Blogs: A Genre of Virtual Platforms for Collaborative Discourse in Education

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Abstract— **This paper discusses blogs as a web generation as well as its educational applications. In so doing, weblog is compared and contrasted with website, and its phenomenal expansion is touched upon. The ways students and teachers make use of them are considered, and collaborative discourse that blogs provide is explored.**

I. Introduction

The founder of the Triple W once said, "The original thing I wanted to do was make it a collaborative medium. A place where we all [could] meet and read and write" (Berners-Lee quoted in Richardson, 2006, p. 1). Probably, he would not imagine how this innovation might change the way the world works. Since 1989 there has been tremendous development and transformation of the web, and various platforms have been created to make the most of the potential of the virtual world. In what follows, the websites and weblogs (blogs), as two web generations, are contrasted and educational promises of blogs will be discussed.

There are two major differences between blogs and websites. First, websites are more likely to be "static in that their content does not change often". While, blogs are "dynamic and were developed to facilitate and accommodate frequent changes in content, particularly giving readers the opportunity to comment on the primary messages that appear on them". Most of blogs provide the readers with opportunity to leave their comments without the blog author's approval. The other difference is that it is straightforward to place content on a blog (Quible, 2005, p. 327). Such features of Blogs have made them flourish rapidly since their first appearance in 1999. Declared as the "Word of the Year" in 2004 by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (Ray, 2006), blogs have mushroomed in recent years. Technorati.com listed almost 25 million blogs at the beginning of 2006 (Richardson, 2006), a "phenomenal increase from the 23 known blogs that existed at the beginning of 1999" (Quible, 2005). According to Quible, the "blogosphere is doubling in size every 6 months, and it is now over 60 times bigger than it was 3 years ago. On average, a new weblog is created every second of every day" (p. 327).

II. Why Blogs in Education?

In what ways can blogs improve student learning? Why teachers need to consider blogs as a means of delivering curriculum? By definition, Blog is information that is instantly published to the web, and "contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer" (Stephens, 2006, p. 15). They have variety of advantages which make them suitable for *education*. With blogs, publishing is no longer driven by profits and audience size. Blogs make it inexpensive and realistic to publish for any audiences (West, Wright, Gabbitas & Graham, 2006). One of the major benefits of blogs is "their ease of use" (Reinhart, Whicker & Juettemeyer, 2005, p. 25), and limited webpage authoring knowledge is required to use them (West, Wright, Gabbitas & Graham, 2006). They are also powerful media for increasing access and exposure to information.

Blogs could be used as tools of managing information as well. Collective knowledge in the world doubles every 18 months, and as more and more information is posted online, it seems essential that to teach students the skills to analyze and manage it. The act of writing in a Weblog, or 'blogging', can go long way to teaching skills such as research, organization, and synthesis of ideas (Richardson, 2006, p. 28), e.g. they might be used to organize class discussion, class seminars, or to provide summaries of readings (Reinhart, Whicker & Juettemeyer, 2005). Other advantages of using blogs include the "ability to archive and search content as well as browse, due to the nature of tagged posts" (Reinhart, Whicker & Juettemeyer, 2005, p. 25). They could be a means of the dissemination of information (Ray, 2006) and its publication. Published material becomes immediately accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. This added accessibility has been called the "democratization of web publishing" (West, Wright, Gabbitas & Graham, 2006, p. 55).

III. Blogs and Students

Compared to their teachers, today's students, of almost any age, are more computer literate. They seek to access