending on its purpose. To anticipate a quality blog on any site, web sites should be researched extensively to determine which weblog provides the best forum for the goal intended. Researching, selecting a site, and posting a blog should be done when one feels comfortable about it. Feeling comfortable about what is being posted will most likely produce quality blogs and possibly receive quality interactions from many authors. When this interaction is conducted over a period of time, this should provide the author with a positive blog experience and hopefully with enough experience to create and maintain a blog on other sites with other participants.

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