



Blogging in Education: Primary and Secondary Educators- Administrators' Views

Evanthia Mitintzi¹

Abstract

Blog is one of the Web. 2 tools which makes it possible to interact, collaborate and share material. It's use in the field of education can contribute to various aspects of the educational process. This research aims at the empirical approach of the educational blog. In particular, it detects ways of managing and exploiting the educational blog by primary and secondary school administrators-educators. Their observations from the use of the blog in their teaching and their views on its effectiveness as an educational tool are also sought. Among these views there are educators' opinions of the blogs impact on students' language use capacity. The method which was used, was field survey and data collection done by sending, completing and submitting an electronic questionnaire. 338 educators from all over Greece, serving at primary or secondary schools, public or private answered the questionnaire. They concluded that blogging is an effective educational tool, that can enrich the educational process, can help students' learning and understanding, can improve personal relations, communication and collaboration, and affect students' language use capacity.

Keywords: educational blog, educational technology, ICT, field survey

1. Introduction

The term weblog was created by Jorn Barger, who first used it in 1997, while the abbreviation blog is attributed to Peter Merholz in 1999 (Andriotakis, 2007: 17). The term comes from nautical terminology and denotes a deck calendar or naval log. The term originally concerned some websites that functioned as catalogs of websites with specific thematic and common interests. Weblogs initially could only be created by people who knew how to create websites, that were familiar with the HTML code and spent a lot of hours in this job. Since 1999, however, there has been considerable diversification as in July 1999, the first online tool that allows a simple user who does not have the expertise to create his own weblog appeared. An explosion has been triggered in creating weblogs. The structure and content of blogs changed as publishers publish posts with varying content and refresh content often, even several times during the day, thus turning the blog into a kind of personal calendar (Blood, 2000). The rapid spread of blogging over the last decades could not leave the education sector unaffected. Teachers of all levels are looking for ways to turn the blog into an educational tool, students and learners are encouraged to use the blog to create learning communities, parents and administrations of educational organizations actively participate in the educational communities created through blogs (Yang, 2006: 144).

2. Educational blog

In the question "Why use the blog in education?", a first easy answer is: because it is easy to manage and requires no specialized knowledge (Kim, 2008:1347). One more reason is the fact that children are already largely adopting the blog in their everyday life, with no differentiation between the two sexes (Dimitris Koutsoyiannis, 2011: 87). Also, considering that the new generation of students is dissatisfied, when a communication system requires many "steps" to make a communication act a reality, it is understood that the blog is superior in this area, as it does not require registrations or links, but it allows easy text editing or annotation even to new readers because it is designed as an open communication system (Kim, 2008:1344). Beyond the obvious and easily identifiable reasons, however, educational blog supporters argue that this is an effective tool for learner-centered and participatory learning as it helps to transform pupils into critics, co-workers and creative participants in the social construct of knowledge. Blogging assists learners through a process of systematic removal and filtering of posts to gain in-depth knowledge about a topic, stimulates their interest in learning, provides them with equal opportunities to participate and integrate in a community, and offers opportunities for diversified perspectives (Farmer et al., 2007: 2). Moreover, participation in online communities, such as those created by using the blog, is an important aspect of informal learning and

¹ Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece)

general education of citizens and cannot be ignored by the educational system (Dagdiles & Deligiannis, 2006: 963). At the same time, blog publishing offers feedback and functions as a "cognitive scaffold" in building knowledge. In addition, the use of hyperlinks in blogs leads learners to realize that their knowledge building and understanding are based on the association and context (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004: 13).

3. Research

The short time of blogs' existence and exploitation has not yet been explored in all aspects, as - especially in Greek reality - only a small number of research efforts have focused on educational blog. There has also been no research work in the Greek field that has garnered the views of educators-blog administrators about the usefulness and contribution of this web tool to their work. This finding led to the decision to explore the educational blog at a theoretical and empirical level.

3.1 Aims of the survey

The aim of this work is to identify the views of Greek educators of primary and secondary education who have also been or are administrators of educational blog about its use in education. We are looking for their comments from the use of this web tool in practice and their assessment about its contribution to the educational process.

3.2 Method and conduct

The method used in our case is field overview, as intended on collecting data for the educational blog at a given time and on given existing conditions, and to extract descriptive, concluding and explanatory information, as well as to identify possible correlations between parameters (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008: 289-294). Data collection was made using the methodological tool of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent electronically to primary and secondary school teachers who manage blogs of an educational nature. The questionnaire is structured and includes 35 closed-ended questions because it was considered that an electronic questionnaire should be easily and shortly filled in to prevent the recipient from participating. 10 of the questionnaire questions refer to demographics and help to outline the profile of the participants. Questionnaire questions can be grouped into four (4) groups based on their theme. In particular: a) the first group consists of questions that examine the way educators use and exploit the blog, b) the second set of questions asks the educator to submit his/her observations and findings from the experience of using and exploiting the blog, c) the third group of questions relates to educators' views on the contribution of the blog to specific aspects of the educational process and d) the fourth group of questions are the demographic questions that trace the personal characteristics of the participants. The time taken to collect the replies was from 12 March 2016 to 30 June 2016. The questionnaires were addressed to teachers - women and men- all over Greece, island and continental regions, urban, suburban and rural areas. 338 of them were anonymously answered. Subsequently the data was coded and analyzed. The SPSS Statistics Viewer Version.23 was used to statistically process the data.

3.3 Conclusions

Research findings that are consistent with its objectives and respond to research questions can be summarized in the following.

- i. The Greek teachers- blog administrators are long-term users and managers of the blog. They also manage all three types of blog (personal, class, school), but with emphasis on the school blog.
- ii. They are mainly referring to their students and colleagues via their blog. However, they include in their audience, the students' parents and any other visitor (s) of their blog.
- iii. From ways of using the blog mentioned in the questionnaire, it is mainly used for the posting of announcements, the publication of educational material, the posting of material from school activities, the publication of pedagogical and educational practices and the presentation of papers. At a lesser frequency, of course, all the reported exploitation methods are used and some others not included in the questionnaire..
- iv. Teacher education does not seem to affect the ways in which they use the blog, their observations and their views.
- v. Educators use the blog in the direction of achieving and improving communication with students, colleagues and students' parents.

- vi. Educators-administrators observe to a greater or lesser extent a positive differentiation in pupils' performance in writing.
- vii. They also observe positive differentiation in communication and interpersonal relationships among pupils as well as between pupils and educators.
- viii. Teachers-bloggers consider that the educational blog contributes to enriching and facilitating the educational work.
- ix. Teachers also think that the educational blog helps learners understand concepts, conquer knowledge and cultivate thinking skills.
- x. According to the educators, the educational blog, promotes interaction and collaboration within the school community and contributes to a more learner-centered approach.
- xi. The educational blog also contributes to the effort not to exclude and marginalize sensitive groups of the student population.
- xii. Participating in the educational blog strengthens students' self-esteem and positively affects teachers self-esteem.

In summary, the educational blog is another tool available to the educational world. The way it's being used will be that of highlighting or not showing its usefulness. The existence of the necessary conditions, the appropriate preparation and support of the educational staff can provide space for the pedagogical use of the educational blog and this in turn contributes to the effort of reforming the educational process, promoting cooperation and interaction. Otherwise, the blog will simply be integrated into the existing conditions, making it another option for their reproduction.

4. Epilogue

From the aforementioned it is noted that the pedagogical exploitation of the blog requires the appropriate preparation of the teachers with emphasis on the collaborative and interactive features of the blog, so that they know how to exploit them and promote the cultivation of the students' critical thinking and the building of Knowledge in a collaborative environment. Such pedagogical exploitation of the blog requires teachers to accept the change in their role. It is necessary to accept that they are not the center of the educational process, but their role is to guide their students to the more efficient and safer use of the Internet tool. Such an assumption, however, presupposes a framework that favors the teacher's autonomy and leaves him/her the opportunity to pedagogically utilize new technologies.

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