

Embedding blogging as a way of fostering greater student engagement, collaboration, and ownership of learning

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Academic Writing as Impediment to Self-Authorship

Many people have learned to manage or handle adequately **“correct English,”** but in doing so, **they muffle or clog their thoughts** into language that’s far **less clear and interesting** than they could have used in the language of their talking. Many other people don’t even feel that writing is an option for them and **feel excluded**— yet they speak smart, eloquent, interesting things. And finally, even many of those who can write well are often **reluctant to write**, and they are continually distracted as they write by **nagging critical voices**.

(Elbow, 2012:3)

Self Authorship

Epistemological: “I think I must be **too stupid to understand highbrow university level text books** because some of the things I’m given to read are beyond me. Not sure what I can do about that though”.

Intrapersonal: ‘I feel **too stupid** to be here. It’s not a nice feeling at all.’

Interpersonal: ‘When I’m writing I know what I want to say, but it’s just writing it. **You already know somebody’s going to say something about it.** That’s my issue.’

(From Baxter-Magolda, 2004:8-9)

Two major goals of teaching include educating students to communicate effectively and encouraging students to critically engage with information. To what extent can student blog writing help us to achieve these goals?

Blogging, defined

- “Blogs are a quintessential feature of the so-called social media of the twenty-first century ... they **facilitate interaction** ... networks of sociability” (Cummings and Jarrett, 2013)
- “... a blog is an online public collection of one author’s (or several authors’) entries, or posts, displayed in reverse chronological order” (Hansen, 2016:86)
- “Blogging – a contraction of the term ‘web logging’ – is perhaps best described as a form of micro-publishing ... has the capacity to engage people in **collaborative activity**, knowledge sharing, reflection and debate” (Williams and Jacobs, 2004:232)

What do we know about blogging as a teaching tool?

- There is an emerging body of literature on blogging as a subset in the scholarly field of writing
- “Blogging assists students in understanding audience, negotiating between their **academic and personal** voice, synthesising and integrating prior knowledge, and peer reviewing each other’s work” (Bryant, 2014:96)

Students as bloggers

- Blogging was embedded into a L6 Sports Education module
- Students were introduced to blogging as technology and as a social practice (McGrail and Davis, 2011)
- Students were asked to submit a 600 word blog post on a contemporary sports issue of their choosing
- Engaging with peers' blog submissions was also a requirement
- This formative activity formed part of the summative assessment, with an emphasis on reflection

Audience awareness

- Shift from a lecturer focused audience to an interactive and participatory public audience
- Enabled students to forge relationships with students who were not in their groups
- Friends and supporters; teachers and critics
- Blog writing relies on a response from the audience:
 - “Without a response, there is no communication. If there is no communication happening, then there is no understanding as to whether one’s words make meaning or fall silent” (Penrod, 2005: 2)

Sense of ownership

- Blogging required students to claim a writer's hat
- More conscious of their audience and exposure of their writing skills
- Such awareness helps students to be more mindful writers, as they are forced to reconsider their ideas, their voices, their writing approaches, and so forth
- Students paid attention to the role of titles in inviting or enticing readers

Vs. essay writing

- Google generation students and the 21st century classroom (Manca and Ranieri, 2016)
- Provides the opportunity for a new writing experience
- Negotiating a space between academic and personal writing
- Merges self-expressive writing with writing for social interaction
- Explore style and voice

Student feedback

- The blog sessions were really helpful and helped me understand what I was doing a lot more, as well as techniques and content
- The blog allowed us to write about the topic in a different mindset. Less emphasis on academic writing and more on the actual topic
- The blog made an enjoyable change. It helped make the module more interesting.
- The blog was a lot more interesting than just an essay
- The blog and the comments have encouraged peer feedback, which has been really valuable and gets us thinking about counter arguments
- I have liked having the opportunity to write a blog as part of our assessment as it has given us a different way of writing academically
- I've liked the blog aspect of the module. It's helped develop a new skill of blogging and has made the module more interesting

Final reflections

- Embedding blogging practices as a writing exercise has a number of possible benefits, including:
 - Encourages participation and engagement
 - Creates a space for collaborative learning
 - Helps foster a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for one's own writing
 - Students also saw blogging as a worthwhile skill in its own right

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