# THE USE OF BLOGS A KEY ELEMENT IN THE NEW TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS

## Fernando Checa García

EMUI_ Complutense University of Madrid

**Abstract.-** The emergence of blogs as free and easily publishing tools are available to Internet users expressing their thoughts, publish their views and sharing of experiences and ideas. Open standards accepted by the community and with very low barriers to access have transformed in a few years of production and consumption of information. They are a platform where anyone can express themselves without restrictions have limited computer skills. Post a blog on the Internet makes it easier for readers to instantly make comments and that they generated in the author a sense of satisfaction that results in future publications. Have evolved from a simple online publishing platform to a type of network that provides that the interactions between people, both individually and from the point of view of a particular group. Social networks and the *blogosphere* share common elements with respect to social partnership, a sense of community and shared experience. By observing the work of students and teachers in the classroom using blogs and through the review of the literature on the pedagogical use of the same, this paper offers an analysis of the possibilities open to their use in the classroom, both from the point of view of students as from the teachers.

**Keywords.-** *blogs, edublogs, microblogs, social network*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Because of it´s importance as easy to use tools and for the time they are being used, we can consider that blogs are one of the applications that can best respond to some of the challenges of the new teaching-learning environment reinforced mediated communications (Gewerc Barrufell, 2005). In a field where the battle for open knowledge society and in which teachers and students are interacting in new ways, blogs are the ideal tool for easily understood, but can also be seen as tools of transition to more complex aspects of social and collaborative Web. In an environment where active learning will become a strategic and operational thing in the educational organizations, in times when the student has to win initiative and ownership, mature in its formative development, the blogs can articulate a mechanism position itself as the perfect tool in the transition to new developments (González Serna, 2003). Blogs alone will not ensure greater educational effectiveness (Lara, 2005) but its proper implementation in the field of a model that integrates with the learning objectives and offers a methodology and development, will help form critical processes of knowledge construction, supported by the educational theories of constructivism and connectivism, will act as a lever of the paradigms of learning

throughout life and will underpin the development of teachers toward the figure of the mediator that supports the creation of a student's knowledge more and more autonomous. Blogs can create a new channel of communication between student and teacher, creating new interactions between the community created through the classroom, and are easy to digest, even for those students or teachers with less expertise or reluctant to use technology in the classroom.

The new educational model to which we find in schools requires the responsible use of technology, use technology that students are taking place because of them constant immersion in the Internet. Students have skills that allow them to quickly search for information and be constantly motivated to share knowledge. Students belonging to the new generation of intensive Internet users can view on the use of blogs a chance to help them work with information that let them to create responsibility for use with published content, improve its creativity and relational ties with the surrounding environment and other Internet users, as well as a momentum space and define their digital identity.

## 2. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE USE OF BLOGS IN THE CLASSROOM

Initially, the blogs in the classroom have been used as a replacement for the personal websites of teachers and the student´s virtual notebooks, which by way of posts will publish the different tasks and work required by the teacher. But in its evolution to full use as a tool for knowledge construction is necessary to look at blogs from two perspectives, as a format and process. The format will allow a change in the content management developed by the student and the intrinsic freedom offered by the blog, both in space design and the incorporation of content.

Lara (2005) and Downes (2004) advance the use of blogs must not only be a response to the requirements of a particular subject or field. If the student's blog adheres to having to publish a certain posts of duty will only be digging into some of its possibilities and it is more likely that such work is left to finish the course. Rather, the blog should be a tool to accompany the student from the beginning of their studies, allowing a communication network complete with its environment.

The freedom of design developments, exemplified by templates changes and improvements or the addition of supplements or widgets that it deems appropriate or interesting, the profuse and varied use of the hyperlinks on the blogroll, or categorization through free labels, will emphasize the construction of a digital student speech, beyond the completion and publication of a number of posts required for a subject (Congosto, 2008).

From the exhibition class to the participatory class, one of the challenges that are posed in the new teaching-learning environment can be carried to the plane of the network thanks to the discursive nature of blogs. With one of its defining characteristics, interactivity through the system of comments and trackbacks, the back links that allow the conversation to go through other blogs, students can receive feedback on their actions and writings, and not just the teacher or other partner, but any Internet user who accesses the blog. The classroom and the conversation becomes this way in an open space where interactions give

room for new external partners, increasing the satisfaction and knowledge acquisition capability.

Contreras (2004), "Weblogs in education" raises the issue of blogs use and the building skills in students related to creativity and social interaction network. Thanks to the particular structure of a blog, thinking sequentially exposed is easy to show and express. The visualization and construction of a new mindset of learning is enhanced with hypertext links that offer both in the body of each of the posts as customizing lists of recommended links, which offer a profile of the student's interests and its recommendations. Attached to the meaning of labeled semantic and the categorization of content, the blogs tools have an impact on improving the process of reflection upon the publication of a post.

Students can formalize and build a digital identity on a daily basis in their interactions on line and their regular participation in web based social networks. They are mostly users of online tools, which incorporate data, images of your day to day part of his public persona in the big repository that is Web 2.0. Their mind is drawn on the day across hundreds of cross-conversations, traditionally considered in the level of teaching and learning as unsubstantiated or irrelevant to achieving agreed learning goals. But the digital identity can also be reflected through the construction and continued development of a blog. It is not just identity within the network acquired more or less closed and close the student. The freedom in the time to choose a design and customize, the choice of content and links in the style of writing, knowing readers facing known and unknown, suggests an increase of credibility on the Internet that is measurable.

Creating and editing a blog also helps in coordinating research projects, offering the ability to generate a different but efficient organization of the documentation generated in the research process. Working with blogs is no longer limited to working with particular platform. The editor of a blog follows and reads blogs. When the student is undertaking a project supported by a blog looking at similar sources, includes the subscription to RSS feeds as the basic element to keep up. The RSS feeds and readers become the main vehicle to access many sources of information and can be used by teachers to follow the evolution of the blogs of their students.

As strategies to incorporate working with blogs in the classroom is important to start exercising the critical reading of other blogs of interest. It is therefore necessary that the teacher incorporate blogs as key material using the blogs closer and with supporting the contents of the subject. Show most representative and popular blogs that are related to the topic of the subject, the posts that are of interest, how to find them through directories, search engines or specialized sites. Work as a facilitator of teacher helps it act as dynamizer, so that the student can act freely, although aware of their responsibilities.

These responsibilities in the development of the work with blogs typically generate doubt and fear of the possible plagiarism of the work and the posts by some of the students. However, despite the existence of tools to control this problem by the teacher, this situation always is feasible. To deal with it, the teacher can try to resolve in advance, showing to the student how easy it is to find a forgery and, most importantly, that it is wrong. The call to the responsibility of the student must previously made clear what is expected of him

in his blog, his learning and the implementation of certain content or skills, not the merely instrumental reflection of a post.

Blood (2002) warns that the freedom and the ease of editing the contents of a blog can take a little fraud by students, from being discovered in a situation of plagiarism, changing the contents on the fly and putting the teacher in a complicated situation in the proof of student error. Therefore the agreement with the student and the appeal to responsibility becomes as important as the very embodiment of the post in the working methodology.

Blogs are inside of the broad scope of the social tools of Web 2.0 and therefore they should not be taken in isolation, but as transmitters of knowledge that can become easy in central protagonists. In the classroom it is necessary not only to work with the formats of blogs, but incorporate microblogging, wikis, social bookmarking, knowledge social networking, free and open and any other element of active construction of knowledge, such as podcasts or videocasts. The inherent properties of blogs make them a special medium in the complex Ecosystem 2.0. They are personal, even those that can be edited by multiple authors. Demonstrate a commitment to thoughtful content published it has much to do with the personality of its editor, and this despite the millions of blogs and possible similarities. It is difficult to find two blogs are exactly alike.

The difficulty of maintaining a blog makes that the effort it takes to work with them generate a discipline that can be extrapolated to other areas. Like other tools of the Social Web are integrators of formats, among which especially the multimedia, but the graphic content could not to be the most important. The ease of integrating content with simplicity can integrate video, created by the author or reproduced from third party platforms. They are a good support for audio files and the podcasting evolution arises in response to audio content, export and syndicated through RSS feeds in a similar way as the text.

But most of all the blogs have their own culture and are part of a macro community without barriers set by community service providers, open to discovery by the seekers of community, content creators and feeders of the Internet, and is available for conversation not only between participants of a particular virtual community, but open to all users of the network (Marzal and Butera, 2007; Martí, 2008, San Millan et al 2008).

This open framework puts the blogs them ahead of other Web 2.0 tools at the time of its integration into the teaching methodology. As wikis and social networks, the blogs have features that allow collaborative use, but outperform them by allowing better construction of reflexive "digital self" (Sanchez, 2006). The blog helps to "be heard" but involves a complex way to achieve it. Given the vastness of the Internet pages published, the blog is a reflection of the individual connected member of a group but independent. Owner of its content, but sharing them publicly. As stated by Sonia Blanco (2005), the user is the protagonist of his writings but to escape the previous rules dictated by him or blog features embedded in their educational development. Subject to look beyond physical borders or digital.

The techno-social environment that applies in the classroom, with students holders of new desires and mindset, is inclined beforehand to the use of blogs in which the student becomes the protagonist. With their difficulties and doubts,

learning from the time of discharge in the service until the final stage, in their blog, becomes an intrinsic part of their day to day (Oravec, 2002; Merelo and Tricas, 2004; Orihuela and Santos, 2004 ).

The learning focus on the achievement and the achievement of the challenges, the construction of knowledge with tangible is reflected in the blogosphere exceptionally. The student is aware of its progress since the beginning, with the support of teachers and the rest of their environment. Has to face times of uncertainty and should solve problems by yourself or by going to the collaboration with their environment, internalize the lessons and becoming in turn a transmitter of the same (Islas y Aribas, 2008).

Given the changes that education faces and through the inclusion of blogs as a tool for personal and classroom work we can observe six key aspects to consider:

- Students must assume the edition of a blog to bring them to a process of maturity and accountability. His writings are not only faced with the discretion of the teacher, but to the entire Internet. Fear of the initial difficulties and risks becomes a process of improving self-esteem when the student begins to be aware of the visibility of their writings.

- Feedback is as important as writing. Students must be aware of how important the publication of posts in his personal space is critical and active participation in their peers. Critical thinking should be supported by the teacher, the first actor in the comments of students, motivating and encouraging.

- The style of writing and communication skills is not heritage of a particular discipline. Facing to the open judgment of the written word is a path to continuous improvement. Writing, in the case of blogs, or the diction in the case of podcasts, it improves with consistent work.

- New students tend to do several things at once and that is one aspect that can best be seen in the classroom. Subjected to time measures not agreed and with which they could not agree, the fall of care is a common problem in any group. To avoid loss of concentration the class should be participatory and have activities that stimulate the amount of time students are in the classroom. But the concentration is also a competition the student must achieve and blog development work helps focus and objectives in a tangible and measurable development with ease.

- Blogs should not be raised solely as a mere activity in a particular subject area. If so, the publication will keep only the records required by that professor. Accustom the student to publish consistently permit that a short time after his reflections can be improve voluntarily and freely, affecting all his academic and personal ambit.

- The student should be aware of the visibility that will have their writings and their importance as an Internet node. As a creator of content, he improves and gives knowledge to the reader. The student now not only builds his knowledge, he helps to build the knowledge of the others.

## 3. SPECIFIC USES OF BLOGS AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

As we have said, before the publication of a blog is necessary to gain an understanding of what they are and become a reader to internalize the different styles and challenges in its development. Also important will be work in editing and publishing posts and access to and reading other blogs (Levine et al, 2004).

From the standpoint of reading blogs, they have different functions that enhance the capacity of teaching and learning of the participants, both students and teachers. Let's look closely some of the possibilities:

### 3.1. Reading blogs by students

Students can access new knowledge bases. Increasing the information obtained from scientific sources and reference publications of the matter, the recognition of materials that are being created in other schools, as well as monitoring and the creation of a knowledge base that go along of his academic life, allows students to observe how knowledge is developing and evolving.

Reading the blog of the teacher is the complement to the sessions in which the teacher exposes parts of the subject and generates discussions or activities to be performed. Frequent access to the publication of the teacher allows students to see the evolution of the facilitator and overcome any fears or brake in the edition of his blog, besides being able to interact via comments and provide a source of extra content to feed their own blog.

Most platforms provide a blogging service that allows the ability to create group blogs. To carry out collaborative work group, the blog shows up as an excellent tool that helps members of the working group interact, publish their findings identified individually and generate a distribution of tasks in managing the blog. Reading the group blog allows students to internalize the concepts raised by his fellow band members, meet them on an equal footing, enhance their critical and supports collaboration to achieve common goals.

Not only the group's blog should become a constant reading but for the rest of peers. New ideas generated by other class members or advances in aspects such as design issues or the introduction of initially untreated subjects can inspire as well as increase social ties and knowledge beyond the groups that traditionally are based on the known affinities.

To help students improve their skills in reading blogs is necessary to demystify the information appearing on them is strictly amateur. Knowing how to find sources of information helps students to increase the sense of criticism about the content being published. And to make a proper management of the sources using feed readers to help manage the large amount of content is basic. The figure of the teacher to help discern between different sources and as a facilitator in the selection and use of RSS aggregators is displayed in a main plane.

The student must have the freedom to choose the management application with which you are most comfortable and it must know the most common features and functionality, their points of weakness against its competitors. The simple

use of a feed reader should not be taken for granted and that is why training in concepts such as content syndication, filtering or actively seeking sources has become one of the early stages of labor.

## 3.2. Reading blogs by teachers

As students have access to knowledge bases by reading blogs, the teachers and professors have that possibility one way to increase their access to content that, while they may not have the characteristics applicable to scientific knowledge published in journals or recognized quality papers should not be underestimated. Many of the advances that are subsequently published in journals or books are advanced in research blogs. Increasingly, professionals and managers often write a blog to show advances in his industry, his company or his thoughts on any field of activity. Shared knowledge made available through thousands of blogs and free and easy to find should become a permanent reference tool by the university faculty, acceding to new publications as well as the specific sources of their field of study and reach it work smoothly and permanently.

The teacher must read the blogs of your students. Ask students to write a blog and then not access it, appreciate their posts, and criticize those works that can be incorrect, or not have an assertive reading, means that the inclusion of blogs in the dynamics of the class is doomed to see failure. The first reader of the blogs of the students needs to be the teacher and the reading should be noted. Hence the importance of active participation in the comments pushing and generating debate, offering assistance and entering the contents read in class. Again, the organization becomes critical, using a feed reader which blogs appear clearly defined their students and those posts that should be used in the classroom for comment or work on them.

The time divided between teaching and research of many teachers and professors, especially at the university, often leaves little space for training in new teaching techniques and advances in teaching methodologies. Universities try to offer refresher training professors but often these overlap with daily activity, resulting in little motivating for a professor who can find them in an extra increase in their workload. So by reading blogs specializing in innovative teaching and educational methodologies, the university professor can easily keep track of the progress that other colleagues are doing. The islands of knowledge that sometimes occur in educational settings by teachers who carry out innovations and are not known to the rest of the faculty community, have their counterparts in access to experiences and best practices of professors who publish blogs anywhere in the world and on any topic.

Gain access to new learning objects, shared by teachers from their blog, help to enrich the content offered to students. It avoid precious time writing and creating material already completed and made available to the community under Creative Commons licenses. Traditionally, the teacher creates and reuses its learning objects and repeat patterns initiated by peers. The classic slides that accompany the teaching content of a subject usually be created individually, when through reading blogs is possible to access shared material in repositories such as Slideshare. Just as the student is encouraged to use

materials created by third parties, while maintaining the original author quotes, the teacher can use these materials without having why prestige is being undermined.

### 3.3. Writing blogs by students

The student's blog is a great way to incorporate their subjects digitized portfolio, which are added the tasks and work required to achieve the learning objectives previously known. Compared to traditional delivery practices to teachers, in writing or through digital media such as virtual campuses or e-mail, creating and maintaining an online portfolio affects the construction of identity online and in the responsibility quality and effort put into the work carried out. Dealing with the investigation of their peers and the Internet community, openly and without barriers, leads the student to improve their communication skills and writing as well as their ability to synthesize and personal reflection. The consciousness that his work may be known by anyone creates tension and resentment at first, but once past, improves the learning.

Addressing the learning achieved from the plane of continuous reflection is another novel aspects that incorporates the use of blogs. Initially the student comes to class, studying or working on some content and finally gets a rating after being evaluate, usually in objective and subjective aspects for the teacher, which guarantees the achievement of learning objectives. But reflection on the learning gained not usually arises until recently. If a student got a score that would allow it to overcome the minimum was considered to have achieved this learning, but his opinion went beyond the occasional reflection on surveys of satisfaction with the course. With the launch of a blog and motivation by teachers for students to write about it without fear, we can know what the student believes he has learned. The learning objectives are often marked the beginning of the course by the teacher according to the curriculum of the subject characteristics and are often not agreed or even discussed with the students. The vertical approach is widespread. The public reflection on the daily and the degree of achievement of the objectives given, however, an exceptional teacher information can be aware of errors in the approach to the subject. When the student feels free to reflect on public facing himself and learns to appreciate or criticize through their feelings and words the value or lack thereof of learning.

The criticism of learning and putting into public affects growth and increasing credibility of the reputation acquired and reflected at the time the student sees himself as part of creating Internet content, referenced by others, discussed and engaged in conversations about academic development. No longer is a student who manages the digital image in public or among your circle of friends. It becomes an individual with something to say, that can be heard and valued not only for the teacher but by anyone with access to your blog. The reputation acquired over time that the blog remains active and its interrelationship with other Web 2.0 tools like professionals social networks, can place the student in a strong position after his academic path and their employability.

Joining the conversation, participation in blogs with comments from other classmates and the teacher's incorporation of the criticisms and suggestions in his speech, sorting by category and make use of semantic tags, converts the

blog of the student an excellent global tool, likely serve to manage their knowledge, to get used to transfer and share, to work in an environment of collaboration and active participation in the Internet creates value, both for itself and for the rest of the community.

## 3.4. Writing blogs by teachers

Some professors, especially at the university, have two fundamental strands in his work, the researcher, becoming in creators of knowledge, seekers of their field of study, and research achievements transmitting the rest of the scientific community and the rest of the society. Their researches improve their teaching skills, being able to show the way forward for students, providing them with resources and guidance in the process of constructing their learning, both from the point of view of content and from the professional skills required for the insertion work. Carry out a blog enhance the visibility of their practice. Share the progress of their research, prior to writing a paper or book, with readers and community members of the Internet can be a good exercise of reflection for the drafting of the definitive work. Make available on the blog helps to give visibility beyond publication in journals that are often inaccessible to people outside the university community, but interested on the subject. Share learning objects and practices increase the professional standing and places the professor as expert recognized not only within the university, but outside it.

The visibility offered by blogs also helps teachers who write in them to obtain an increase in its network with professors and experts from other universities and study areas. That contact can go collaborations for the execution of joint projects and new projects to improve the teacher's professional position. The digital identity and visibility of anyone on the Internet is particularly important for professionals involved in teaching and research. We can not forget that teachers and professors always have a profile of public service and increasingly subject close to their environment will be interested in their work and concerns. The edition of a blog often and the impact that this ends up with thanks to search engines, the professor becomes an expert both inside and outside the university.

The teacher's blog has become the space to which students repeatedly come in for instructions on issues related to the subject, which may be published classroom materials and support resources of any kind. The teacher's blogroll is the best place to make recommendations about places of interest and sources of consultation required. The ability to integrate video and audio helps subscribers, students or not, may continue to exercise differently than usual (eg. a teacher can record a small weekly podcast in which we put some of the issues to be addressed in the next class without much effort). The dynamics of the classes, just as the students following their reflective learning journal, can be published to show the students that matter is built jointly by all members of the class, including the teacher, without prejudice the moral authority of his figure as a facilitator of knowledge. The blog allows a professor of management meetings and progress made, providing summaries and final reflections on the various units of knowledge.

Finally, the teacher's blog can also be the hub from which you link all the blogs of students. Especially in classes with large number of students it is interesting that there is a place where all are indexed so that any member can return to them and be able to easily find the blog of their peers.

If the management of the posts through categories and using labels is always important, it is especially in the case of teacher's blog. Students who are visiting continuously throughout the course must have the ability to access all content seamlessly and as simple as possible. Management posts thus become something fundamental to the proper management of knowledge reflected there. Almost as much as the style of writing that has to be warm and friendly without thereby neglecting the severity of the issues they addressed and discussed.

A final point that the teacher has think when arranging his subject with a blog is the space-time. The subjects have a fixed term and usually are held again next year to another group. Given this common situation may arise two scenarios: the creation of a blog for every subject taught each academic year and can be punctuated with the writing of students they see as the teacher is writing about the same time as them. When the student observes the teacher's blog and see dozens of posts can tend to feel some pressure to the large amount of content. However, if a student observes as the teacher is writing his blog while he and his teammates in the situation is encouraging. On the other hand, the fact of starting a blog every time that start a course, abandoning the previous one, can lead to reuse learning objects and is not interesting. There will be the teacher who decides, in its technical ability to use blog tool and interest in the approach to the subject of a blog reuse year after year or the opening of a new one by subject. In the case of reusing the same blog, customizing the beginning of each year post as well as the categorization of content, not only thematically, but in groups, must be very clear. Blogs of course can be accompanied by the issue of teachers' personal blog, which is published not only on the daily life of the class, but on special interests and whose impact on the aspects outlined above accompany and increase the chances of teacher development.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The use of blogs in educational settings lets put in an equal weighted students and teachers. The first, as creators and publishers in their blogs, become responsible for the content creation, exposed to the scrutiny of Internet users, and responsible for the creation and demonstration of their own learning indicators and the development of skills required. Similarly, professors and teachers change their role as a passive transmitter of knowledge to become facilitators, guides and mentors of student learning, without losing their teaching skills and your responsibility to evaluate the students' learning. To this is joined by the new visibility achieved by teachers who use the model, improving their own digital identity and resulting in greater satisfaction in their role as generators of scientific knowledge and academic experience.

The implementation of strategies for inclusion of blogs in schools reinforces the daily incorporation of technology to improve learning and places the digital conversation as part of the new relationship with the student, the main

protagonist of his own learning. Is positive, also, work on models incorporating the blogs that offer a form of systematic course of action, both conceptually and methodologically, offering the required flexibility to adapt according to the particularities of each school.

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