

The dog sat on the blog

An overview of how the weblog medium can be used in education

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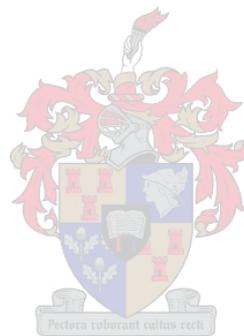
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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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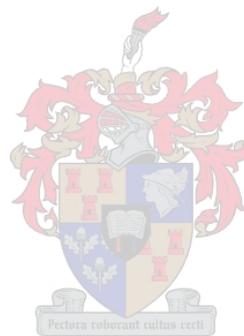
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Abstract

Globally weblogs have burgeoned since their development in the late nineties. The phenomenon has demystified the technical side of online publishing, allowing individuals without specialised knowledge to create and update their own websites.

Weblogs are already used in a number of professional sectors such as journalism, marketing, politics and now also education. This study is approached from a uses and gratifications framework and provides a broad overview of the emergence, structure, applications, pitfalls and future of blogs in education. Weblogs are also investigated in relation to other social software tools and learning theories.



Abstrak

Die gebruik van webjoernale wêreldwyd het gebloei sedert die verskynsel in die laat negentigs ontwikkel het. Dit is nou moontlik om webwerwe te skep en in stand te hou sonder 'n gespesialiseerde kennis van programmering.

Webjoernale het reeds 'n impak gemaak op 'n verskeidenheid professionele sektore soos joernalistiek, bemaking, politiek en nou ook die opvoedkunde. Hierdie studie word aangepak vanuit 'n gebruik- en gratifikasie-raamwerk en ondersoek webjoernale in die opvoedkunde.

Die opdrag gee 'n wye oorsig oor die ontwikkeling, struktuur, gebruik, hindernisse en toekoms van webjoernale in opvoedkundige omgewings. Aandag word ook gegee daaraan om webjoernale te ondersoek in verhouding tot ander sosiale sagteware en leerteorieë.

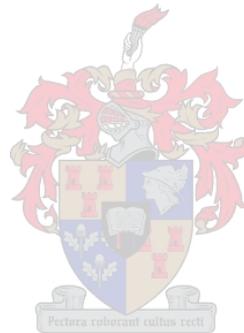


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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

We live in a society in which the media plays an important role. Croteau & Hoynes (2003:5) suggest that possibly media

“have become the dominant social institution in contemporary society, supplanting the influence of older institutions such as the educational system and religion”.

To balance out this power McQuail (as cited in Watson, 2003:101-102) tasks the media with a form of “public stewardship”. In his *social responsibility theory* he stresses that

“the media are under an obligation to fulfil their social functions, especially with regards to the transmission of information and the creation of a forum for different viewpoints” (Fourie, 2004:272).

The inception of the World Wide Web introduced an online dimension to the media world. This new media form has expanded rapidly. Inglis, Ling & Joosten (2000:13) propose that

“(t)here is the rise of new social movements, giving a voice to others that were previously marginalized. There is the emergence of multiple new discourses, some arising directly from developments in information technologies. ..”

Technological change has influenced both media and society. Croteau & Hoynes (2003:150) propose that computer networks defy the difference between a “producer” and “receiver” of media messages and combine the features of “mass” and “one-to-one” communication. The Web allows for contemporary modes of interaction and “challenge our assumptions about the nature of mass-mediated communication”.

Personal web sites existed since the Web was created and over time evolved into blogs, a phenomenon Stone (2002:3) suggests is taking over the web at an enormous speed. Weblogs were originally developed as internet-based,

personal publishing tools. In the past web publishing was reserved for those with technical knowledge, but software developments have made it possible for people with little or no programming skills to create and maintain their own sites. (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002:10).

Weblogs have taken off since their origin in the late nineties and are now emerging in professional sectors such as journalism, politics and marketing. The medium is also steadily gaining ground in education (Richardson, 2004).

Education has always been a predominately print-based endeavour. With his invention of the modern press, Gutenberg allowed the educational sector to publish educational texts and formalised the way in which information was disseminated.

McLuhan (1995:298-302) argues that this development had a downfall as it “evoked the walls of the classroom” and “isolated the scholar”. He contends that:



“(b)efore print the community at large was the centre of education. Today, information-flow and educational impact outside the classroom is so far in excess of anything occurring inside the classroom that we must reconsider the education process itself”
McLuhan (1995:302).

Gutenberg’s revolution allowed for mass producing educational texts, in turn the weblog revolution (due to its participatory nature) is opening up education to the masses.

“Over 500 years ago, Gutenberg invented ‘movable type’, and printing was born although it was for many years the preserve of the religious and the aristocratic. Today, we have a blogging tool called Movable Type, and anyone can print anything, just about anywhere, with no more than a computer, a mobile phone, or a printer. The main difference between printing in the 1400s and printing today, regardless of technology is that media have become participatory and personal” (Anon, 2006c).

This assignment proposes that blogs can fulfil the media's social responsibility within educational contexts and instead of displacing the educational system (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003:5) this media form could constructively contribute to it and possibly provide equilibrium between the information flow inside and outside the classroom.

1.2 Research question/s

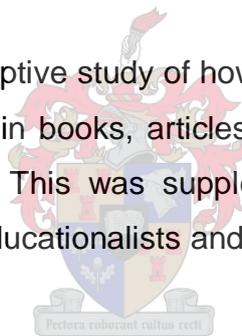
This assignment aims to provide an overview of how the medium of weblogs can be used in education and endeavours to answer the following research questions:

How are the media of blogs used in education?

How might the media of blogs be used in future education?

1.3 Methodology

This is a non-empirical, descriptive study of how the medium of blogs is used in education. Information found in books, articles and the World Wide Web was consolidated and compared. This was supplemented by unstructured email questions posed to various educationalists and weblog experts (see addendum A).



This study was not confined to one specific country or educational sector. The group of experts consulted were made up of a number of individuals who work in different educational contexts and represent different countries. This provides a broad, balanced view of weblogs in education

These experts were initially all asked the same questions, but the data was not processed in an empirical manner as they all work in different sectors and levels of education. Some experts do not work in a formal education sector; these respondents were selected on the basis of their expertise with web development and weblogs. The broad scope of respondents would not yield scientifically comparative data.

The researcher sent out an identical email to all selected experts. The content included the aim of the study and a request for them to answer 4 questions (see addendum A). The response varied:

- Out of a possible 17, 11 experts did not reply.
- Two respondents who were selected on basis of their weblog and web development expertise did not feel comfortable commenting on educational issues.
- Two experts initially requested extra time, but ultimately did not respond to the questions.
- One email delivery failed.

The aim of the study was to explore ways in which the weblog medium is currently used in education and can be used in future education and despite the fact that only 2 respondents out of a possible 17 provided a contribution the researcher decided to incorporate the comments. This decision was based on the following:

1. This was not an empirical study.
2. The email questionnaire was not intended to be the primary source of information.
3. Respondents communicated possible blog applications that was not found in literature and therefore necessary to include.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical point of departure for this study is one of the primitive, normative media theories pertaining to the functions of the press, namely the social responsibility theory (Fourie 2004: 272-273). McQuail (as cited in Fourie 2004: 272-273) lists a number of premises on which the social responsibility theory is based:

- The media have an important function to fulfil in society, especially with regard to supporting democratic political principles.

- The media are under obligation to fulfil their social functions, especially with regard to the transmission of information and the creation of a forum of viewpoints.
- The independence of media should be emphasised in relation to their responsibility towards society.
- The media should meet certain standards.

Though all premises are relevant to a broader investigation of blogs, it is specifically “the transmission of information and the creation of a forum of viewpoints” that concern blogs encountered within educational contexts.

The goal of this study is to investigate how blogs are used in education. By examining how media are used, this assignment adopts the principles of the uses and gratifications theory (Watson 2003:62-63). This theoretical approach “(shifts) attention from the message-makers of the mass communication process to the message-receivers: the audience”, and asks the central question: How do the audience *use* the media to *gratify* their needs?

Research by O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske and McQuail (as cited in Fourie 2004: 297) suggests 4 possible answers as to the probable gratifications that an audience derive through media use:

Diversion: Media provides the audience with a means of temporary “escaping” from reality.

Personal relationships: The media gratifies people’s need of companionship and social interaction.

Personal identity: People use media content to compare themselves to others.

Surveillance: Individuals use the media to gather information about the world around them.

1.5 Structure of Study

The chapters of the assignment are arranged as follows:

The first chapter includes the introduction and explains the research question, methodology, theoretical framework and structure of the study.

The second chapter comprises the literature review.

The third chapter unpacks the topic by describing the emergence and anatomy of blogs.

Chapter four places blogs in the context of other online learning tools

Chapter five is concerned with blogs as learning spaces and discusses various applicable learning theories.

Chapter six proposes uses for blogs in educational settings. These uses are categorised according to blog authors, readers, teachers and students.

Chapter seven lists potential pitfalls when using blogs within educational settings.

Chapter eight looks at the future of blogs.

Chapter nine is the concluding chapter. Recommendations for further research in the area of blogs as well as the limitations of the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1 The uses and gratifications theory and online media

Several studies (e.g Charney & Greenberg, 2001; Chou & Hsiao, 2000; Dimmick, Kline & Stafford, 2000; Eighmey & McCord, 1998; Ferguson & Perse, 2000; Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Kaye, 1998; Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999; LaRose, Mastro & Eastin, 2001; Lin, 1999; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Parker & Plank, 2000; Perse & Greenberg-Dunn, 1998; Song, LaRose, Eastin & Lin, 2004; Stafford & Stafford, 2001) have applied uses and gratifications to online media. All these studies “upheld one of the model’s basic propositions” (Palmgreen, Wenner & Rosengren as cited in LaRose & Eastin, 2004) namely that the theory sought to explain individual use of media. These studies and other internet related research also “reconfirmed a basic weakness of uses and gratifications: They did not explain media exposure very well” (LaRose & Eastin, 2004).

Ruggiero (2000) suggests that the exponential expansion of the internet has increased the influence of the uses and gratifications theory, as this medium requires “a higher level of interaction from its users in comparison with other traditional media”. This led to the exploration of possible new gratifications. Korgaonkar & Wolin (1999) added “dimensions of information, interactive, and economic control. Flanagin & Metzger (2001) included the following gratifications: “problem solving, persuading others, relationship maintenance, status seeking, and personal insight” and Charney & Greenberg (2001) suggest “coolness, sights and sounds, career and peer identity factors” should be added to the list.

Payne, Dozier, Nomai & Yagade (2003) applied the uses and gratifications theory to investigate interaction, surveillance, and diversion as uses associated with the Internet and newspapers. Altogether 128 students at a West Coast university in the USA were studied. Consistent with their hypotheses, they

concluded that there was a statistically significant preference for newspapers for surveillance and the Internet for diversion. The Internet was preferred for interaction, although the difference was not statistically significant.

2.2 Blogs and journalism

In his study Lowrey (2006) mapped the journalism-blogging relationship. He used a systems framework from the sociology of occupations and suggested that difficulties posed by external and internal factors have led journalism to desert some types of news information, these types have in turn been stolen by bloggers. These include “partisan expression, old stories, stories driven by non-elite sources, and highly specialized content”.

Wall (2005) analysed blogs that were active during the second US war with Iraq, during 2003. Her analysis suggested that these “war blogs” were a new form of journalism that lay emphasis on “personalization, audience participation in content creation and story forms that are fragmented and interdependent with other websites”.

Robinson (2006) drew from normative journalism theory to produce a textual analysis that also suggested that blogging is changing the traditional mainstream press. Like Wall, Robinson also credited this to the participatory nature of blogs and contended that “this evolution will affect what we know as the “truth” about our society and ourselves, what we mean by “community”, and how we understand reality”.

The web its social software applications such as blogs and wikis have opened the door to global participatory media. Traditional journalism has to come to terms with a new form of citizen journalism.

Time Magazine celebrated this evolution of the web by naming “you” the person of the year 2006. The magazine suggests that through the new web and its ability to create community and collaboration the individual has “(seized) the reins of global media” (Grossman, 2006).

Mark Glaser (as cited in eWeek, 2004), a columnist for the Online Journalism Review who specialises in writing about blogs, states that “things get picked up by bloggers that take a while to get picked up by the mainstream media”. However, he believes that “(b)loggers have to start from scratch in building trust”.

Johnson & Kaye (2004) conducted a study into the credibility perceptions of blogs. Altogether 3737 blog users were surveyed online. Almost three-quarters of respondents viewed blogs as moderately to very credible. The most important reason listed for this was that users relied on blogs because “they provide more depth and more thoughtful analysis than is available in other media”. Johnson & Kaye admitted that posting a survey online compromises random selection method and therefore “the results cannot be generalized to the Internet as whole or to blog users”.

The “Future of News” survey (Gough, 2006) contests these findings. The survey of more than 1 000 adults, half younger than 25, concluded that local TV remained the preferred source of news. The study also queried the influence of new media on consumer’s lives. Less than 5% of those surveyed have ever watched news on the internet and only 10% said that they would ever consider doing that. Only 3% of those surveyed visited blogs daily and two thirds either didn’t read blogs or didn’t know what they were.

2.3 Educational application

Weblogs are a fairly new medium within the educational sector and not a great deal of research exist concerning their educational application. An extensive search of printed and online literature yielded only a few studies. Williams & Jacobs (2004:5) criticised the academic community for being “a little slow getting out of the starting blocks”. They stressed that blogging “is a grassroots phenomenon” and suggest that information about blogging should be distributed throughout the blogosphere and not necessarily be published in scholarly journals.

Instone (2005) agrees that academic research on the topic is scarce and suggested that within educational settings blogs were mostly used as reflective tools (Williams & Jacobs as cited in Instone, 2005). Williams and Jacobs (2004) argued that weblogs have the potential to be a transformational technology in teaching and learning. Maag (2005) documented the use of blogs as an “interactive and effective educational method” for nursing education.

Du and Wagner (2005) empirically determined that weblog performance is an important predictor for learning outcome, while traditional coursework was not.

The research of Oravec (2002) reflected on the possibilities of using blogs to promote deeper learning, personal reflection and collaboration.

Oravec conducted another study (2003), this time focusing on weblogs in blended learning initiatives and contended that the building of weblogs encourage “student’s individual, critical voices within the broader context of classroom interactions”.

In their research into “content delivery in the blogosphere”, Ferdig and Trammel (2004) drew on the educational theories of Vygotski. They noted that the contextualisation of learning, by means of providing links to other materials, promotes the revision of learned concepts.

Chapter 3: Blog Emergence & Anatomy

3.1 Blog Emergence

It is difficult to identify exactly by whom and when blogs were created since

“...there was never a conscious decision by any single person to purposely invent the format. Weblogs evolved spontaneously on a handful of sites around the same time” (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002: 8).

Jacobs (as cited in Williams and Jacobs, 2004:1) believes that:

“Blogs have evolved along similar lines to other forms of human communication in that they are a product of convenience rather than design.”

It was the amalgamation of different tracks of development that led to the inception of blogs. These tracks of development include personal publishing, the invention of the personal computer, the inception of the World Wide Web and development of blog tools.

3.1.1 Personal publishing

Warlick (2005:17) suggests that the origins of weblogs can be traced back to the 18th century when “(a) new class of literate citizens was rising in parts of Europe and in the American Colonies.”

These educated individuals published their opinions and distributed them widely as pamphlets. The most famous was probably American, Thomas Pain. With his publication, Common Sense, he influenced the United States’ move to independence from England (Warlick, 2005:17).

These radical pamphleteers were not unlike what Stone christened the “feisty, intelligent, opinionated, subversive people” who blog. Through blogs people are able to “(converse) with an audience...” Where printed pamphlets were the past, “blogs are the future of personal publishing” (Stone, 2002: 9-10).

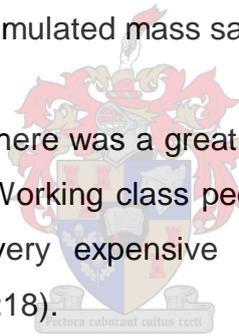
3.1.2 Personal computers

Another track of development that led to blog emergence was that of the personal computer (PC). A number of inventors and discoveries played vital roles. Most important of them was probably the work of German, Konrad Zuse (Anon, *undatedA*).

In 1938 Zuse created what is now considered the first freely programmable computer. The “Z1” led the way for the first automatic digital computer in 1939 and the first electronic computer in 1943. IBM started selling the 1400 series machine to businesses in 1960.

IBM was one of the ground-breaking firms in establishing the “market for a PC on every desk”. This started with the release of their first PC in August 1981. Apple Computer launched the first “truly usable desktop” computer: the Apple II in 1977, but it was IBM that stimulated mass sales of PC’s (Scott-Joynt, 2004).

Prior to the arrival of the PC there was a great divide between the creation and consumption of information. Working class people could not afford to produce information as it required very expensive equipment and “highly trained technical staff” (Warlick, 2005:18).



3.1.3 The World Wide Web

Technology was further de-mystified with the inception of the World Wide Web. The vision behind the Internet “was that people should not have to deal with the technology stuff” (Groff quoted in Ward, 2006).

While working as an engineer at the Cern physics laboratory in Switzerland, Tim Berners-Lee, a graduate from the Queen’s College at Oxford University, suggested a global hypertext project. His intention was that it can be used as a research tool so people could work together “combining their knowledge in a web of hypertext documents”. This project started in October 1990 (Stone, 2002: 3-4). It was also during 1990 that the first commercial Internet dial-up access provider, The World, came on-line (Anon, *undated*).

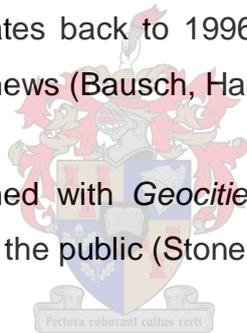
On 6 August 1991, Berners-Lee's newly developed computer code was placed on the *alt.hypertext* discussion group for others to download and try out. With this the World Wide Web went public (Ward, 2006).

Berners-Lee continued to develop the web and between 1991 and 1993 he documented this process, "(co-ordinated) feedback from users" and provided "(links) to new sites as they came online" (Stone, 2002: 4). For this reason Berners-Lee is considered to be the very first blogger (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002: 8) and (Stone, 2002: 4).

3.1.4 Homepages

In 1994 Justin Hall started his web page called "Links from the Underground". Hall is seen as one of the early "predecessors to the weblog" as he used this site to "share links to interesting sites and tell tales of his travel" Micheal Sippey's site, "The Filter", dates back to 1996. There he published scholarly work and links to technology news (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002:9).

In 1996 web pages burgeoned with *Geocities*, a free web hosting service, introducing web publishing to the public (Stone, 2002:5).



"Early on people started to use web pages as a way to express themselves in a way that other technologies simply did not allow. Web code was very tolerant of mistakes and encouraged people to play around with it" (Ward, 2006).

In 1997 Dave Winer, CEO of Userland Software, began a site with daily postings on technology news and information about interesting websites (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002, 9-10). It was also in 1997 that Jorn Barger compiled a list of links on his site. He referred to his site as a "weblog", coining the term forever.

Like Winer and Barger, Jesse James Garrett compiled a list of sites that were similar to his (Blood, 2000:7). This list was sent to Cameron Barrett, who at the beginning of 1999 published it on a website called CamWorld. It included 23 weblogs and is believed to be all those in existence at that stage. From here on

bloggers with similar sites started submitting their blogs to be included in the CamWorld list. There now was an official community of bloggers.

Early in 1999 Brigitte Eaton compiled an even more extensive list of blogs on the *EatonWeb Portal*. Eaton defined blogs as “a site with dated entries” (Stone, 2002:6). Webloggers held opposing views about the definition of blogs, but in the end Eaton’s simple classification prevailed for the time being (Blood, 2000: 8).

The original weblogs were link-driven, supplying visitors with commentary about and links to other sites (Stone, 2002:7). This concept of pointing visitors elsewhere was contrary to the main objective of commercial websites: to keep visitors on a website for as long as possible. Some of the initial media reports about blogs also emphasised this “notion of leading readers elsewhere” (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002:10).

Although a sizable number of websites were initially established, the sites remained static. After creation “(t)he page would just languish, never to be updated again”. The world wide web was “growing, but it seemed to be growing out instead of up” (Stone, 2002:5).

The reason for this was simple: there were no specialised weblog tools available at that stage and bloggers had to write their own software to update their sites. The few people who were cultivating weblogging prior to 1999 were mainly technology professionals (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002:10).

3.1.5 Blogging Tools

July 1999 a site called *Pitas* went public. It was the first tool dedicated solely to the “(creation), (management) and (maintenance) of blogs”. This site offered users:

- a blog account that was hosted for free at www.pitas.com;
- features that allow for site customisation;

- simple content management tools for easy posting;
- an automatic archiving system; and
- templates to challenge more html competent users (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002:10).

Soon more blog services were launched. In August 1999 came both *Blogger* and *GrokSoup*; and soon Dave Winer's *Edit This Page* followed suit (Stone, 2002:8). Of all of these blog-building tools, *Blogger*, due to its user-friendly interface and large posting space, had the biggest impact. This came as a surprise to creators, Pyra Labs:

“We started a company with some notions about better ways to manage information, both for personal and team-based project work. We were developing, basically, Web-based groupware. That morphed into groupware specifically designed for Web teams, for which we thought Blogger would be one simple piece. Of course, it was the simple thing that proceeded to envelope everything else. After a while we realised that the blog thing was interesting enough to pursue in itself” (Williams as cited in Stone, 2002:8).

Blogger, like *Pitas* offered blogging tools, but there were a number of differences, Blogger



- required that you have your own website when signing-up;
- automatically processed posts by converting them into static files and then transmitting the files to your server;
- offered multiple weblogs through one account;
- had additional ways to individualise your site; and
- gave users the choice on how they wanted their archived posts to appear (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002:10-11).

According to Scott (2004) blog tools that specifically led to the “rapid adoption of blogs” were:

1. “point-and-click software that required no knowledge of HTML coding; and
2. RSS applications for content syndication and personalised aggregation”.

3.1.6 Rich Site Summary

With the growth of blogs the need for a networking tool developed (Scott 2004). Rich Site Summary (RSS), sometimes referred to as Really Simple Syndication, is a ‘lightweight XML format designed specifically for syndicating web content’ (Stone, 2002:206).

“(RSS) provides the ability to efficiently communicate information to not just family and friends, but anyone on the internet who may be interested, whether you know them or not. This very basic implementation of XML is composed of a simple text file. Weblog applications equipped to generate an RSS file enables anyone to produce a custom news feed by simply posting your thoughts, ideas, and experiences to an online daily journal“ (Harsch, 2003).

Scott (2004) believes that “this was a more significant development than merely another example of the increasing need for online content guides”.

3.1.7 Blogging Explosion

After the inception of blogging tools, blogs flourished. Through a random survey of 10 000 blogs on different blog-hosting services it was estimated that by mid 2005, 31.6 million blogs have been created on blog services (Henning, 2003). Bialik contends that “measuring the impact of blogs requires more than counting” (Bialik, 2005) as not all blogs created, remains active.

It can not be denied however that “blogging is no passing Internet fad” and though a large number of blogs are created and abandoned “the blogosphere continues to expand unabated” (Whelan cited in Williams & Jacobs 2004:2).

It now includes “group blogs, family blogs, community blogs, and corporate blogs”, there are also “blogs defined by their content” such as WarBlogs (blogs created for communication to and from a warzone), LibLogs (library blogs) and Edublogs (a new type of blog that has begun to emerge in educational circles)” (Williams & Jacobs 2004:2). Blogtypes will be investigated later in this chapter.

3.1.8 Emergence of Blogs in Education

Education circles were slower to adopt blogs due to issues with access, privacy, and security (Richardson, 2004:1). Blogs have only recently started becoming a medium of teaching and learning. Richardson (a pioneer educational blogger) states that:

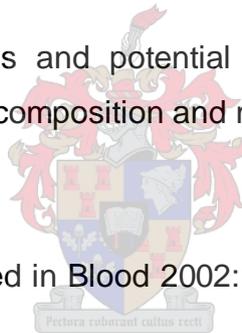
"More and more teachers and schools are starting to experiment with the technology as a way to communicate with students and parents" (Richardson quoted in Downes, 2004a:16).

He further suggests that blogs are used to "archive and publish student work, learn with far-flung collaborators, and 'manage' the knowledge that members of the school community create".

In order to explore the uses and potential of weblogs in education, it is important to understand their composition and mechanics.

3.2 What is a weblog?

Author Douglas Rushkoff (cited in Blood 2002:1), believes the blog "represents the internet at its best".



Eaton originally defined blogs as "a site with dated entries" (Stone, 2002:6). Since then blog definitions have ranged from the artistic, comparing it with "coffeehouse conversation" (Blood, 2002:1) to the political: the "unedited, published voice of the people" (Dave Winer, cited in Ferdig & Trammell, 2004:1). Defining blogs in specific terms are complicated (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002:7). "Since their inception weblogs have changed and have overlapped with similar forms of online publishing."

"Blogging has evolved from its origins as a medium for the online publication of personal diaries to a respected vehicle for editorials on specific topics. In their latest incarnation, blogs represent an alternative to mainstream media publications" (Educause, 2005a)

Paquet lists 5 features that a representative blog exhibits: “personal editorship; a hyperlinked posting structure; frequent updates; free public access to the content via the internet; and archived postings” (Paquet as cited in Bartlett-Bragg, 2003: 2).

Barger (1999) was the first to describe blogs and in his original definition he, like Paquet, pointed to the personal, link-driven, accessibility and chronological features of the blog. He defined a blog as “a webpage where a weblogger (sometimes called a blogger, or a pre-surfer) ‘logs’ all the other webpages she finds interesting. The format is normally to add the newest entry at the top of the page so that repeat visitors can catch up by simply reading down the page until they reach a link they saw on their last visit”.

Jay Cross’s definition of blogs read:

“A blog is defined as a Website with dated entries, usually by a single author, often accompanied by links to other blogs that the site’s editor visits on a regular basis. Think of a blog as one person’s public diary or suggestion list” (Cross as cited in Siemens, 2002:2).

Downes (2004a:16-18) refers to blogs as a form of “personal publishing”, but argues that definitions that assign only “online diary features” to blogs confuse them with personal journals. He points out that personal journals, or online diaries, developed separately from weblogs and were almost extinct by 1998. Downes refers to Cathrine Seipp’s definition as an example of how blogs are confused with personal journals:

“In general, ‘blog’ used to mean a personal online diary, typically concerned with boyfriend problems or techie news...But after September 11 a slew of new or refocused media junkie/political sites reshaped the entire Internet media landscape. Blog now refers to a Web journal that comments on the news – often by criticising the media and usually in rudely clever tones – with links to stories that back up the commentary with evidence” (Seipp as cited in Downes, 2004a:18).

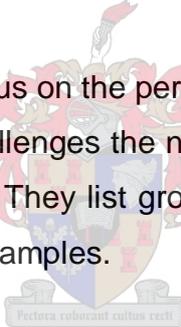
Meg Hourihan disentangles blogs from online diaries with this statement:

“Whether you’re a warblogger who works by day as a professional journalist or you’re a teenage high school student worried about your final exams, you do the same thing: you use your blog to link to your friends and rivals and comment on what they’re doing. Blog posts are short, informal, sometimes controversial and sometimes deeply personal no matter what topic they approach” (Hourihan as cited in Downes, 2004a:18).

Blood (as cited in Rodzvilla, 2002:ix) contends that weblogs are currently defined by format. Hourihan concurs and further expands:

“(i)f we look beneath the content of weblogs, we can observe the common ground all bloggers share – the format. The weblog format provides a framework for our universal blog experiences, enabling the social interactions we associate with blogging...These tools spit out our varied content in the same format – archives, permalinks, time stamps, and date headers” (Hourihan as cited in Siemens, 2002:1).

A number of blog definitions focus on the personal editorship of blogs. Williams & Jacobs (2004:3) challenges the notion that “a blog has to be owned and operated by an individual”. They list group blogs, family blogs, community blogs and corporate blogs as examples.



3.3 Blog typology

Siemens’s (2002:1-2) inventory of blogs include blogs that are defined by their content such as:

- News
- Links/Commentary
- Art
- Editorial
- Technology
- New Media/Journalism
- Reform
- Sports
- Education

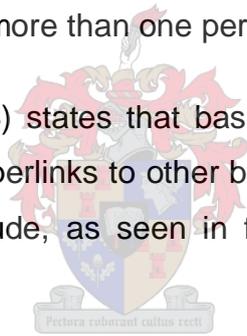
Faith and Community.

Williams & Jacobs (2004:3) add Warblogs and Library Blogs to this list. Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan (2002:211, 220-229) highlight that blogs also have potential for business.

Blog types can be classified according to various factors such as topic, purpose, audience and their media content. Within the University of Warwick Mortimer (2005) notes two kinds: personal and non-personal blogs. She differentiates them as follows:

1. “Personal blogs usually have one owner who writes entries on the blog”
2. “Non-personal blogs might be set up for a research group or a specific project and may have more than one person contributing entries.”

Lankshear and Knobel (2003) states that basically there are 2 types of blog posts: “those that include hyperlinks to other blogs or websites, and those that don't”. From this they conclude, as seen in fig. 1 that there are at least 4 categories for blogs:



1. Blogs that provide links to other blogs or websites.
2. A journal-type blog with commentary and links to other blogs or websites.
3. Journal-type blogs.
4. Meta blogs. “These are weblogs about or concerning weblogs, and include hypertext indices of weblogs, weblog aggregators that calculate the most popular blog posts each day based on the number of links made to that post by others”.

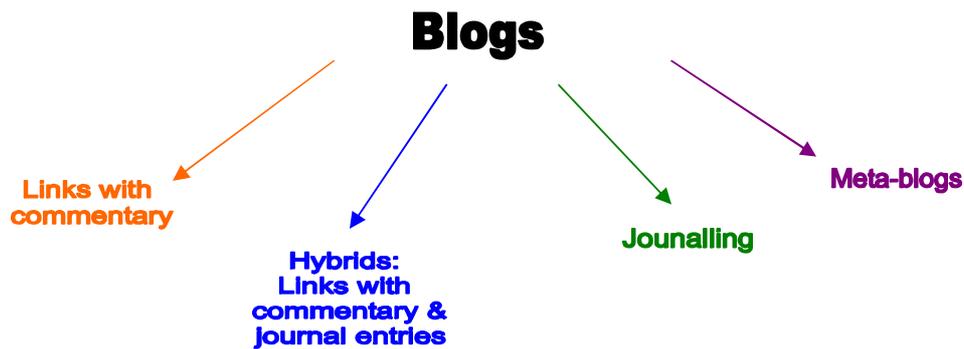


Fig 1. Blogs: Four categories (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003)

Lankshear and Knobel (2003) also devised 4 sub-categories for the “links with commentary-type” blog (See Fig 2). The sub-categories are:

Targetted blogs have specific audiences brought together around specific topics.

News filters: track down non-mainstream sources with commentary and perspectives on current events.

Personal: These blogs are mostly idiosyncratic.

Community blogs: This allows for collaborative posting. The community can be a closed one, with a list of people with access to post to the blog, or it can be an open community where any one can post and entry.

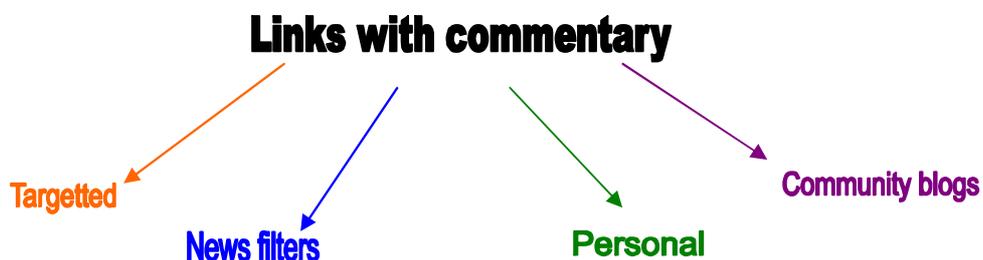


Figure 2. Links with commentary-type blogs: Four sub-categories (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003)

The original blogs were textbased, but blogs have evolved to accommodate audio (podcasting), photos (photoblogs), and video (vlogs). The newest addition is blogging by means of mobile device (moblogging).

3.3.1 Podcasting

Podcasting, also called audioblogs (Warlick, 2005:140; Hargis & Wilson, *undated*), combines the “informal, engaging” features of a blog and the strengths of an MP3 player. Students are already familiar with the iPod and MP3 player and therefore they are comfortable with the underlying technology of podcasting.

Hargis & Wilson (*undated*) note that though “podcasting is a child of blogging”, it did not originate only from blogs. They explain that podcasts evolved from a combination of influences including broadcasting, computers, internet and personal media devices such as the walkman and the iPod. See Fig 3.



Fig 3. Heredity of Podcasting (Hargis & Wilson, *undated*)

The term “Podcasting” was “inspired” by the Apple iPod, though now only refers to “any software and hardware combination that permits automatic downloading of audio files” (Educause, 2005b).

Rodgers (*undated*) identifies a podcast as

“content such as a radio show that is recorded in the ubiquitous MP3 format and broadcast (or more accurately, published) on a web site for download by anyone who cares to listen to it on a mobile device or a computer. Through the use of RSS, information about the web site and the podcasts (or other content) that is available on the web site is provided in a lightweight XML format. The RSS files, or “feeds,” can be harvested by content aggregators designed for podcasts, such as iPodder or iPodderX, or by other aggregators, such as iTunes, all of which can download “subscriptions” either on demand or at predetermined intervals.”

Warlick (2005: 142) illustrates this process in the diagram below (Fig 4):



Fig 4. Process of podcasting (Warlick, 2005:142)

Podcasting can be more successful in conveying emotion than text-only blogs (Dembo as cited in Warlick, 2005:141). Dembo believes that “podcasting is a literal voice that complements the virtual voice” of his blog.

3.3.2 Photoblogs, Vlogs/Vogs and Moblogs

Photoblogs host photos, sometimes in combination with text. Van House, Davis, Takhteyev, Ames and Finn (2004:6) state that the increasing popularity of photoblogging can be attributed to its “ability to serve the social uses of memory, creating and maintaining relationships, and self expression”.

Vlogs/Vogs refer to videoblogs. Hoem (*undated*:3-4) explains that “Audio- and videoblogs are based on temporal media and there are no established tradition which they are closely related to”. He further states that one should not compare videoblogs to television or private filmmaking. “(B)roadcasting blogs are personal and at the same time they are shared by people outside the private sphere”.

Photoblogs and vlogs can be moblogs and visa versa, but they are not necessarily one and the same thing (Anonymous 2004). Moblogging or “mobile web logging” is the process of posting to your weblog via mobile phone or handheld device (Perrone: 2002). Content may be text, images media files or a combination.

Rheingold (2003) predicts that moblogging "is one of the leading indicators to watch as the shape of the new mediasphere becomes visible. The phenomenon's future will be further discussed in chapter 8.

3.4 Blog Elements

Before examining the elements of blogs and blog posts, the types of pages that blogs can carry will be discussed.

3.4.1 Types of pages

Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan (2002:91-92) lists 3 types of pages that blogs can have:

1. The Index page:

This is the first page that visitors to your site will view, the latest posts will be visible.

2. Archive pages:

These pages automatically store pages from the index page permanently.

3. Additional pages:

Additional pages can include information, for example about the author, or photos.

3.4.2 Blog elements

Fig 5 is used to illustrate Warlick's (2005) list of possible blog elements.

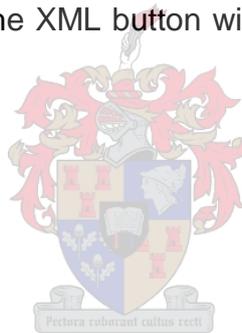
The image shows a screenshot of a web browser displaying a blog page titled "Exactly 2¢ Worth" by David Warlick. The page content includes a main article titled "When do I Blog?" dated March 21, 2005, at 11:30. The article discusses the author's experience at the MACH conference and the differences between wikis, forums, and blogs. A diagram in the middle of the article illustrates the relationships between Wikis, Forums, and Blogs. The page also features a sidebar with a "Blogroll" of other bloggers, a "My Books" section, and a "Tech Learning Blogroll".

Annotations on the right side of the page identify the following elements:

- a - Banner
- b - Blog Title
- c - Blog Subtitle
- d - Links
- e - Calendar
- f - Archives
- g - RSS/XML
- h - Copyright Statement
- i - Personal Pictures
- j - Shameless Self Promotion

Fig 5. Blog Elements (Warlick, 2005:26)

- a) **Banner:** Most blogs have banners; it gives the page its own identity.
- b) **Title:** Blog name
- c) **Subtitle:** Describes the focus of the blog
- d) **Links:** a list of websites the blog author finds valuable. By clicking on a link the reader can automatically visit any particular website featured.
- e) **Calendar:** This calendar notates the day a post was added to the blog.
- f) The **archive** provides a link to older articles.
- g) **RSS (Syndication):** The XML button with which a reader can subscribe to a blog's RSS feed.
- h) **Copyright statement**
- i) **Pictures/Images**
- j) **Personal information**



3.4.3 Post Elements

The post is the “atomic unit” (Doctorow as cited in Scott, 2004) of a blog. It is also known as an entry. Warlick (2005:32-34) explores the post elements of blogs. Fig 6 on pg 27 was used as basis for the explanations:

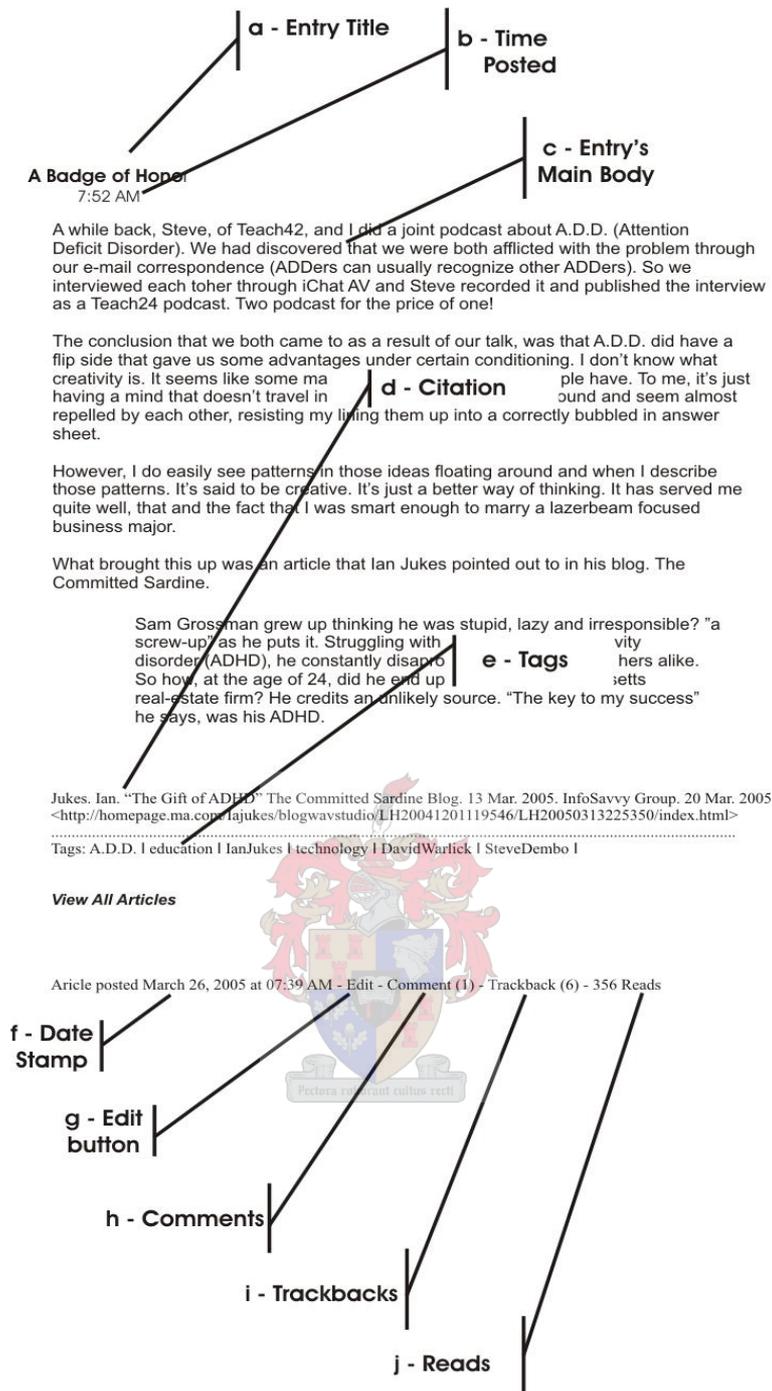


Fig 6. Blog Post Elements (Warlick, 2005:31)

- a) **Title:** This is the subject heading under which the article will appear in the archive.
- b) The **time** and **date stamps** are usually at the top or bottom of an entry and indicates exactly when the article was posted.

- c) The **body** is the post or entry itself. This can vary in length and can include text, hypertext, images, video or sound files.
- d) **Citations** or references used.
- e) **Tags** are active links in a blog entry that connect reader to more information.
- f) The **datestamp** is the official date for the blog entry.
- g) A blogger uses the **edit button** to make changes or to update an entry.
- h) Readers who wish to leave **comments** do so within the commenting function.
- i) **Trackback** provides a way for other bloggers who want to write about your entry to link their readers to your article.
- j) **Reads** indicate the number of people who have looked at your article.



We have looked at the definitions of blogs, their typology and the elements that they are made up of. Blogs can also be classified as asynchronous learning tools and social software. In the next chapter social software will be described and blogs will be compared to other asynchronous social software tools such as: virtual worlds, wikis, content management systems, message boards, and online conferencing.

CHAPTER 4: Blogs in context of other social software tools for education

4.1 Definition

Gorrissen (as cited in Kloos 2006:24-25) provides this broad definition for social software:

“Social software is software that is aimed at simplifying the achievement and enduring of networks among people.”

Kloos (2006:24) believes that the arrival of social software has played a role in bringing about an important “mindshift”. People are now collaborating to “develop new structures and content” (Kolbitsch and Mauer as cited in Kloos, 2006:24).

This development that “support(s) group interaction” (Chen, Cannon, Gabrio, Liefer, Toye & Bailey, 2005:1) has progressed to a range of forms. There are a number of tools of which Wang, Fix & Bock (2004) believe the blog is one of the most widely used.



This chapter only focuses on four asynchronous (interaction not occurring at the same time) tools and their relation to blogs. These tools are: Content Management Systems, Virtual Learning Environments, Wikis and Discussion Boards.

4.2 Content Management Systems

The previous chapter broached the subject of content management systems (CMS) from a technical angle and it was discovered that blogs are good examples of CMS (Warlick, 2005:58-61). Warlick points that schools and school districts find CMS effective for their school and class websites, especially because content is swiftly updated.

The process is illustrated in Fig 7:

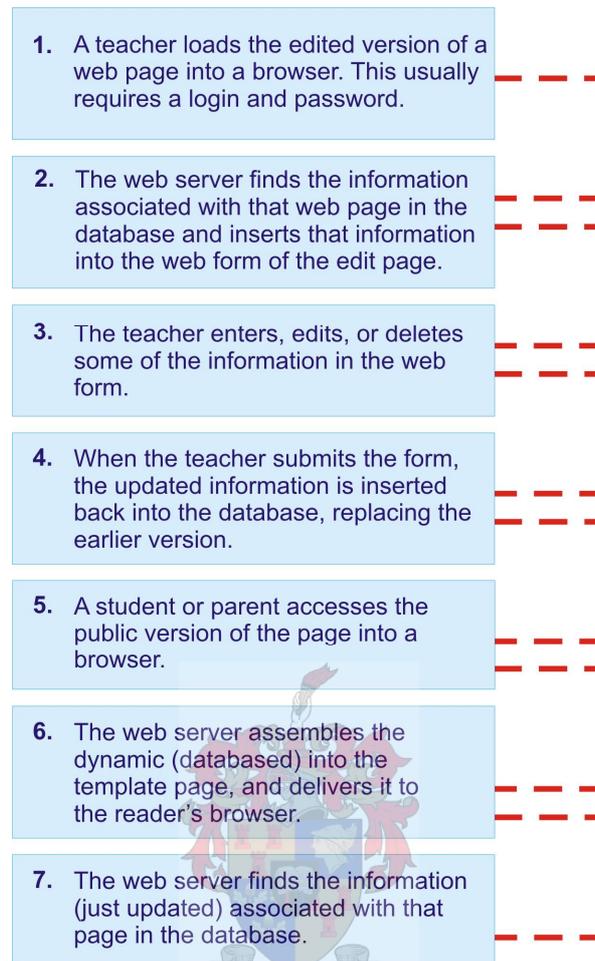


Fig 7. Updating a content management system (Warlick 2005:57-58)

In the past the term CMS suggested “large and extremely expensive software packages” (Bausch, Haughey, & Hourihan, 2002:144). To distinguish between the two, “weblog content management systems” are at times referred to as “microcontent management systems”.

In an interview (Anonymous, 2006b) Jim Murphy, research director of Knowledge Management at AMR Research, suggests that compared to content management systems, some blogs (and wikis) still struggle to integrate and search information, specifically if the information are in different formats such as pdf-files or non-text-based documents.

4.3 Virtual Learning Environments

A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is best described as “a web based platform supporting a more or less integrated suite of tools to support online learning” (McMullin, 2005:74). Dillenbourg (2000:9) contends that VLEs are not only reserved for distance education, but can effectively complement face-to-face education.

It has already been established that a VLE is a specifically “designed information space” (Dillenbourg, 2000:2) that supports “educational interactions”. Content can vary from text to three-dimensional material. VLEs qualify as social software as not only do they provide a platform for communication, but they are also “co-construct(ed)” by students.

Virtual learning systems can be commercial, in this instance licences are sold to educational institutions. Examples of proprietary systems include WebCT and Blackboard. Moodle and OLAT are “open-source” versions. Open-source VLE’s are made up of open access source code that are freely distributed (Perens, 2006).

The terms VLE and MLE are occasionally used interchangeably. A Managed Learning Environment (MLE) includes “the whole range of information systems and processes” of an educational institution “that contribute directly to learning and the management of that learning” (Everett, *undated*). This means that if an educational institution has a VLE, it would be a subsystem of the institution’s MLE as seen in Fig 8 on pg 32.

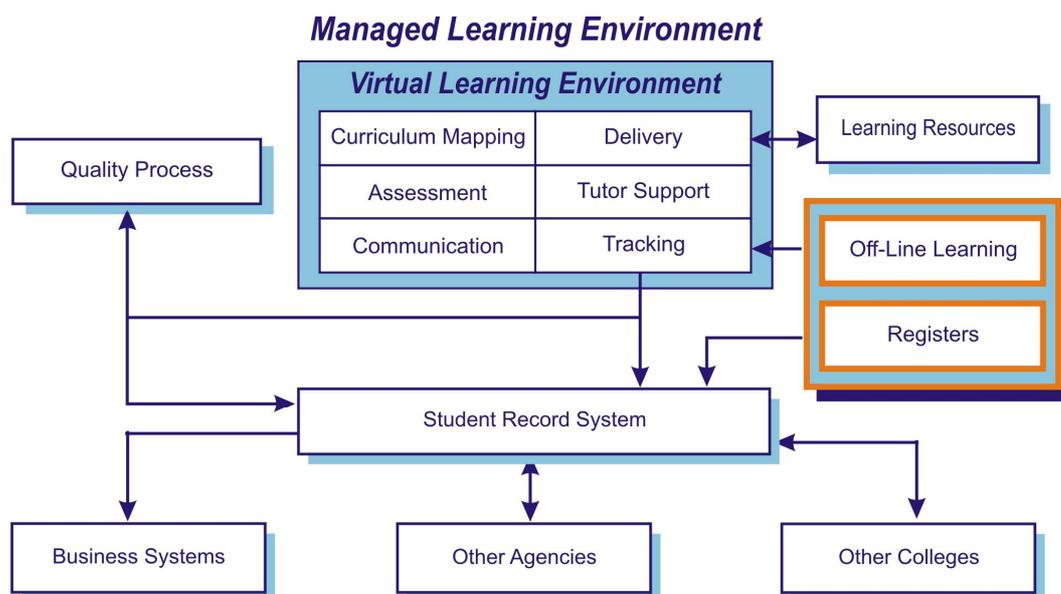
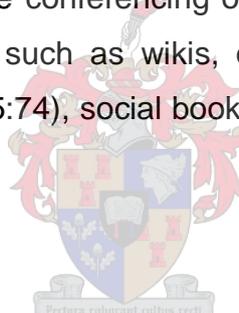


Fig 8. VLE as subsystem within the MLE (Everett, undated)

The “integrated suite of tools” that VLE’s support can include synchronous social software such as online conferencing or chat (Dillenbourg, 2000:5) and asynchronous learning tools such as wikis, online assignment submissions, online quizzes (McMullin 2005:74), social bookmarking and blogs (Kloos, 2006: 25).



VLEs and blogs can have 2 types of relationships.

1. Blogs can be a tool that forms part of a larger VLE; or
2. Blogs can be adapted to act as VLEs themselves.

Firstly, due to the fact that VLEs accommodate social software, a blog can form a subsystem of a VLE. See fig 9 below:

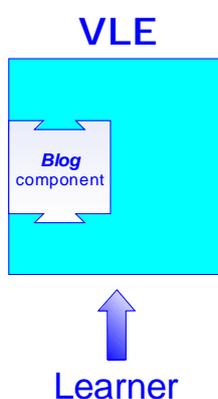
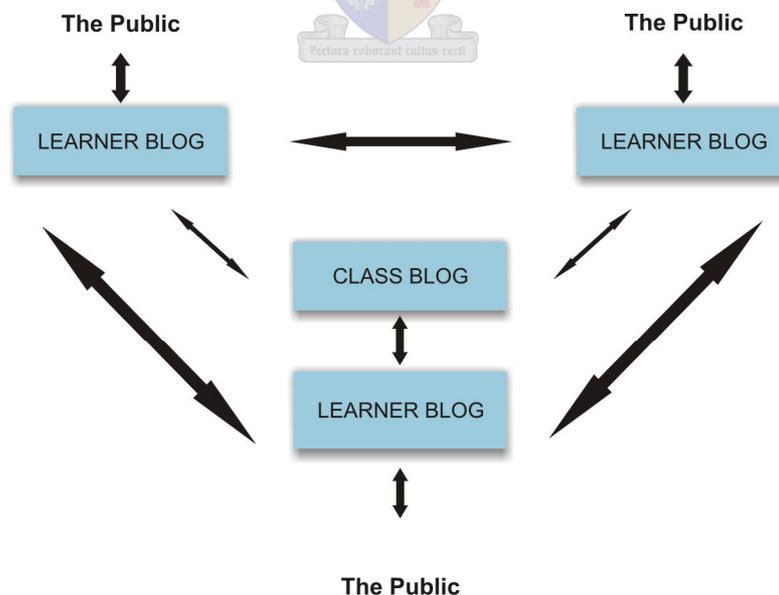


Fig 9. Blog as a subsystem of the VLE (Adapted from Trafford 2005)

Trafford (2005) raises the issue that although most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have some form of a VLE it is mostly utilised for the “delivery of information”. HEIs do not generally include substantial amounts of content that have been authored by students into their VLEs. Consequently personal/reflective blogs of students seem to be rarely included into institutional VLEs.

The University of Warwick in the UK is one of the exceptions since it boasts a “home-grown and heavily customised e-learning system built around blogs”. This introduces the second type of relationship that can occur between blogs and VLEs: Blogs themselves can be adapted to form VLEs.

The University of Warwick’s blog/VLE system is a complicated one (Trafford, 2005). Stanley (*undated*) refers to Barbara Deu’s blog-project¹, *Bee Online*, to illustrate simpler blog-based classroom VLEs. *Bee Online* was originally a class group blog. Students had their own private blogs and collaborated on the *Bee Online* shared space. Through adding comment and chat facilities, the blog was opened up to the public as can be seen in Fig 10:



Public Communicative Learner-Class Blog VLE

Fig 10. Public Communicative Learner-Class Blog VLE (Stanley, undated)

¹ *Bee online* available at <http://www.beeonline.blogspot.com/>

Stanley (*undated*) notes that by providing access to the public the interactivity of *Bee Online* was increased. He argues that if teachers “are interested in opening up this environment” that they should choose the blog-based VLE above the more controlled learning environments such as WebCT and Blackboard.

4.4 Wikis

Originally dubbed the WikiWiki Web (Warlick, 2005:63) the main objective for this development was to enable a group of people to “collaboratively build and maintain a website”. Wiki is the Hawaiian word for quick and loosely translated WikiWiki means very quick. WikiWiki Web has since been shortened to only Wiki.

The original developers, Leuf and Cunningham (as cited in Schwartz, Clark, Cossarin & Rudolph, 2004) offered the following definition for wikis:

“(A) wiki is a freely expandable collection of interlinked webpages, a hypertext system for storing and modifying information – a database, where each page is easily edited by any user with a forms-capable Web browser client.”

The wiki’s collaborative nature makes it useful in education. Learners are invited “to participate in collaboratively building resources through a wiki themselves” (McMullin, 2005:72).

Fig 11 on pg 35 is a random screenshot of a wiki off the Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia. The blue text are active links leading to other wikis about that specific topic.

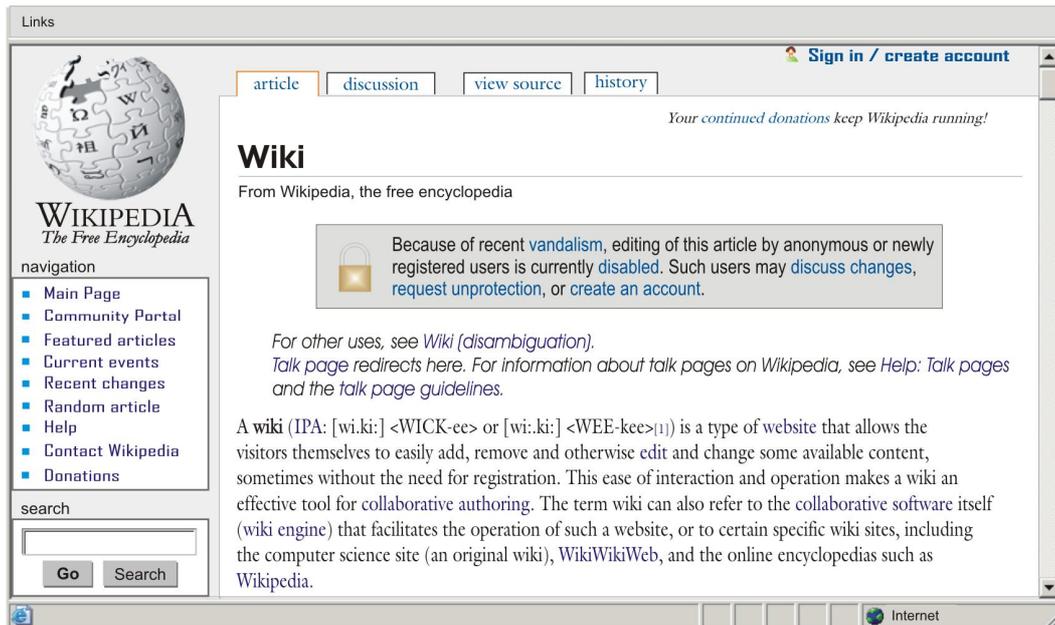


Fig 11. Random screenshot of a wiki on the Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (Wikipedia, undated)

Warlick (2005: 68-70) cites specific uses for wikis in the classroom such as: “team collaborations”, “classroom dictionary(s)”, “story starters”, “collaborative note book(s)” and “professional collaboration” for educational managers.

In the higher education sector the usage of wikis are currently restricted to that of “knowledge repositories” with “definite purpose and structure” (Schwartz, Clark, Cossarin & Rudolph, 2004:2). This is due to the fact that they have “open access... for editing” and essential content is at risk to be changed or tampered with.

McMullin (2005) also mentions that some express the notion that the information held by wikis is not reliable. He does however argue that theoretical and empirical evidence prove that wikis can hold quality content. Through “peer review” intentionally corrupted information on wiki sites were rapidly repaired.

Blogs and wikis are often compared. Wagner (2003:132) views wikis as an expansion on the blog-experience and encourages teachers and students who already effectively use blogs to explore wikis.

“Wikis take the process of group writing and knowledge sharing far beyond weblogs and can be a great enabler for student centred learning.”

Blogs and wikis are similar in that they are both examples of “groupware”, each providing a possible platform for “collaborative work” (McMullin: 2005). This shared feature means that “user communities” can be found at both blogs and wikis (Schwartz et al, 2004:1).

Blogs and wikis differ in that “(A) wiki can be a blog, but a blog does not have to be a wiki” and most blogs are not wikis (McMullin, 2005). All wikis have search functions and promote content over form. Blogs on the other hand, endorse form above content and not all blogs have search functions.

Structure-wise wikis are considered to be more flexible. (Schwartz et al, 2004:1). Once “a blog addition is posted, it often can not be edited”. Blogs are arranged in reverse chronological order whilst wikis are structured according to “subject divisions”.

McMullin (2003) points out that when it comes to access: “Wikis are by default open to anyone within the domain served by the wiki”, but can be protected against “uninvited users”. Blogs “are secured against open collaboration”, but can be adapted to allow for “limited collaboration”.

Section 4.5 will revisit the comparison, this time including discussion boards.

4.5 Discussion boards

Discussion boards are one of the older social software tools (Warlick, 2005:70-71). They originally started as email-lists. An internet based discussion board

“is a webpage that includes a web form that people can use to submit their message, and a listing of the messages and their authors that have already been posted. Open messages can be submitted and existing messages can be responded to.”

The discussion board is also known by other terms such as “discussion group”, “discussion forum”, “message board” and “online forum” (Harman and Koochang, 2005). This study uses the word “discussion board” to include all these terms.

In the table (Fig 12) below Northover (2002) summarises all the advantages and disadvantages of discussion boards.

Purpose	Pros of discussion boards (db)	Cons of discussion boards
Tutor-Student communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • questions and answers are available to others • ensures all information is equally shared • permanent record of all postings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dependent on accessing db to read postings • email tends to be more readily accessed
Student-Student communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • group db gives a convenient place for collaborative work • students learn from each other • accessible at any time • threads of discussion are clear • contributions can be composed and well-considered before posting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as above • language confidence can be a barrier to willingness of contributions • ‘lurking’ can be difficult to discourage if participation is required
‘Personal’ contributions, eg. personal diary/journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • group of one can provide a personal db to be used as a journal • some WCMS can provide an anonymous forum for contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘class’ discussions are a public forum for all members of the course
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear archive of all contributions for assessing • discussion can be closed at the final date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • requirements for assessment must be clearly stated • can be difficult to determine ‘original’ thought

Fig 12. Advantages and disadvantages of discussion boards (Northover, 2002)

Ferdig and Trammel (2004:2) suggest that discussion boards and blogs share a number of constructive features for education. They do however maintain that blogs are essentially a more advanced learning tool. Furthermore discussion boards are shared by many and does not offer students “full control” and “ownership over their online content” like blogs do.

Holtz (2005) concurs that one of the main differences between blogs and discussion boards is “control”. Where discussion boards are concerned “anybody can initiate a topic”, but “[o]nly the owner of the blog can open a subject for discussion”. Holtz notes that the very nature of the discussion board creates the “expectation of participation” whereas with blogs the main purpose is to read the content.

The centralised authorship of blogs can help them to easily become news sources while the decentralised nature of the discussion forum is ideal for group input (LeFever, 2004). Weblogs can also host a number of social software tools and always published in reverse chronological order. The

discussion board's format evolves with the content input from the participants. Blogs allow for quicker development of "personal connections" and because of centralised authorship is less likely to have to deal with unsavoury content or spam. Figure 13 summarises the differences between blogs and message boards.

	Weblogs	Message Boards
Locus of Control	Centralized and personal	Decentralized and group
Authoring of New Topics	Centralized: Individual or small group drives all new topics	Decentralized: Group shares equal responsibility to post new topics
Intent	Personal accounts, news, reflection	Group input, decision making, collaboration
Responses	Comments are extraneous, not required	Replies are required for a discussion
Tools	RSS, Aggregation, Trackback, Permalinking, Cross linking, etc are currently in the weblog domain	Message board may integrate new tools, but most have not. This is quickly changing
Chronology	Reverse chronological order of topics on front page	Wide variety of topic or discussion organization and presentation
Personal Connections	Deeper look into one person or small group's thinking	A broader look at a large group's thoughts in group context
Pollution control	Can be unspammable or unflame-able by others without loss of primary value	Must be managed closely to deal with spam or flames
Content Buckets	Weblog topics are all presented on the weblog front page and then archived into categories.	Message board discussions are often presented in multiple places across the online community and archived independently.

Copyright 2004 Common Craft, LLC

Fig 13. Blogs vs Message boards (LeFever, 2004)

4.6 To blog, to wiki or to discussion board?

To distinguish between when to use a wiki, blog or discussion board, Warlick (2005:78-80) uses their outcome and format as criteria. All three are information tools and revolve around information, knowledge and idea building (see figure 14). Warlick suggests that discussion boards "are usually not intended to be public documents with a formal message". Their outcome is to build ideas through reflective conversation.

“Wikis are much more concerned with constructing a document (content) with a formal message and purpose” (Warlick, 2005:78-80). The outcome in this instance is that the wiki helps its target audience to achieve a goal.

As stated earlier in this chapter, blogs are more focused on form. Warlick contends that “blogs are about publishing” and that their objective is to communicate a specific message to a specific audience.

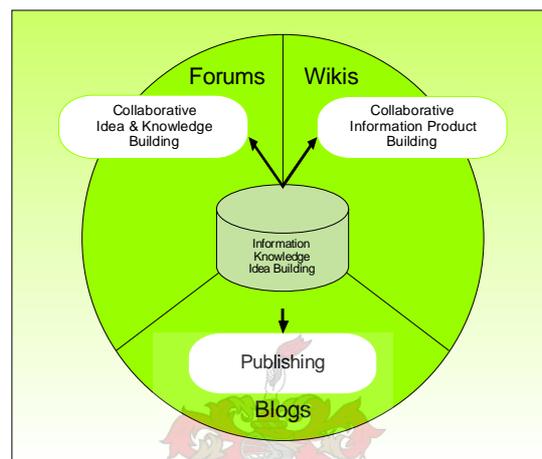


Fig 14. Forums, Wikis and Blogs (Warlick, 2005)

LeFever (2004) believes that blogs and discussion boards are “different enough to happily exist together in the same online community web site.” He concludes that their differences makes sense as they have different roles to fulfil in the online community. The next chapter explores learning theory that applies to blogs and blog pedagogy.

CHAPTER 5: Blogs as learning spaces

It was Plato (Anon, *undatedB*) who said:

"Someday in the distant future our grandchildren's grandchildren will develop a new equivalent of our classrooms. They will spend many hours in front of boxes with fires glowing within. May they have the wisdom to know the difference between light and knowledge".

Veenema & Gardner (1996:1) agrees with Plato that when it comes to using technology, not all applications thereof necessarily contribute to education. To discern the value of blogs for education we need to understand how we learn and establish whether traditional learning theories and models still apply in this digital age.

There are numerous learning theories and concepts and possibly most of them, in some way or another, can be relevant to blog pedagogy. In this chapter we only succinctly refer to the main concepts, including: Gardner & Hatch's theory of multiple intelligences, idea of multiple literacies, collaborative learning and constructivism. This chapter also introduces a modern learning theory, namely "connectivism".

5.1 Gardner and Hatch's Theory of multiple intelligences

Gardner and Hatch (1989) define intelligence as "the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting".

The *Theory of multiple intelligences* originally identified seven specific intelligences namely *visual-spatial*, *bodily-kinesthetic*, *musical*, *interpersonal*, *intrapersonal*, *linguistic* and *logical-mathematical* (Smith, 2002). These intelligences records the manner in which students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways. Gardner (as cited in Lane, *undated*) criticises the more traditional educational system "that assumes that everyone can learn the same materials

in the same way and that a uniform, universal measure suffices to test student learning."

Brown (1999) believes that "with Web we have for the first time a medium that could truly (honour) multiple forms of intelligence". The table below (Fig 15) illustrates how the features and functions of blogs can be utilised to stimulate all seven of Gardner and Hatch's intelligences.

Intelligence	Prefer learning through:	Applicable blog features or functions
Visual-Spatial	Drawings, verbal and physical imagery, models, graphics, charts, photographs, drawings, 3-D modeling, video, video-conferencing, television, multi-media, texts with pictures/ charts/graphs.	Photoblogs Videoblogs Added features such as drawing tools, graphics and animation.
Bodily-kinesthetic	Physical activity, hands-on learning, acting out, role playing. Tools include equipment and real objects.	The hands-on blogging experience of working with personal computers and software.
Musical	Turning lessons into lyrics, speaking rhythmically, tapping time. Tools include musical instruments, music, radio, CD-ROM, multimedia.	Audio streaming Podcasts.
Interpersonal	Group activities, seminars, dialogues. Tools include the phone, audio conferencing, time and attention from the instructor, video conferencing, writing, computer conferencing, E-mail.	Public domain for publishing. Comment function. Groupblogs. Asynchronous and Synchronous discussions
Intrapersonal	Independent study and introspection. Tools include books, creative materials, diaries, privacy and time. They are the most independent of the learners.	Blogs as diaries or reflective spaces.
Linguistic	Saying and seeing words, read books together. Tools include computers, games, multimedia, books, tape recorders, and lectures.	Publishing original written text online, reading and commenting on the work of others.
Logical – Mathematical	They can be taught through logic games, investigations, mysteries. They need to learn and form concepts before they can deal with details.	Technical side to posting to a blog.

Fig 15. Blogs as application for Multiple Intelligence Theory

Table adapted from Lane (undated)

Though some intelligences, especially bodily-kinesthetic, seem more difficult to be accommodated with blogs, Brown (1999) suggests that we may be at an

"inflection point where visual, musical, spatial and kinesthetic intelligence can be as easily served by technology as abstract and textual intelligence".

5.2 Multiliteracies

The nature of literacy and how it is acquired is evolving (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack as cited in Stevens, 2005:3). Each new technological development produce new literacies. Leu et al believe that

“we are on the cusp of a new era in literacy research, one in which the nature of reading, writing, and communication is being fundamentally transformed” (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack as cited in Stevens, 2005:3).

Literacy has progressed beyond text- and image-based literacy (Brown, 1999). The New London Group, who originally coined the term “*multiliteracy*”, notes that

“[a] pedagogy of multiliteracies, by contrast, focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone” (The New London Group as cited in Stevens 2005:1).

Lankshear and Knobel (2003) cautiously refers to 21st century literacies in context of how “human behaviour is likely to change when we hold in our hands gadgets with super computing power”. They suggest that this places a huge weight onto “the issue about how literacy education within the formal curriculum can and should intersect with contemporary literacies in the world beyond the school”.

5.3 Constructivism

According to constructivist learning theories, how we construct knowledge will depend on what is already known. What we know, depends on the kinds of experiences that we have had and how we have come to organize these into existing knowledge structures (Kanuka & Anderson, 1998).

In a constructivist classroom student independence and initiative are recognised and encouraged, the instructor “asks open-ended questions and allows wait time for responses” (*South West Educational Laboratory, 1995*). “Higher-level thinking is encouraged”, students interact with the teacher and with each other. “Students are engaged in experiences that challenge

hypotheses and encourage discussion” and “the class uses raw data, primary sources, manipulatives, physical, and interactive materials”.

Kanuka and Anderson (1998) notes that computers provide an “interactive environment” that “creates an effective means for implementing constructivist strategies that would be difficult to accomplish in other media” (Driscoll as cited in KanUka and Anderson 1998).

Sade (2005) states that

“Constructionist pedagogy represents a shift in approach to education, from a behaviorist epistemology to a social constructivist epistemology, where the learning outcomes cannot be simply equated to the sum of the material ‘transmitted’ from the teacher to the student and the final quantitative grade.”

Sade (2005) suggests that this type of approach is pivotal in the context of our modern interconnected society:

“...a generation of researchers are turning to forms, such as weblogs, as a phenomena of study and a method of publishing and peer review...” (Sade 2005)

It is also Brown’s (1999) observation that a shift is taking place:

“a shift between using technology to support the individual and using technology to support relationships. This shift will be very important because with it we will discover new ways, new tools and new social protocols for helping us help each other, which is really the very essence of social learning.”

5.4 Collaborative learning

Dahley (1994) describes cooperative learning as a process in which

“students work with their peers to accomplish a shared or common goal. The goal is reached through interdependence among all group members rather than working alone. Each member is responsible for the outcome of the shared goal.”

Ferdig and Trammell (2004) draws on Vygotsky's educational theory stating that

“educators highlight the knowledge construction processed of the learner and suggest that meaning making develops through the social process of language use over time. As such, knowledge construction is discursive, relational and conversational in nature. Therefore, as students appropriate and transform knowledge, they must have authentic opportunities for publication of knowledge”.

Godwin-Jones (2003) brings this into the context of the blog:

“If one thinks of blogs as being essentially on-line journals, it may not be evident how they could be used in collaborative ways. Writers typically make rich use of hypertext to connect to what others have written on a topic or to resources on the Web. Blog entries are normally followed by a comment button, allowing readers to write a reaction, which is created and managed by individuals, group blogs are also possible.”

Jay Cross (2004) believes that “collaboration supercharges performance”. He states that the “age of collaborative learning is at hand”. He contends that both computing models and learning theory has shifted to modular models as seen in Fig 16 below.

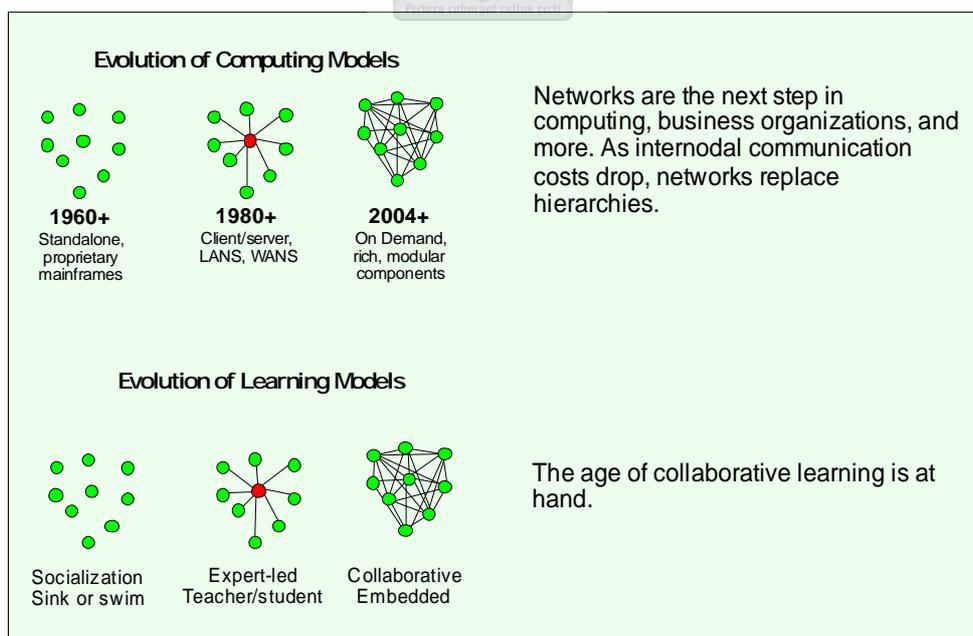


Fig 16. Evolution of Computing and Learning Models (Cross, 2004)

5.5 Connectivism

Siemens (2004) argues that the traditional learning theories, namely on which most instructional environments are modelled, are now outdated. He stresses that technology has infiltrated most levels of human existence and explains that “learning needs and theories that describe learning principles and processes should be reflective of underlying social environments”. He developed the theory of connectivism which integrates the “principles explored by chaos, network, and complexity and self-organisation theories”.

Siemens’ principles of connectivism are:

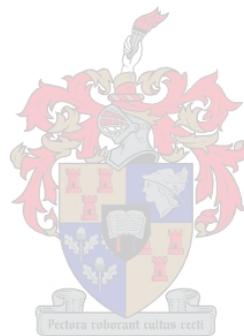
- § Learning and knowledge is rooted in a diversity of opinions
- § Learning is a process of connecting specialized information sources
- § Learning may reside in non-human appliances
- § Capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known
- § Nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning.
- § The ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill
- § Currency (accurate, up-to-date knowledge) is the intent of all connectivist learning activities
- § Decision-making is itself a learning process. Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a shifting reality. While there is a right answer now, it may be wrong tomorrow due to alterations in the information climate affecting the decision.

One could question whether connectivism can really be considered a learning theory. Siemens’s critics call for the redefining of the terms *learning* and *knowledge* (Anon, 2005a). His use of learning as a noun is questioned in the light that “(l)earning is the *acquisition* of actionable knowledge, not the knowledge itself”.

Siemens's notion that learning can be stored in non-human appliances is also queried because although we will possibly achieve artificial intelligence in the near future, even the "more sophisticated data mining applications" are not able to "ascribe meaning to patterns" and therefore machines can not "learn".

It is suggested that it might be more appropriate "to call this a theory of information management, or knowledge management rather than a learning theory "(Anon, 2005a).

The next chapter explores the uses of blogs in education.



CHAPTER 6: Blog uses in Education

There is no clear divergence in the way in which students and instructors use blogs. Both parties use blogs for academic and personal purposes (Adenekan, 2005). One blogger or a blog can have or be part of a number of different audiences, which according to Martindale (as cited in Martindale & Wiley, 2004), might have shared interests (topical and internetwide) and exclusive interests (course and class specific). Martindale further illustrate this by noting that as a blogger he has “multiple audiences, of varying sizes and levels of interest” these audiences include:

- 1) himself (with the blog serving as his personal webbased filing cabinet, reflective journal and ‘external brain’);
- 2) students in his various courses;
- 3) students in degree programmes;
- 4) friends and co-workers at the institution where he is employed;
- 5) colleagues around the world with similar interests; and unknown readers on the web.

6.1 Matrix of blog uses in education

Leslie (2005) developed the *Matrix of blog uses in education* (Fig 17) as part of an online workshop in educational blogging. It lists the pedagogical uses for blogs from an instructor and student perspective and accommodates the roles of both reader and writer. According to the matrix, educational blogs can have 3 focuses: “personal”, “classroom” and “internetwide”. This provides a framework for this chapter’s discussion on the uses of blogs in education.

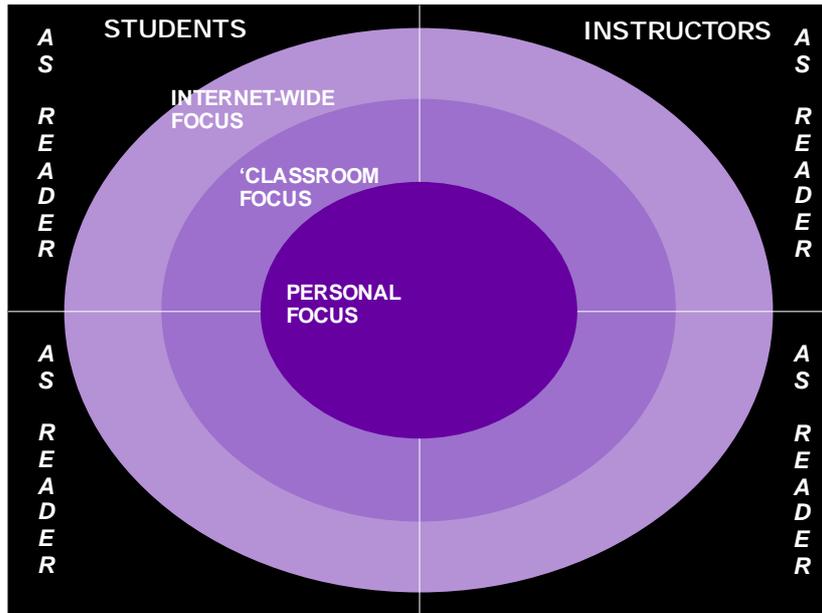


Fig 17. Leslie's Matrix of uses for blogs in education (Leslie, 2005)

6.2 Instructors as Blog Authors

Leslie's diagram (Fig 18) illustrates that the blogs authored by instructors with a personal focus are mainly used as personal knowledge management tools.

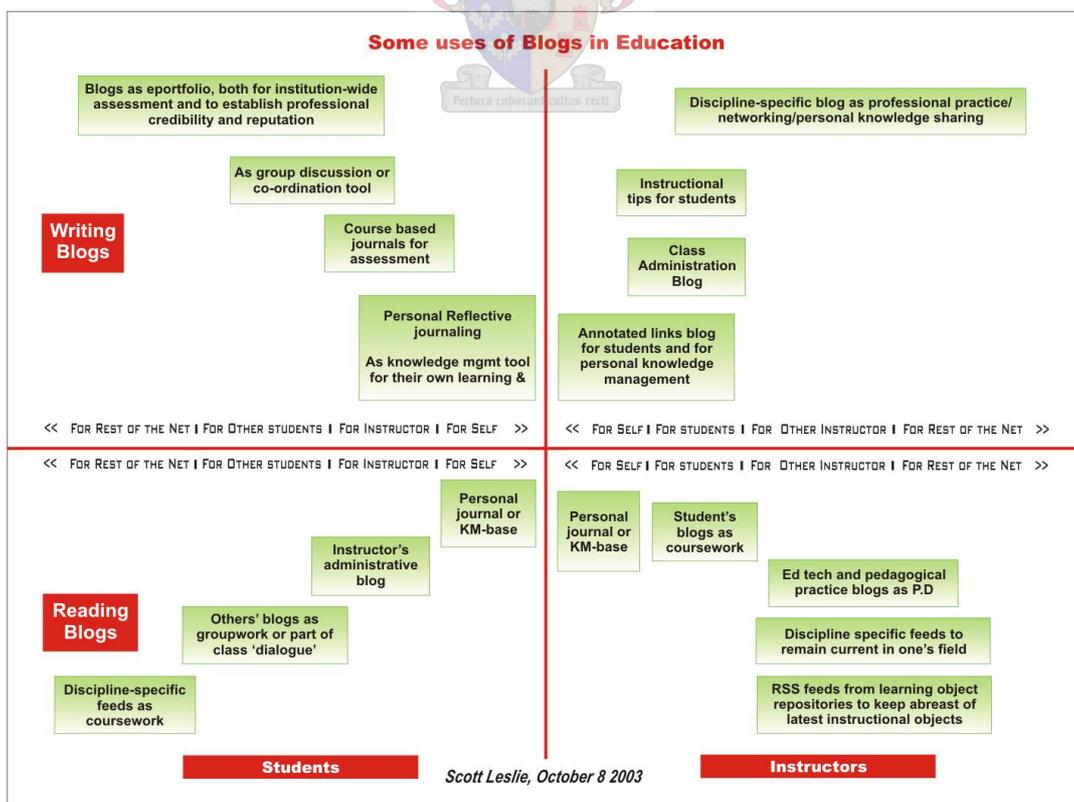


Fig 18. Some uses of blogs in education (Leslie, 2005)

Dr Lisa Wise, an online learning specialist at Melbourne University (Australia) applies blogs in this manner. She calls it “a place to refine little ideas and collect those together and maybe to make those into papers” (Wise as cited in Mitchell, 2006). James Farmer, former Deakin University (Australia) academic refers to knowledge management blogs as his “filing cabinet” (Farmer, undated). He suggests creating multiple categories in a blog to store interesting links.

Educational blogs with a “classroom” focus can provide students with annotated links (University of Houston-Clear Lake, *undated*), instructional tips or disseminate administrative information (Leslie, 2003).

Ohio-based (United States) school principal, Pam Coates (2006) is in a position where the majority of parents and students associated with her school, Butlerville Elementary, have access to the internet. She posts spelling words of the week, nightly home work and long term assignments for her students. Through the school blog she also keeps parents informed of announcements with regards to what is going on in the classrooms.

Blogs can also be applied as course delivery mechanism. Farmer (*undated*) suggests structuring a virtual learning environment around a blog. Wiley (as cited in Martindale & Wiley, 2004:5) experienced great success using blogs in an online course about the culture of online interaction. He attributes his success to preparation. He had the students study blogs and the culture of blogging before progressing to publishing to their own blogs. Wiley witnessed that through the blogging process the students’ blogs became longer and more thoughtful, students started commenting on each other’s blogs, additional pieces of writing appeared on the blogs and external readership, so-called “big names in the field”, started interacting with the students through their blogs.

Farmer (*undated*) points to blogs as institution-wide project management tools for collaborative efforts. He notes that stakeholders can be kept up to date and relevant documentation can be stored there. This implies that blogs can also act as knowledge management tools within the faculty.

6.2.1 Blogs and research

Greg Restall, an associate professor in the department of philosophy at the University of Melbourne (Australia) contends that blogs are “changing the face of research” (Restall as cited in Mitchell, 2006).

Historian Esther Maccallum-Stewart used the web server at the University of Sussex (Uk) to set up a blog where she can publish academic findings and where her students would have “access to resources, information and courses on demand” (Adenekan, 2005).

Research based blogs can benefit a great deal from the internet-wide focus that blogs can facilitate. Farmer (as cited in Mitchell, 2006) advises that blogs can be instrumental in achieving a successful academic career:

“(Y)ou have to impress a large number of readers and have a great deal of credibility, and that only comes from peer-to-peer review, which is people reading and recommending and subscribing back to you (Farmer as cited in Mitchell, 2006).

Farmer founded edublogs.com a site about blogging for educational professionals.

Restall’s blog has prompted a number of students to request that he supervise their PhDs. His blog has also contributed to him being asked to write for an edited collection of work, to attend conferences and to teach summer school (Restall as cited in Mitchell, 2006).

6.2.2 Blogs for communication

Adenekan (2005) suggests that the informal tone of blogs improve communication with students. Glenn (2003) notes how blogs can “break down barriers of rank and hierarchy” placing senior and junior academics onto a “level playing field”.

Associate director of admissions at Wharton Business at the University of Pennsylvania (United States) and a marketing professor at the University of Delaware, Newark (United States) highlights the external marketing potential that blogs have. He uses them “to disseminate information for

Wharton applicants and keep up with developments at other universities” (Knowledge@Wharton: 2005).

The Higher Ed Blog Con held online from 3 to 28 April 2006 drew attention to more ways in which blogs can be utilised in education. The University of Florida’s (United States) Alumni Association presented their use of social software such as blogs and podcasts to communicate with its alumni and Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana (United States) explained how they employ blogs and podcasts in student recruitment. (Higher Ed Blog Con, 2006)

6.3 Instructors as Blog Readers

Blogs are built on content management platforms. According to Kennedy (2003) this provides an effective platform for collecting, editing and assessing student work. Due to their “publish, review, comment” structure, Warlick (2005) suggests that the classroom blog can make a very effective portfolio. “Students submit their writing (and even images), (the instructor) comment as a way of the assessment, and the work is archived” (Warlick, 2005:135). Warlick suggests that portfolios can be “opened up by allowing students to continue to improve their work and request ongoing assessment and constructive coaching”.

Wu (2006) highlights that blogs’ automatic date-stamping feature allow instructors to know when assignments were submitted. Unlike emails that can easily be deleted or not reach their destination, once an assignment has been published only the student can delete it.

Vincent Maher (2006) notes that media studies students at the New Media Lab, Rhodes University in Grahamstown (South Africa) use blogs combined with moblogs hosted on Flickr “to organise and document all the projects (they) work on with (their) students”. Each student also has a blog for personal issues.

Journalism at Hunterdon Central Regional High School in New Jersey (United States) is a “paperless course”. All student work is posted exclusively to a class

blog. Educator Will Richardson has experienced that the interactive comment function of blogs "provided students an opportunity to articulate their ideas in ways they haven't been asked to before" (Kennedy, 2003).

6.3.1 Institutional blogs and RSS feeds

Leslie (2005) lists that institution and internet-wide blogs can be employed as part of professional practice or to keep abreast in a specific field. The Wharton Business School (University of Pennsylvania, United States) rely on blogs to "keep up with developments at other universities" (Knowledge@Wharton: 2005). Farmer (undated) suggests using a news aggregator "to sign up to weblogs and news sites" of interest. These RSS feeds can also be used "to gain new learning materials" (Leslie, 2005).

6.4 Students as blog authors

As personal applications blogs can fulfil the two roles similar to that of a traditional diary: it can either act as a knowledge management tool in which case it is utilised as a virtual space to store information, links, references and ideas or it can be a personal, reflective journal (Adenekan, 2005).

McLeod (as cited in Lowe & Williams, 2004) describes journals as a way to:

"help students explore and assimilate new ideas, create links between the familiar and the unfamiliar, mull over possibilities, (and) explain things to the self before explaining them to others. The analog for this kind of student writing is the expert's notebook – the scientist's lab book, the engineer's notebook, the artist's and architect's sketchbook (the journals of Thomas Edison and Leonardo Da Vinci are prototypical examples).

Wagner (2003:131) also refers to the situation where a student behaves like "an expert in the making". He suggests the use of blogs for learning logs. Learning logs are "learning diaries created concurrently with the learning experience, and reporting on the learning content as well as the process". The logging activity allows for peer and instructor evaluation. Students can comment on each other's reflections and learn from each other's insights (Warlick, 2005:137).

6.4.1 Writing development/Process writing

Lowe & Williams (2004) list the following uses of blogs in writing class: reading responses, posting articles of interests, research responses and personal explorations. Blogs provide a platform for students to publish a draft and all comments made by instructor and peer will be archived (Warlick 2005: 138).

6.4.2 Internetwide focus

Students can also collaborate on projects (Turnbull, 2004):

“Rather than using a weblog as a platform for an individual voice, you can use it for a collaboration of many voices. A class of students doing a project on the environment might want to start a weblog about their local river, because it’s online it might attract interest from local residents and policy makers too. Their local community can be drawn in on something that without the weblog would have been isolated within the school.”

Trammell & Ferdig (2004) further explains that:

"It is likely that someone outside of a class will happen across student blogs or a classroom collaborative blog. As such, blogging can help extend the classroom from the physical constraints of those who fit in the room and are registered to a limitless international student body."

Blogs also provide access to academic communities. This communication platform can provide valuable feedback and criticism. UK-based PhD student, Robert O’Toole, applied this blog feature to turn his “thesis proposal into a written one” (Adenekan, 2005).

Restall (as cited in Mitchell, 2006) comments on how successful academic blogging can develop careers:

"People who are blogging as junior academics as part of their PhDs have a profile way beyond anyone similar could have expected to have at that age..."

6.5 Students as blog readers

Students might use blogs as personal knowledge management tools or as a way in which to keep up to date with regards to instructor's announcements (Leslie, 2005)

As readers, students also have access to other students' blogs. Glenn (2003) believes that (b)logging "has some of the best aspects of peer review built into it". Scholars' entries "are instantly monitored and responded to by others as well-informed as they are".

Warlick (2005:135) also refers to the process of student peer review. He says:

"It has long been found by teachers that students are among the most critical reviewers of each other's work, and effectively so. Weblogs are ideal for this type of assignment, where students are asked to write, and then required to read and comment on a specified number of writings by their classmates."

6.5.1 Internet wide focus

Ferdig & Trammell (2004) believes that the use of blogs increases student interest and ownership in learning. They focus on "topics they are interested in learn through looking for information".

Farmer (as cited in Mitchell, 2006) encourages teachers to set up discipline specific RSS feeds for their students. Ferdig & Trammell (2004) explains: "The use of blogs help students become subject matter experts." According to Blood (2002) there is a three-step process involved in blogging: "scouring, filtering and posting". The blogger filter the results of various visited websites to post the "best of content" for readers that are exposed to vast amounts of information. Downes (2004a) argues that blogging is not about writing at all, but mostly about reading:

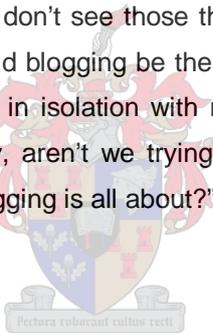
"it is about reading what is of interest to you, your culture, your community, your ideas. And it is about engaging with the content and with the authors of what you have read – reflecting, criticising, questioning (and) reacting to it" (Downes 2004a:24).

Leslie calls this process the creation of a set of practices and conventions around a new form of social “network writing” that includes both the reading and writing (2005:6). Often students learn as much from each other as from instructors and textbooks (Educause, 2005a).

The use of blogs provide students with the opportunity to participate. This “opens up the assignments beyond teacher-student connections”. Glenn (2003) notes that scholars find the knowledge that “anyone at all can read and comment on their discussions”, “most thrilling”. Students can now “interact with an authentic audience in a community of practice” (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004).

Will Richardson (as cited in Downes, 2004a:26) summarises it as follows:

“This (the blogging process) just seems to me to be closer to the way we learn outside of school, and I don’t see those things happening anywhere in traditional education... Could blogging be the needle that sews together what is now a lot of learning in isolation with no real connection among disciplines? I mean ultimately, aren’t we trying to teach our kids how to learn, and isn’t that (what) blogging is all about?”



Chapter 7: Blogs in Education: Pitfalls

Leslie (2005) believes that “while there has been plenty of hype, there are still few great examples of the use of blogs in online education.” This chapter focus on the pitfalls instructors may encounter when using blogs in education.

7.1 Intellectual property issues

Blogging evokes potential instances of plagiarism as images and text belong to their creators. Sade (2005) airs concerns about accurate referencing. He experienced that during the blogging process his students were neglecting referencing standards. He attributed this to the fact that

“bibliographic software like Endnote is not easily integrated into the weblog writing environment. Students who maintained academic referencing standards typically composed their posts in software like Microsoft Word then copied these into the weblog.”

He suggest that students receive more “guidance on evaluation of source materials”.

Sade (2005) found that students were “recycling memes” from other blogs “without exercising any analysis or critique”. To combat that, he included tutorials on information retrieval and evaluation in his course.

7.2 Credibility of websites

Wu (2006) addresses the issues of website credibility. Raising the following questions:

Are students trained to judge what features a good website should have?

Are articles of the website genuine and credible?

Are they unbiased and updated?

The article: *7 things you should know about blogs* (Educause, 2005a), queries the authority of blogs themselves stating that “blogs are produced and

maintained by individuals” and even though they “might be seen as authoritative information”, essentially it remains “soap box speak”.

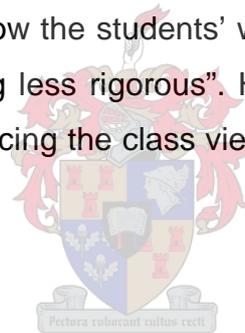
Wu (2006) also refers to the possible unsavoury elements that might lurk on the internet which are unsuitable for especially her “younger language learners”.

7.3 Privacy issues

Posting under his/her full name could cause mistakes to haunt students for a long time to come (Educause, 2005a). Students should also be warned that for safety reasons they should refrain from posting any of their whereabouts or contact details. Posting under a pseudonym is one way in which a student’s identity can be protected.

7.4 Informal style

Sade (2005) comments on how the students’ writing styles evolved to become “more casual and referencing less rigorous”. He blames this on the fact “that many students upon commencing the class viewed weblogs as principally used for personal diaries”.



7.5 Lack of motivation

Jeremy Hiebert, a Web designer and graduate student in Canada (as cited in Downes, 2004a:24) comments:

“I’ve seen evidence of this in courses with required e-portfolio or reflective journal elements... As soon as these activities are put into the context of school, focused on topics the students are unlikely to care about much, they automatically lose a level of authenticity and engagement. These disengaged students (non-writers and writers alike) won’t get the main benefits of true reflective learning no matter how good the instruction and tools are. “

Sade (2005) experienced that his class blogosphere “was not as active as anticipated”. He advises that students should receive more support “especially related to methods of engaging with other weblogs”.

Martindale & Wiley (2004) shared their experiences: once the course ended, the student blogging also ceased. They note that for them it raised the issue whether student blogs should be “institutionally-hosted”. Martindale & Wiley believe that it should not, as “a sense of ownership and full control over one’s blog is important in supporting the blogging process”.

7.6 Isolated activities

Wu (2006) contends that web-based activities should not be used “just because”. She wants (English) teachers to “think how web-based activities can be integrated into the overall design of a course rather than how to use them in an isolated, disconnected fashion”.

7.7 Technical issues

The computer literacy of students may vary and therefore it is important to provide the necessary technical support. This can also be combated by acquiring user-friendly software (Sade, 2005). Sade further suggests that when it comes to instructors, digital skepticism or technophobia might be encountered. Briggs (2004) notes that blogs are open to comment “spamming”. This is similar to email spam and afflicts most large blogging tools.



7.8 Time-consuming

Sade (2005) explains that the rule of thumb for teachers is that 3 hours preparation is needed for one hour of online material. Coates (2006) listed the “extra admin” that accompanies blogs as a pitfall. She relies on positive encouragement to ensure “more teacher buy-in” into the process.

7.9 Peer Review gone wrong

With peer reviews comes the freedom to express opinions, ideas and attitudes (Educause, 2005a).

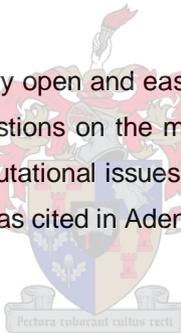
Maher (2006) states that “(s)tudents voice very honest opinions on their own blogs often combined with very violent criticism, but public criticism is part of the new blogging conversation.” He explains that they allow it, but respond where necessary.

Briggs (2004) suggests that moderation is necessary in case of inappropriate comments. De Zwart (as cited in Mitchell 2006) notes that: “if you choose to moderate... any content that doesn’t fit should be removed immediately”. He argues that this could make the institution more liable because it is “assuming control”. De Zwart suggests a code of conduct that should apply to all blogs: “no spamming, no commercial use and no inappropriate language or off topic discussion”.

7.10 Legal implications

David Supple, web strategy manager at Birmingham University (Uk) states that even though blogs offer important benefits for education “as a strong tool for rapid knowledge development”, blogs are unstructured and this could potentially generate problems. He warns universities that:

"This type of technology is very open and easy to instigate and that often means in the rush to use it, the bigger questions on the most effective ways to use the technology without creating legal and reputational issues for the institution are forgotten or end up being asked too late" (Supple as cited in Adeneken, 2005).



7.11 Issues of access

Darkwa & Mazibuko (2000) highlight access to connectivity and expensive ISP services as major challenges in Africa. Although South Africa possess the highest teledensity in Africa (Mohammed & Miller, 2002), rural areas are still lacking access. Mohammed and Miller suggest that growth in Internet access are limited to “mostly wealthy whites”.

The Schools Register of Needs Survey of 2000 (as cited in Mohammed & Miller, 2002) suggests that there are even more basic needs at schools than internet access:

“of 27 148 schools, 58 percent had electricity, 55 percent had telephones, 30 percent had computers, and 16 percent had access to the Internet”.

CHAPTER 8: The future of blogs

In First World countries it is believed (Anon, 2006a) that:

“(i)n regard to schools and information technology, the last 10 years have mostly been about the web, digital still images, productivity software (word processing, spreadsheets, databases), email and moving much traditionally paper-based information to databases (eg grades and comments)”.

The next decade will be the time of

“course management software, digital audio/video (along with a new focus on media literacy), shared virtual spaces (wikis, blogs, Second Life), and visualization/simulation software...” (Anon, 2006a).

According to Siemens (2001) blogging has not yet grown to its full potential. Wharton Business School (Pennsylvania, United States) legal studies professor Kevin Werbach concurs that “(b)logging is still in its early days”. He estimates that it is currently at the same point as where the Web was in 1995/1996 (Knowledge@Wharton, 2005). The direction in which it will be developing remains speculation. The future of blogging, the future of blogging in education and the future of the internet is interlinked and should be explored simultaneously.

8.1 Future of the internet

No form of communication has expanded so rapidly as the internet (Wilkerson, 2004). To illustrate this Wilkerson cites an *eMarket* projection. It estimates the number of people online in any given month has grown from 352 million in 2001 to more than 700 million in 2004. It is projected that by 2007 this figure will reach 1.2 billion. The growth rate of blogs are parallel. *Technorati*, a search engine that monitors blogs, found more than 8 million online diaries as of 21 March 2005. The number was 100,000 merely two years prior. This means that approximately 12,000 new blogs are created every day.

Despite these figures, the internet has only penetrated a small segment of the global population. The *World Internet and User and Population Stats* (see Fig 18), last updated 18 September 2006, indicates that only 16.7% of the world's population use the internet.

WORLD INTERNET USAGE AND POPULATION STATISTICS						
World Regions	Population (2006 Est.)	Population % of World	Internet Usage, Latest Data	% Population (Penetration)	Usage % of World	Usage Growth 2000-2006
Africa	915,210,928	14.1%	32,765,700	3.6%	3.0%	625.8%
Asia	3,667,774,066	56.4%	394,872,213	10.8%	36.4%	245.5%
Europe	807,289,020	12.4%	308,712,903	38.2%	28.4%	193.7%
Middle East	190,084,161	2.9%	19,028,400	10.0%	1.8%	479.3%
North America	331,473,276	5.1%	229,138,706	69.1%	21.1%	112.0%
Latin America/Caribbean	553,908,632	8.5%	83,368,209	15.1%	7.7%	361.4%
Oceania / Australia	33,956,977	0.5%	18,364,772	54.1%	1.7%	141.0%
WORLD TOTAL	6,499,697,060	100.0%	1,086,250,903	16.7%	100.0%	200.9%

NOTES: (1) Internet Usage and World Population Statistics were updated for Sept. 18, 2006. (2) CLICK on each world region for detailed regional information. (3) Demographic (Population) numbers are based on data contained in the [world-gazetteer](#) website. (4) Internet usage information comes from data published by Nielsen//NetRatings, by the [International Telecommunications Union](#). By local NICs, and other other reliable sources. (5) For definitions, disclaimer, and navigation help, see the Site Surfing Guide. (8) Information from this site may be cited, giving due credit and establishing an active link back to [www.internetworldstats.com](#). © Copyright 2006, Miniwatts Marketing Group. All rights reserved worldwide.

Fig 19. *World Internet Usage and Population Statistics 18 September 2006 (Internet World Stats, 2006)*

Pending much needed development in infrastructure and access, this confirms that there is potential for blog growth in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean.



Werbach (Knowledge@Wharton, 2005) proposes that blogs are “the next extension of the Web” and the Web itself is rapidly evolving into an application platform. This emerging platform has been christened The Web 2.0.

8.2 Web 2.0

The term, Web 2.0, was coined by Tim O’Reilly in 2004 (Eneroth, 2005). It describes an ongoing transition of the World Wide Web from “a collection of websites to a full-fledged computing platform serving web applications to end users”. It is a “new wave of Internet development offering a more dynamic online experience at low cost, using established software tools”.

In an online article, *Web 2 dot What?*, journalist Stephen Bryant (2005) quotes technology professionals’ definitions of the Web 2.0.

"To me, it's all about open data and service composition" (John Marrells, **Sxip**).

"Web 2.0 is the two-way Web where content finds you" (Ron Rasmussen, **KnowNow**).

"People doing things together on the Web" (Mitchell Baker, **Mozilla Foundation**).

"Breaking the traditional mold of static content, be it images, video or text" (Mark Chervesky, **CNN Internet Ventures**).

"Web 2.0 is about platforms that other people can build on" (Rajat Paharia, **Bunchball**).

"Web 2.0 is features masquerading as companies" (Anonymous).

"It's made of people. It's not content" (Jeff Jarvis, **Buzzmachine**).

"True mass consumption of Web-based applications" (Steve Mitgang, **Yahoo!**).

"The interconnected Web" (Andrew Anker, **Six Apart**).



Miller (2005) mapped certain features of the Web 2.0. See Fig 19.

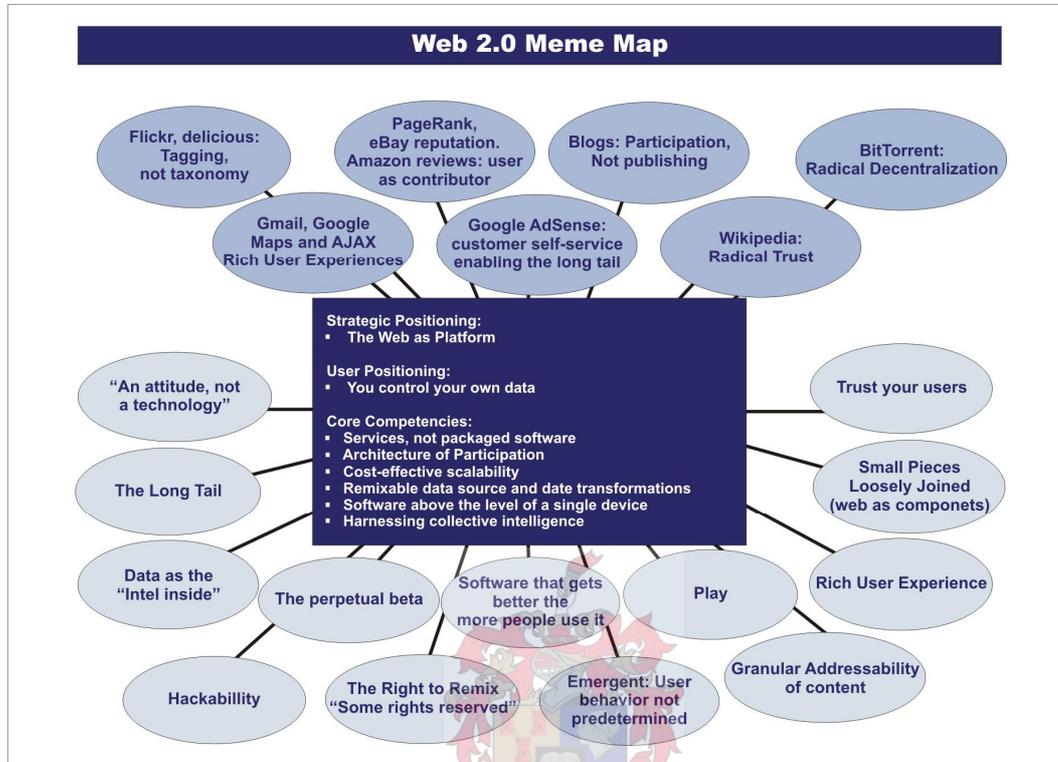


Fig 20. Miller's Web 2.0 Meme Map (Miller, 2005)

Some of Miller's principles of the Web 2.0 are:

- Data will be freed "allowing it to be exposed, discovered and manipulated in a variety of ways".
- Web 2.0 allows for the building and development of virtual applications.
- The Web 2.0 is participative. "Web 2.0 applications have been quick to spot the value of user-generated content. It is useful to facilitate participation in the way a messaging service might, but it is a lot more valuable to fold the output of that participation back into the application and make it available to all of the applications users".
- Web 2.0 applications work for the user. They can locate and assemble content that meet the needs of the user, as opposed to forcing users to conform "to the paths laid out...by content owners or their intermediaries".

- Web 2.0 applications are modular enabling developers and users able to select from “a set of inter-operating components in order to build something that meets their needs”.
- “Web 2.0 is about sharing: code, content, ideas”.
- “Web 2.0 is about communication and facilitating community”.
- “Web 2.0 is built upon trust, whether that be trust placed in individuals, in assertions, or in the uses and reuses of data”.

8.3 The blog 2.0

Miller’s meme map suggests that in the future we will see blogs used rather for their participative nature than as a publishing tool. This suggests development in the way we access and use blogs.

8.3.1 Software and design development

Mena Trott, the co-founder of blogging tool company Six Apart, also believes that the blogging phenomenon has just started (Trott as cited in Business Week Online, 2006). She foresees that when it comes to blogs and blogging software future development trends will include:

1. “(S)elect and filtered readership” where content is password protected; and
2. Blogging tools that will make it “easier for people to incorporate more media” and “mobile capabilities”.

Trott speculates that the biggest future blog-design challenge will likely be to design blogs that will “archive and present 20 years worth of content”.

8.3.2 Personal broadcasting

Already in 1998, Downes in his article *The future of Online learning* predicted that asynchronous conferencing would advance from being text based to include multimedia. In 2005 text-based blogs were considered “yesterday’s news” (Mossberg, 2005) the focus has shifted to podcasting, mobile learning (Rheingold, 2004), vlogging and instant messaging (Anonymous, 2005).

The annual *New Horizon Report* (2006:3) predicts how emerging technologies will impact “teaching, learning and creative expression in the higher education sector”. The 2006 report lists personal broadcasting as the leading of the four major trends to follow within the next year. This trend which evolved from blogs, is expanding to include audio and video. Tools for creating and sharing audio and visual media is becoming smaller and more advanced. From podcasting to videoblogging (vlogging), personal broadcasting is an increasingly popular trend that is already impacting campuses and museum audiences. The report forecasts that as audio and video converge with the mobile phone, personal broadcasting will take off even more rapidly (New Horizon Report, 2006:11).

Another trend highlighted by the *New Horizon Report* forms the backbone of blogs, namely social computing (New Horizon Report, 2006:8-9).

“The promise of social computing has been and continues to be – more effective knowledge generation, knowledge sharing, collaboration, learning and collective decision-making”.

Though this is not a new concept the report states that social computing is only now beginning to realise its potential specifically in areas of “distributed learning, research, and campus work settings”.

Vincent Maher (2006), lecturer in New Media at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, suggests that

“(s)ocial networking, online conversations and Web 2.0 applications will become one of the central mechanisms for organising students around projects”.

8.3.3 Mobile technology

At the 2006 *National Education Computing Conference* (NECC) in San Diego, Greaves and Hayes (2006) presented a five year forecast of how digital media will be utilised in American Schools.

The following information was submitted:

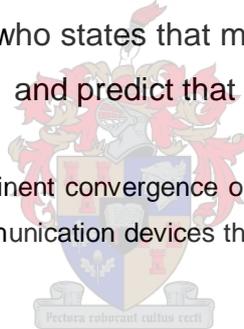
Student appliances (technology used in learning) were the fastest growing digital devices used in schools. 19.4% of all student devices were mobile and it is predicted that by 2011 this number will have grown to 52.1%. These mobile devices however included laptops, tablets and other student appliances, but excluded mobiles.

Lankshear and Knobel (2003) contends that

“much, if not most, of the world will experience the conjoining of mobile communications and the information processing power of networked computers during the current decade (2000-2010). In the very near future the number of mobile (wireless) devices connected to the Internet will surpass the number of internetworked personal computers.”

They disagree with Greaves and Hayes that this future excludes mobile phones. They cite Rheingold who states that mobile phones "have become tiny multimedia Internet terminals" and predict that

“we are looking at the imminent convergence on a large scale of portable, pervasive, location-sensitive intercommunication devices that are useful to groups and individuals alike”.



CHAPTER 9

9.1 Conclusion

In just more than a decade blogs have evolved well beyond the list of links that the early efforts were made up of. Blogs now embody what Tim Berners-Lee originally intended with the development of the internet: a medium that people can both contribute to and read. Clearly the phenomenon has only started and is forcing a number of sectors and professions to redefine their identities.

The role of blogs in education have shifted from that of an online learning tool to that of a mini-computing platform that can accommodate and converge a host of other online learning tools and applications such as wikis, discussion boards and RSS feeds.

The aim of this assignment was to examine the present and possible future uses of blogs. From a theoretical perspective this assignment supported an application of the uses and gratifications theory to blogs in educational contexts. Although Swanson (as cited in Ko, Chang-Hoan & Roberts, 2005:13) criticized the fact that the uses and gratifications theory does not specifically investigate whether audiences are active when they select and use media, this is less important within the educational context as the selection of media can be influenced by curriculum, assignments, teachers and peers.

The uses and gratifications framework in which the study has been positioned however only provided broad categories for gratification, namely: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance. This allows for a generalised conclusion that the gratifications derived from blogs in education relate to surveillance.

Even so developments in learning theory and online learning tools indicate that personal relationships are also a gratifications factor within this context. Elements of most learning theories apply to blogs, but in line with thrust towards participatory media, there is a clear shift to models in which students learn together.

Very few applications can incorporate such a wide range of uses for the educational sector as blogs. This range includes using blogs on personal, classroom, institution-wide and internet-wide level. Uses include administrative functions, for marketing purposes, as internal and external communication tools, as reflective tool, publishing tool, knowledge management tool on personal level and in group or project context. Education professionals also use blogs to communicate with a community of practice to develop professionally.

There is a wide range of pitfalls that instructors using blogs might encounter. Some pitfalls such as plagiarism is an old problem emerging within a new context, other pitfalls such as online privacy issues are new. Generally most pitfalls can be avoided through early trouble shooting, building training components into courses with blog elements and through adhering and suggesting codes of conduct when it comes to blog publishing and commenting.



Three clear trends that are emerging with regards to the future of blogging are:

1. There is a definite move away from text-based blogs towards media rich blogs incorporating forms of media such as image, audio and video.
2. The future blog will be tasked with stimulating participation rather than act as a publishing tool.
3. Blogs are very rapidly moving towards being mobile-device based.

9.2 Limitations of theory and analysis

Similar to all research endeavours, this study does have its limitations. For starters it tackled an issue positioned in two fairly uncharted areas of study namely the use of media technology in education and blogs per se.

An initial search of the Internet produced a significant amount of literature on the topic of blogs and blogs in education specifically, but most of this was found

within the blogging community. The literature was mainly written by academics, nevertheless the credibility of academic literature published within the blogosphere is still questioned. Therefore the researcher mainly focused on published (in print) and traditionally defined academic literature on the topic.

Another limitation was the poor reaction received from experts surveyed. Despite an initial positive reaction, the electronic questionnaire yielded very few responses. Fortunately the questionnaire was only sent out to supplement existing literature.

The study was also limited in that the focus was too broad including all levels of education on a global basis. Various geographically specific factors were not given and the very complex South African education system was not dealt with.

Possibly the study attempted to achieve too much, but this assignment should be seen as a starting point for further inquiry.

9.3 Further research and recommendations

Blog usage in educational contexts was broadly defined and a great deal of research is still required to fully grasp the potential of blogs in education.

The researcher suggests further exploration into broader issues such as defining how the media is transforming from a learning/teaching support tool into a learning/teaching space in its own right.

Blogs are set to change not only the way in which we interact, but will certainly influence the way in which we learn, formally and informally. Future research might also look at specific gratifications derived from blogs in educational contexts.

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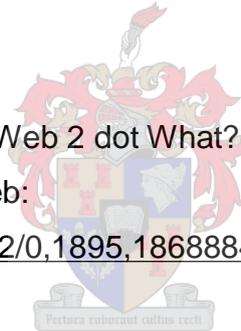
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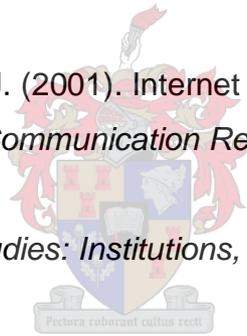
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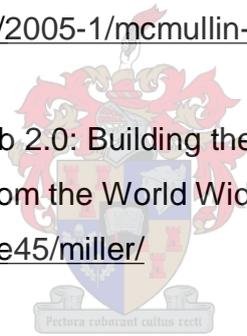
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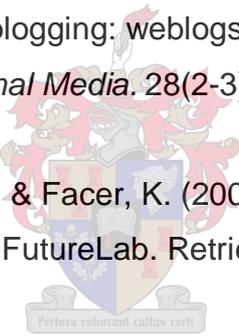
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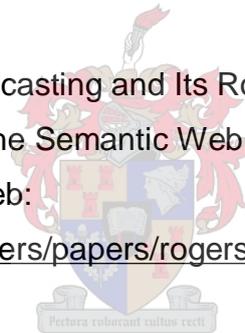
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Addendum A:

Questions:

1. What uses have you found for weblogs in an educational context?
2. What pitfalls have you experienced when using weblogs in education
3. How have you overcome them?
4. How do you see the future of weblogs in education?

