



Teacher-created, Teacher-centered Weblogs: Perceptions and Practices

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Abstract

This paper describes the findings of a qualitative research study examining the perceptions and practices of inservice teachers who blog. Open-ended interviews and electronic dialogues were conducted with 16 K–12 bloggers to identify emergent themes. A content analysis of each participant's Weblogs was conducted to confirm these findings. Findings suggest that when used by teachers, Weblogs can promote 1) reflective practice, and 2) collaboration and social interaction among users. Ethical issues related to the use of Weblogs are discussed as well. Reporting of this data may assist in forming a deeper understanding of the perceptions and practices related to teacher created, teacher centered Weblogs.

In their simplest form, Weblogs, or blogs, can be thought of as electronic journals (Huffaker, 2004; Kennedy, 2003). According to Kennedy (2003), blogs are “part Web site, part journal, part free-form writing spaces [that] have the potential to enhance writing and literacy skills while offering a uniquely stylized form of expression” (¶ 4). A simple user interface makes Weblogs an effective medium for many educators, including those who lack strong computer skills (Lohnes, 2003; Richardson, 2006).

Blogs Defined

Blogs have distinct attributes that distinguish them from other types of electronic communication. For example, while e-mail is used to compose, send, and receive messages over electronic communication systems, blogs are unique Web sites where authors post in reverse chronological order (Kajder & Bull, 2003; Richardson, 2006). And unlike threaded discussions, only the author of the blog can create a new topic for discussion (Richardson, 2006).

The use of blogs by K–12 teachers is a relatively new phenomenon. Only a handful of studies have been published supporting their effectiveness in educational settings (Tan, 2005). However, these papers do not address their efficacy, when used by K–12 teachers, to reflect in writing about professional practice. In fact, it remains unclear how K–12 teachers are using blogs, even though many in the field are aware that the number of educational users is growing.

Literature Review

Creative Expression

There is a dearth of scholarly literature on the efficacy of blogs in educational settings. However, few studies indicate their usefulness. For example, research reported by Huffaker (2004) suggests that “blogging” promotes critical literacy skills, including reading, writing, self-expression, reflection, and creativity. Oravec's (2004) work supports these assertions. “Similar to an open journal, the accumulation of writings and other content [published in a blog] creates both a record of learning and

a resource for others” to use (Campbell, 2003, ¶1). Through the use of blogs, journaling has reemerged as a way to promote writing skills, particularly among student writers (Kajder, Bull, & Van Noy, 2004). Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2004a) report that scholars underestimate the importance of blogs in supporting creative expression.

Reflective Practice

Preliminary research indicates that blogs promote reflective practice (Fiedler, 2003; Suzuki, 2004; West, Wright, & Graham, 2005). Lohnes (2003) refers to Weblogs as “living, reflective journal[s]” (¶ 5). And, because work is archived and readily available, students and instructors can read previous work and reflect on earlier entries (Blackmon, 2004). Research on the efficacy of reflection in electronic environments supports this practice (Barrett, 2002; Bonk, Cummings, Hara, Fischler, & Lee, 2000). According to Kennedy (2003), “...in many ways, blogs combine the best elements of [technology, where] work is collected, edited, and assessed, with the immediacy of publishing for a virtual audience” (¶17).

Written reflection has been noted in the literature as an effective method of thinking about practice (Calderhead, 1996; Palmer, 1998). Blogs are “especially effective at supporting ... reflection ... more so than other technologies would be” (West, et. al, 2005, p.1656). While research on blogs as reflective devices is in short supply, the research on reflective practice in education is plentiful (Bolton, 1999; Kirk, 2000; Redmond & Burger, 2004; Romano & Schwartz, 2005). In particular, there are a number of studies regarding preservice teachers and the use of electronic mediums for reflection. Research indicated that preservice educators who participate in electronic asynchronous reflection groups feel the activity helps them better understand teaching and helps them make better decisions concerning the teaching experience (Redmond & Burger, 2004; Romano & Schwartz, 2005). Kirk's (2000) research provided insight into the types of topics that promote reflective thinking in an electronic environment, and Bolton (1999) defined the characteristics of reflective practitioners as “... educational trendsetters and teacher leaders” (p.193). However, the research on the efficacy of blogs in supporting reflective practice among inservice teachers is scarce. Therefore, the results of this study should prove useful in framing further research in this area.

Collaboration and Social Interaction

According to Darlington-Hammond (1996), most teachers receive little or no feedback from their peers about the effectiveness of their instructional activities. However, Weblogs can provide an electronic forum for reading, writing, and collaborating with peers and others (Goodwin-Jones, 2003; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004; Kajder & Bull, 2003; Poling, 2005; West, et. al., 2005). Stiller and Philleo (2003) report similar conclusions. Students and instructors can use blogs to cultivate ideas and share them online with colleagues and others (Glenn, 2003; Kajder,

Bull, & Van Noy, 2004; Oravec, 2004; Poling, 2005). Posts are accessible to the writer, as well as to other readers. As such, they are available for “subsequent reflection and analysis; allowing [users] to revisit and revise their artifacts” (Ferdig & Trammell, ¶5, 2004). Kajder, Bull, and Van Noy (2004) support this assertion as well.

Blogs can give users a sense of connection with their peers (Poling, 2005; Reynard, 2005; Richardson, 2003; Toner, 2004). According to Richardson (2003), blogs are “a way to communicate with students ..., archive and publish student work, learn with far-flung collaborators, and ‘manage’ the knowledge that members of the school community create” (¶5). Blogs also provide a means of delivering course content including syllabi, assignments, links, and other updates as necessary (Downes, 2004; Kajder & Bull, 2003; Roberts, 2003). As educators and other users post to their blogs, they are also, potentially, creating an on-line resource for their peers to refer to for guidance (Campbell, 2003). Because blog software often includes ways to link users together, others can comment on a peer’s posts or even work together online to solve a shared problem (Lohnes, 2003; Piontek, 2004).

Improved Technology Skills

Some experts believe blogs can be used to promote technology skills among users (Bull, Bull, & Kajder, 2003; Richardson, 2003). Blogs can display pictures, texts, audio and video files and store word processed or other files. The technology can be a fun and efficient tool, even for technology novices (Kajder, Van Noy, & Bull, 2004; Lee, 2005).

Ethical Issues

Bloggers choose to identify themselves in several ways. Most bloggers (92%) provide some sort of identifier, whether it is a full name (31%), a first name (36%), or an alias (29%) (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004a; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). Personal demographic information, such as age and occupation, is also often provided on blogger’s homepages. According to a study by Herring, et al. (2004a), 54% of bloggers provide some demographic information.

Several studies have provided information on the ratio of female to male bloggers. Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2004b) randomly selected 358 blogs for study, and found males (52%) and females (48%) were almost equally inclined to blog. In an analysis of 776 randomly selected blogs, The National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education’s *BlogCensus* (2003) reported a similar ratio of male to female bloggers—40% male to 36% female, in blogs where author gender could be determined. Additionally, Greenspan’s (2003) research supported this finding. However, in those bloggers under 20 years of age, Herring et al. (2004a) found females to be more prevalent bloggers than males. Of 358 blogs studied, 39% of the blog authors were under age 20 (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2004b).

Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach to address the following broad research question: What are the perceptions and activities of K–12 teacher bloggers concerning the usefulness of Weblogs? In particular, the researchers sought to examine the usefulness of Weblogs in supporting reflective practice. Participants were also asked to identify ethical issues associated with blogging.

Stage One: Conducting a Census

The total population of bloggers is unknown; recent statistics published by other researchers indicate the blogger community includes approximately 4 million users (Huffaker, 2004; Henning, 2003). However, it is not known how many bloggers are K–12 educators. Identifying the parameters of this population and tracking its growth is critical for future research in this area.

Therefore, the researchers sought to conduct a census to identify teacher-created, teacher-centered blogs. Identified blogs included only those created by K–12 inservice teachers in public schools in the United States. No effort was made to collect data on teacher-created, student-centered instructional blogs or on preservice teachers’ blogs. Preliminary data were collected using a researcher-produced checklist (See Appendix A). Categories included on the checklist come from the review of primary and secondary resource materials relating to the efficacy of Weblogs in educational settings. Four technology experts within the instructional technology and teacher education fields assisted the researchers in establishing the content validity of the checklist. A census was conducted over a three-month period during the spring 2005 school semester. The known population for this period was 142 teacher-created, teacher-centered blogs (N=142) (See Appendix B for a demographic profile of this group). The research sample was selected from this population.

Addressing Sampling Bias

In order to reduce the problem of self-selection in the survey process, the researchers applied Dhalen’s (1998) method of sampling to the identified research population (N=142). Thirty bloggers were randomly selected and a specific invitation to participate in the research was emailed to each. Because of the qualitative nature of the research, this number was kept small (Punch, 1998). The percentage of respondents from the sample that agreed to participate in the study was 53% (n =16). Therefore, results cannot be generalized to the known population. However, for the purposes of this qualitative research project, the results remain useful.

Stage Two: Electronic Dialogues and Open-ended Interviews

Patton (2002) and Punch (1998) support the use of electronic dialogues and open-ended questions in qualitative studies. Informed consent was obtained for the remaining steps in the process. Authors were contacted electronically using the contact capacities of each Weblog (e-mail or electronic posting, depending on how a blog was set up). Only those blogs whose authors agreed to participate were used in the next two steps of the research. Because the examples used in this research come from practicing educators, information of a personal nature or information that would identify the author’s place of employment was not collected.

Stage Three: Content Analysis

Written posts and comments collected from the 16 blogs were analyzed for emergent themes (Patton, 2002). All written materials were carefully read and reread by the researchers and reoccurring themes were noted (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Patton, 2002). Themes were compared to those that emerged from both the participant interviews and the electronic dialogues. There was strong agreement between the themes that emerged in the interviews and from the content analysis.

Participants

The sample consisted of 16 (n=16) K–12 inservice teachers. While nine were female and six male, the gender of one participant could not be determined. One participant was a K– 8 teacher, eight taught at the middle school level, and seven were high school teachers. Participants taught a range of subjects (language arts = 6, math = 2, social studies = 3, science = 3, computers = 1, unknown = 1). Fifteen of the participants published their blogs anonymously. Only one participant published using her real name.

Results

The discussion of results is organized around categories that emerged during the study: 1) reflective practice and 2) peer communication and social interaction. Quotations representative of each theme are used for illustration. Results indicate that the majority (15) found the blogging

experience to be very positive. Several participants specifically noted the ease of use as one reason for blogging. Only one participant expressed a more neutral stance toward blogging's efficacy.

Reflective Practice

Twelve participants reported that blogging supports their reflective practice. As one noted, blogging helps "[me] focus on who I am as an educator." Another reported,

I feel that blogging has made me a more reflective teacher...I believe that it helps me stay healthy and more even-keeled than if I wasn't making a conscious effort to record my daily experience and thoughts. It also allows me to return to old posts, reread them, and consider the actions I took in response to certain student behaviors or encounters with parents and coworkers.

Another participant's comments support this assertion: "[Blogging] provides an opportunity to record [an] experiences, reflect on it, [and] organize my thoughts. I think it also benefits others who may be looking for...inspiration." For another participant, blogging has become "integrated with the rest of my work...It is a part of my day." Participants' awareness of the reflective process is illustrated by this quote:

I am...aware that my blog is read by educators... Sometimes, the impulse...is to share the commonalities in our situations. Sometimes, I want to shed light on what 'real life teaching' is like. Sometimes I just need a place to dump my soul. I use my blog for all these purposes.

Examples from the Content Analysis. Results of the content analysis indicate that a majority of entries examined demonstrated some level of reflective writing. However, the depth of reflection varied markedly between and within individual blogs.

Reflections with reference to students occurred frequently on the blogs. Issues ranged from classroom management concerns to discussions about how to keep students actively engaged in their own learning. The thoughtfulness often involved in this process is illustrated by the entry below:

Our first hands-on science activity of the year, today! It was a basic lesson on constructing a circuit from a light bulb, battery, and wires. The kids love electricity. I like it, but it's not my strongest subject—I am more of an Earth Science and Biology person, but as a middle school teacher, it's only a matter of time before you wind up teaching all three subjects (Earth, Life, and Physical Science). I am, at heart, a generalist, not a specialist, which is one reason why I teach middle school instead of high school. Middle school science introduces so many new and fascinating topics to the kids, which they love and I love. But I digress. Today was a perfect example of trying to balance inquiry—letting kids explore a topic for themselves—with structure. As it's the beginning of the year, I am still heavily in "training mode," teaching the kids how things work in my classroom and our school, how we behave on line, how we handle materials, how we follow directions, how we take notes, and on and on and on. Thus the lesson plan was to have the kids explore the many ways to make a circuit out of the materials provided... but the real lesson was much more step-by-step.

She continued,

It was also a revelation to see how much quicker (sic)

the seventh graders understood the material—we had lots of those "lightbulb" moments (pun intended!) when I asked them why a switch turns the light on and off. The sixth graders struggled with this much more, and needed to be walked through it. Lucky for me, I see the sixth graders five times per week, but the seventh graders only four. That should be enough time to keep them in roughly the same place in the material.

After discussing the situation in depth, the teacher reflected:

The reason they are even getting the same material this year is that I started the seventh graders on Earth Science in the sixth grade, only to wish later on that they knew about atoms and molecules. So, this year's sixth graders are getting Physical Science to make sure they know that stuff before Earth Science, and the seventh graders are getting Physical Science because they didn't have it last year. Both will get Life Science in 8th grade since the 8th grade Intermediate Level Science Exam is 60% Life Science, so it makes sense to teach it right before they take the exam. Hope I didn't lose anyone there!

The entry demonstrates a process of informal action research on the part of the author. The author's reflection upon instructional choices and the resulting outcomes is also illustrated.

Other posts were intended to illicit suggestions from readers. These reflective pieces ranged from concerns about logistics (e.g., scheduling and time constraints) to frustrations relating to testing and other mandates. While many posts simply reflected a need to vent, others had a strong curricular focus. The frustration experienced by a science teacher after his curriculum changed resulted in the following post:

It's moments like these when I feel totally incompetent. I've been teaching 13 years now, and yet here I am, fumbling around trying to find my way through a science curriculum like any other first year teacher. I'm spending too much time on certain topics but still finding too many of my students aren't keeping up. I'm rushing topics that should be prior knowledge but about which my students are understandably clueless—basic chemistry concepts, e.g. This past week I tried to cover 6 weeks of grade 8 chemistry in one week. A lot of lectures, discussions, visualizations, but not much in the way of activities. I figure we will continue using the vocabulary in studying cell processes over the next few weeks and indeed throughout the rest of the course, so a crash course was in order. I hope that with repeated exposure to the concepts in the context of cell biology, ecology, and human biology it will begin to make sense at some point...

He also considered input from other educators:

A former colleague who is now a principal argues that living environment teachers should try to teach a few topics and teach them well...I'm OK with the idea of teaching fewer formal topics and teaching them well—in fact, if the units are as rich as the egg unit, then the students may come out understanding significantly more, but the 65 doesn't sit with me. Especially with my 8th graders, where I'm afraid if they don't do better than that the schools may find a way to reject their middle school regents course

and require them to take it all over again in high school. I hope I am teaching at least as well as they can expect to be taught in a high school—otherwise what's the point?

While the passage could have been simply a statement of frustration, the teacher instead attempted to think through a problem and find a solution. Posting his thought process online also allowed him to illicit useful feedback from other science teachers.

Collaboration and Social Interaction

Thirteen of the participants wrote about the importance of peer communication and social interaction while blogging. Within this category, several sub-categories emerged: 1) the sharing of ideas, 2) the discussion of issues of concern, 3) the overcoming of geographic or professional isolation, and 4) the venting of frustrations. The following quote is illustrative of the broader theme:

I love reading other teacher's blogs, to find out what they're thinking, what works for them, what doesn't, and also to get some vindication. It's such a relief to know that I'm not the only one who has trouble with classroom management, or is irritated at the testing frenzy, or cannot WAIT for each vacation.

Sharing of Ideas. Twelve participants cited the sharing of instructional and classroom management strategies as an important part of why they blog. One cited the "chance to 'pimp' my kids or my lessons when things go well" as important for her. For another participant, blogging has:

...provided me with the social and practical support that is often lacking at my low-income, low-performing school. Reading other teachers' blogs allows me to see what they're doing in the classroom and what has worked (or not worked) for them in the past. It is nice to share the victories and defeats of other teachers, especially those just starting out like I am.

A long time blogger provides the following insight:

I have only very recently discovered the "genre" of teacher blogs. For years it felt like I was the only teacher out there with a blog and I am thrilled to find other blogging teachers. Blogging does take a lot of time and I can see why many teachers would feel they just don't have the time to dedicate to it. [But] I see my blogging time as the most valuable time of the day....

Addressing Issues of Professional Concern. Addressing issues of professional concern was important for many of the participants. In fact, 11 reported this as a major factor in their decision to blog. Comments illustrative of this sub-theme are listed below:

...a place to take comfort, to process a particularly tough day, or to discuss school politics. [But it can also be] a bit (emotionally) risky, put[ting] your thoughts and ideas out there in a public space and wonder[ing] how they will be received by readers.

[Blogging is] a good forum for me to speak about what I hold dear... Having so many teachers respond to my blog has been a delightful surprise, one I treasure!

I like getting to speak (write) my mind fully. It's a great experience to have people respond to what I write, even when they disagree with me.

Others were more specific in their thinking:

[B]logging is a fantastic way to open a national (or

even international...) forum among teachers. If we want to effect change or try new and different practices, this is a free, fun way to do it!

I think a large group of blogging teachers could have a lot of political clout if the teachers had some good leaders who were willing to sniff out injustices and put forward solutions to common problems.

Overcoming Geographic or Professional Isolation. Six of the participants reported that blogging assists them in overcoming their sense of isolation. Isolation was addressed in terms of professional and geographic isolation:

Being a classroom teacher can be [a] very lonely business—you don't have a lot of opportunity to reach out to other professionals--or ways to regularly reflect on classroom issues. Blogging is helping me do both...

I'm just a simple teacher in small town mid-America...But being able to communicate with teachers all over the world...has given me a tremendous sense of connectedness (sic) and community with innovative teachers around the world!

I've gotten a lot out of the informal community of teacher bloggers. I've become good blog buddies with several other teachers who I, otherwise, would never have met. I know that, when I've had a terrible day, I'll be able to find at least one blog that tells a story of a positive, successful day in a school somewhere. Although it doesn't always work, I try to use these uplifting stories as reminders of the positive days I've had and will surely have again.

Being a teacher is an extremely isolating experience. How often do we have meaningful contact with adults? Not very. [My] blog is my outlet into the world of reality.

Venting of frustration. Terms such as "venting" and "blowing off steam" were used by seven participants to explain why they blog. As one participant reported,

[It] is a wonderful way to express my frustrations with teaching. Before I took up blogging I didn't really have an outlet to share the things that irritated or enraged me. The blog allows me to take a very bad situation and see [it] in a humorous light. Instead of being overwhelmed with anger, I'm able to handle the situation by thinking "this is going to be a great story to tell on my blog...When I write out my daily trials I am able to let them go. When I keep my problems locked inside I can't sleep because I stew on them. Once I tell my story on my blog, I don't really have to think about the problem anymore. The tension is released.

Others agree:

My blog is cathartic for me...a place to vent and tell stories about my experience as an educator.

I need a place to vent. I also feel like the world needs to know about the deceptive/annoying/ridiculous happenings in public schools, in order to have the truth out there.

Ethical Issues

Participants were also asked to identify professional concerns related to blogging. Fourteen participants specifically cited privacy as their primary

concern. Issues such as whether they were in violation of school or district policy were addressed, as was the need to avoid being “outed” by students, parents or administrators. The following quotes are illustrative of these concerns:

I do feel I have to be very careful with my blog and with what I say. When I write about students or other teachers/school employees I always give them false names. I have tried to keep my name off the blog as much as possible so I won't come up in Google. I don't want parents, students or other school staff members to read my blog... Luckily, no one has found my site, that I'm aware of.

Some of the things [I write about] don't reflect well on my school, my coworkers, etc. and that could potentially get me in trouble... I am constantly worried about being 'found out.'

Every blog I read makes sure to use a pseudonym... It's a shame that we feel we have to protect ourselves that much.

One teacher's experience explains the need for pseudonyms:

Looking back, I was really pretty naïve in the beginning. I wrote posts that included my principal's name and details about my students and the school. When I realized that a quick Google search of these names and details yielded a direct link to my site, I was mortified. I quickly set about deleting several posts and changing the names and details in others. Not until Google's cache had gotten rid of old pages was I able to rest comfortably.

As noted earlier, 15 of the 16 participants blogged anonymously.

The need to avoid violating their students' privacy was specifically cited by three participants. As one put it,

[B]reaking student confidentiality would... lead to a lot of trouble professionally and possibly legally... I never, never, never visit my blog or any other blog on school computers. It is strictly reserved for home. I don't want to leave a trail.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions and activities of K-12 inservice teachers who blog. We were interested in determining the usefulness of teacher-created, teacher-centered blogs. In particular, we sought to examine the usefulness of blogs in supporting reflective practice. Another question that shaped the research related to the ethical issues teachers must face when blogging.

Reflective Practice

Our findings indicate that teacher-created, teacher-centered Weblogs can be effective reflective devices. For most participants, their blogs functioned as reflective journals where they could write about and reflect on events occurring in their classrooms. A majority of teachers in the study demonstrated what Rodger's (2002) refers to as a “disposition” for critically questioning what is going on in their classrooms. They used their blogs not only to think about their teaching, but also to assess their own performance as teachers. As Rodger argued (2002), this particular disposition is critical if teachers are to successfully integrate theory into practice.

Many of the teachers' entries demonstrated a process of continuous reflection about their students and about their knowledge and understanding of other issues impacting practice. This finding is supported

by Hillocke's (1999) assertion that expert teachers engage in continuous reflection about the effectiveness of their work.

Weblogs supports written reflection. Written reflection has been noted in the literature as an effective method of thinking about practice (Calderhead, 1996; Palmer, 1998). Participants in this study found blogging to be an effective and timely way to engage in reflection and to communicate with peers in the field. This finding is supported by West, et. al (2005), who concluded that blogs are “especially effective at supporting... reflection,... more so than other technologies would be” (p.1656). Evidence from the content analysis supports this finding.

Study participants found blogging software to be very user-friendly. In addition, because the software allowed teachers to not only store posts long-term, but also quickly retrieve or revise a post, their blogs functioned as effective, reflective tools.

Collaboration and Social Interaction

As stated earlier, most inservice teachers receive little or no feedback from peers (Darlington-Hammond, 1996). However, participants in this study were able to overcome this limitation by establishing a community of practice that supported one another's work. According to Khourey-Brown (2005), this kind of collaborative “... interaction among peers can promote enhanced understanding of complex situations” (p. 86). Participants were able to use their blogs to communicate with peers across the country.

Several of the teachers reported that they used their blogs to assist in overcoming professional and geographic isolation. Participants used their blogs to make connections with peers and others in a conscious attempt to overcome real and perceived barriers. Many of the teachers used them to establish a community of support between themselves and their peers. By their very nature, Weblogs are social and collaborative tools. Blogs allow for “individual expression” (West, et. al, 2005, p. 1656) and ownership, even as they promote collaboration between educators (Piontek, 2004; Reynard, 2005).

Ethical Issues

Blogs also can provide an anonymous forum for educators to express their concerns and vent frustrations about the issues and events they encounter in the educational environment. The majority of participants used their blogs in this manner. In fact, a few mistakenly *perceived* that they were venting in a totally safe environment. While a sense of a anonymity caused some participants to engage in a level of venting that bordered on the inappropriate, the majority were aware that they were creating a “permanent record of ideas, observations, inferences, and emotions that is accessible to [others]” (Khourey-Bowers, 2005, p. 90).

Privacy emerged as a major concern for participants. Because employers, colleagues, parents, and even students can access most blogs, educational bloggers must be aware of potential legal and ethical problems (Reynard, 2005). As one teacher shared, “[O]nce something is posted on the Internet, [it can be] irreversible, even if later edited or removed.” Participants in this study were cognizant of this concern. The majority worked to protect their privacy even as they avoided sharing specifics about their students, colleagues, or the work place. While most of the participants employed an ethical approach to blogging, a few did not. Therefore, issues relating to ethical practices for educational bloggers must be addressed. The authors have developed preliminary recommendations (see Appendix C).

Conclusions

The results of this study provide insight into the efficacy of Weblogs in educational settings. These results demonstrate the usefulness of Weblogs in promoting reflective practice and social and collaborative interaction. Our results suggest multiple avenues for future research. For example,

the depth and quality of reflective practice continues to be of interest to the researchers. Another area for future research involves the use of Weblogs with preservice teachers who are often required to keep reflective journals during field placements. However, issues relating to privacy and ethical practices must be addressed if Weblogs are to fulfill their early promise.

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Appendix A

This evaluation checklist is designed to quickly gather information about Weblogs (blogs) designed by K–12 educators. It is meant to assist the user in drawing conclusions about the type and quality of information provided on an Educator’s Weblog (blog). A high number of positive (yes) responses is not meant to indicate a high quality blog.

Blog Title: _____

Blog URL: _____

Section I:

Directions: Circle the “yes” or “no” box for each entry. Where provided, check the category (or categories) that best supports a positive response.

Author Information Provided	Yes	No
Check one:		
Blog is published anonymously		
Specific personal information is provided about the author		
Author’s teaching credentials clearly identified:	Yes	No
Check one:		
Early Childhood Teacher		
Elementary Teacher		
Middle School Teacher		
Secondary Teacher		
Other (List):		
Educator Classification	Yes	No
Check one:		
Teacher Candidate		
New Professional Teacher		
Professional Teacher		
Other (List):		
Gender		
Check one:		
Female		
Male		
Indeterminate/Unknown		
Type of Blog:		
Blog is used as a personal communications tool.	Yes	No
Blog is used as an add-on to other learning activities.	Yes	No
Blog is used to structure some class activities.	Yes	No
Blog is used to change the nature of some learning activities.	Yes	No
Blog is used seamlessly as a learning tool (Blog is central to learning).	Yes	No

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Section II. Purpose

Directions: Check the "yes" or "no" box for each entry. Where provided, check the category (or categories) that best supports a positive response.

Personal reflection and observation about teaching:		Yes	No
	Check <u>all</u> that apply:		
Pre-reflective			
Descriptive information about some aspect of teaching			
Rationale for an action offered			
Explanation or evaluation of various teaching actions			
Networking/Collaboration with peers		Yes	No
	Check <u>all</u> that apply:		
Electronic resources (links or uploaded resources)			
Links to other topics of interest to teachers provided			
Peer discussion promoted			
Ethical Issues:			
School's location is masked		Yes	No
Students' confidentiality is maintained		Yes	No
Copyright law is followed		Yes	No
Evidence of plagiarism is absent		Yes	No
Frequency of Use:			
	Check <u>one</u> :		
Used from time to time			
Used routinely, nearly every day			
Used every day for some kind of activity			
Used as a routine part of many daily activities			
Interactivity with the Intended Audience:		Yes	No
	Check <u>one</u> :		
Blog supports a low level of interactivity			
Blog supports a minimum level of interactivity			
Blog supports a moderate level of interactivity			
Blog supports a high level of interactivity			

Comments Section

Appendix B

Table 1: Demographic profile of the known population (N=142)

Bloggers by Grade Level Taught	Number	Percentage
PK – 8 Teachers	33	23%
Middle School Teachers	49	35%
High School Teachers	60	42%

Bloggers By Subject Taught*	Number	Percentage
Language Arts Teachers	33	23.24%
Mathematics Teachers	22	15.5%
Social Studies Teachers	21	14.78%
Science Teacher	15	10.56%
Foreign Language Teacher	6	4.23%
ESL Teacher	4	2.8%
Computer Teacher	4	2.8%
Special Education Teacher	3	2.1%
Gifted & Talented Teacher	1	0.7%
All subjects (K-8)	13	9.2%
Unknown/indeterminate	20	14.1%

Blogger by Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	81	57%
Male	45	32%
Unknown/Indeterminate	16	11%

Data were collected during the spring 2005 academic semester. All data were collected from public domain information provided on individual blogs.

Appendix C

Guidelines for Educational Bloggers

1. Avoid using the real name of students, colleagues or other school personnel. Respect their right to privacy.
2. Think before you type. Ask yourself whether what you are posting is hurtful to others. Are you presenting a fair and balanced perspective on the issues you post about? Or are you simply venting frustrations? Would you sign your name to what you are posting? If not, what purpose do you have in making a particular post?
3. Avoid blogging from school. Even the most innocent of posts may put you in violation of your school or district Acceptable Use Policy (AUP).
4. Avoid violation of U. S. copyright law. While the ease of use for many blog sites makes it a snap to add these files to your blog, all images, sound, or other files should be of your own creation or public domain files. Rather than copy/pasting entries from other blogs, link to the entry within your post.
5. Avoid use of school or district identifiers. Information specific to school or district locale should remain confidential.
6. Consider making your blog "favorites only." Many free blog sites offer this option.
7. Avoid using your school e-mail as your contact e-mail on your blog. Free e-mails are available from a variety of sources. Most school e-mail addresses use geographic identifiers that can be used to back track to you and to your school.
8. Avoid posting students' work without obtaining prior consent. Students' intellectual property rights should be respected.
9. Read your local AUP or Internet Use Policy. Know your rights; know your obligations.

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