

Blogs in the Classroom: Discussion

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Abstract

The initial purpose of this research project was to analyze perceptions of blogs in the classroom for both students and teachers. An examination of the data changed the focus of the research to examine the issues related to the implementation of a blog in the classroom. A thematic analysis revealed three emerging themes. The first theme pointed to the fact that blogs provide a positive response when introduced in the classroom. The second theme relates to the importance of having support from school administration and technology leaders in order to implement blog technology. The final theme was the general concerns that educators have with including the necessary security and checks for appropriate use when introducing blogs to the class.

Introduction

The impact of Web 2.0 technologies on the classroom has been a significant change in terms of student engagement and instructional design. As these technologies evolve it is important to analyze the efficacy of the tools and examine how best to implement these technologies in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The first component of the Web 2.0 that was selected as the focus of this research project was the blog. In its current iteration, the blog has been used for more than a decade. Although there are a variety of third party websites that include blogs with different features, the core components include the opportunity to create a journal style exchange with access to a population of users with shared interests. The value is easily seen as a social networking tool but the purpose of this study was to examine how blogs perform in a classroom setting. It was important to the perspectives of those in education with firsthand knowledge of this tool and to assess the future of this technology as a viable addition to the learning process.

Discussion

The general consensus among the participants was that blogs do provide a positive and impactful solution in the form of communication and collaboration. The experiences shared involved a myriad of uses for blogs but the responses suggested that blogs were successful in getting students to work together and provided an opportunity for those students who struggle with oral communications and presentation that involved speaking in front of classmates. The initial focus centered on how students felt about working with blogs in a classroom setting. The assumption was that there might be some hesitation and resistance to the use of blogs because students associated this technology with social interaction outside of the classroom. However, the research proved that the transition between outside use and blogs as in an education setting was a non-issue. As a result, the focus of this study changed to look at how blogs actually affected the classroom environment. After shifting the focus of this study, three distinct themes seemed to emerge. The first was the positive influence that blogs had on the learning environment and how comfortable students were with the technology. Most of the responses in terms of this theme reflected the participants' reactions to seeing more engagement from students who normally struggle with speaking up in class. The blog provided an alternative method of communication that stripped away the anxiety some students feel when having to address the class in an oral presentation. Another other overarching benefit expressed in terms of blogs was the increase in collaboration and peer connections that were made available using this technology. The fluctuations in terms of learning objectives and the level of success were connected to the logistics involved in implementing the blogs. A good plan for moderating the activities of a blog and rubrics for how to use this tool were the essential requirements for using this technology. Some of these realizations were made as a result of an initial offering that proved taxing in terms

of time and resources. However, once they made adjustments in these areas they found tool to be an asset and in some cases a time saving exercise. The second theme that emerged from this research assignment was the importance of support from school administrators and technologists in the schools. The responses to the online survey were the first indications that support from school officials plays a large role in whether any technology is integrated in the classroom. The answers to whether or not blogs were used were often tied to how the participants' school viewed technology. One online survey stated, "I've never used blogging as an assignment for students, although I would like to someday. The technology at my school is too limited." This was the sentiment of other users who had the desire but did not implement blogs because of the difficulties they too encountered with school administration. Some of the trepidation associated with implementation had to do with liability. School officials did not want to deal with any complications that may arise from the misuse of this technology. There have been many cases of cyberbullying and intimidation in schools and this is a subject for concern to school officials. This issue is connected to the last theme that emerged from this study and it involves security and abuse of blogs in the classroom.

For many who participated and detailed their experiences with using blogs in the classroom, a great concern was the abuse associated with using this form of communication. If the security measures and moderation is not planned and executed from the initial implementation, this could pose a problem on many levels. Participants discussed having to re-work and modify the blog technology to include an approval process in order to prevent inappropriate comments and abusive behavior. Other issues closely related touched on privacy and the comfort level of students contributing to the blog postings. Assuring anonymity on the blog was one important concern. For those who needed to identify students for scoring and

participation purposes highlighted the need for the blog to be secure, private and closed in terms of access on the open web. Participants felt that these issues directly affected the amount of engagement and collaboration produced by the blog. If students were unsure about their privacy, they were less likely to contribute and exchange with other classmates.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Although varied in terms of the participants, the sampling size was small. Time constraints and scheduling difficulties also played a role in the number of participants. Increasing the sampling size would add more validity to the results. Research into schools with developed technology plans and support would be another group to research in terms of blog implementation.

Conclusion

Although experiences varied in terms of the use of blogs, all participants agreed that blogs are a positive and viable tool for collaboration and communication. The research indicates that in order to implement this technology successfully, there needs to be more done by way of planning. Including an acceptable use policy is important. Looking at security and privacy are also prerequisites in order to avoid liability issues. The final and perhaps most important aspect mentioned is the need for support from administrators. The successes of each implementation researched were tied directly to the amount of backing received from the learning institutions. Blogs continue to provide an opportunity for students to work together and collaborate. Although the blog has evolved to include more functionality, it remains a viable option that benefits both teachers and students.