

# Blogging in Higher Education: Theoretical and Practical Approach

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper the blogging method, which includes new forms of writing, is supported as an alternative approach to address the frequently asserted problems in higher education such as product-oriented assessment and lack of value given to students' writing as contribution to the discourse of the academic disciplines. Both theoretical and research background information is provided to clarify the rationale of using this method in higher education. Furthermore, recommended way of using this method in courses is outlined specifically in relation to these problems.

**Keywords:** Blogging Method, Weblogs, Higher Education, New Forms of Writing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The main goals of higher education include helping students develop new knowledge in subject areas, improve critical thinking, reasoning, and communication skills (written and oral), become more autonomous thinkers and learners, and to be able to work in cooperative groups [13]. As practice shows, the frequently used processes in higher education courses are reading and writing [26] which are essential for the goals described. Hoadley-Maidment also stated that "all academic communities use written communication a great deal" [5] (p. 166). However, there are some problems presented by various researchers regarding these two core processes, especially writing. This paper aims to address some of these problems in higher education while presenting blogging as one of the methods to lessen the severity of these problems.

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEMS

### Identity, Community Membership, and Voice of the Students

a) Prosser and Webb explained that "the university context is one of analysis, criticism, argumentation, substantiation of claims, acknowledgement of others' ideas, and so on, while the subculture of each discipline within the overall academic culture determines different epistemological approaches, and distinctive ways of thinking. The student, in learning how to write appropriately for each discipline, is actually embarking on a

process of initiation into the culture of that discipline, through which he or she must learn what kinds of meanings are appropriate to reproduce, what kinds of questions appropriate to ask, and so on" [23] (§7). Therefore, different academic disciplines and different instructors require students to write in different ways in accordance with particular disciplines' discourses and instructors' own particular expectations [26]. While trying to maintain their identity, these students try to adapt to the new genres, languages, conventions, rules, and expectations in different courses of different disciplines. On the one hand, these factors lead some of the students to adapt to the institutional system, imitate the best examples, relinquish their own personal style or continue to have no personal style, and present no personal opinion without support from the literature in their papers. On the other hand, they lead the rest of the students to resist to the system.

b) When students become apprentices and are engaged in academic writing to participate in a specific academic community's discourse, they need diversity of feedback to develop audience awareness. However, usually the only audience of the students is their instructors who may not consider students' assignments as a valuable contribution to the disciplines' literature, especially if the student is an undergraduate. Furthermore, mostly due to the large class sizes, giving extensive feedback to students' assignments or other writings may not be feasible. Similarly, it might not be possible to discuss every student's papers together, even though class discussions would provide students with an audience and diversity of feedback and even though the function of oral feedback significantly differs from written feedback in peer assessment, regarding its process-oriented nature [12].

c) Reflection is an important aspect in adult education, and reflective writing is used frequently in higher education courses [27]. It is different from academic writing in many ways, especially in its personal statements and freedom of its style and form. Burke and Dunn explained that "a reflexive approach will enable the students to... take up positions as active and critical learners and, ideally, contribute to doing science in socially responsible ways that help to challenge unequal power relations and taken for granted truths" [28] (p. 230). Reflective writing has its own benefits to the development of students' learning, voice, and writing skills. However as Creme presented, in some courses it is used as a "stepping-stone to other more formal

work” [27] (p. 100), while academic writing is considered as superior. This attitude prevents the effective use of new and useful forms of writing in higher education.

### **Product versus Process Oriented Assessment**

Several researchers observed that written outcome is affected by students’ conceptions of essay writing process, purposes of essay writing, and context, e.g. [23, 16]. The study conducted by Campbell, Smith, and Brooker revealed that “...there is a relationship between students’ conceptualizations of the nature and purpose of particular essay writing strategies and the structure and quality of their essays” [16] (p. 467). It is possible that problems with students’ conceptions of essay writing might be related to the problems in “accessing discipline-specific discourses” [35] (p. 280). Therefore, the role of the instructor as a member of the academic community is important in helping students develop their conceptions regarding essay writing. One way to do this is through feedback. However, the problems with the feedback system problematize achieving this goal.

In their research, Ivanic, Clark, and Rimmershaw presented six feedback types that the instructors provided for students’ written assignments: “explain the grade in terms of strengths and weaknesses”, “engage in dialogue with the student”, “give advice which will be useful in writing the next essay”, “give advice on rewriting the essay”, “correct or edit the students’ work”, “evaluate the match between the student’s essay and an ‘ideal’ answer” [31] (p. 55). The research results revealed that some instructors adopt a process-oriented approach by giving timely feedback on students’ drafts, engaging in dialogue with students, and valuing their discussions. Students who have process-oriented feedback are likely to continue to improve their written assignments even after the course ends. Also, their instructors may help them gain self confidence to continue practicing in the discourse of the academic community. Unfortunately, as Ivanic et al. explained, these types of responses are very uncommon [31].

More commonly, instructors have product and administrative oriented perspective towards students’ assignments and they evaluate only the latest written work for grading [31]. Students try to present their ideas in a way that the authoritative figure in the classroom would find most appropriate. This increases authority and power differences between students and instructors. Furthermore, instructors’ discouraging feedback may negatively affect students’ hopes for contributing valuable ideas to the discourse of the academic community. Students might not feel the need to modify their papers after the conclusion of the course; because they may think that the paper will have no further readers and that it will never be published. While teachers do not value the process much, students’ conceptions also switch toward the end product rather than other activities performed during writing, such as researching, reading, note taking, etc.

In their research study, van den Berg, Admiraal, and Pilot analyzed students’ peer assessments regarding the functions of feedback in written forms [12]. They found that most of the written feedback that students provide for each other was product-oriented. Moreover, most of the students’ feedback focused on evaluation, more than other feedback types (analysis, explanation, and suggesting revision). One of the explanations for the highly product-oriented and evaluative nature of the written feedback is that “most of them [students] were not used

to receiving process-oriented feedback from the teacher, so they had no model” [12] (p. 145)

Product-oriented assessment also has a negative impact on college students’ reading. Instructors who favor product-oriented assessment leave the impression that reading in a particular discipline is only useful in acquiring information to complete assignments or do well on exams. Because of this reason, students’ reading may be superficial and for short-term goals.

### **3. NEW FORMS OF WRITING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

New forms of writing in higher education deviates from strict rules of academic writing while still allowing students to contribute to the discourse of the academic community. These forms also change the power and authority structure in the academic environment [24]. As presented before, reflective writing is one of these new forms. Although the idea of reflective writing is definitely not new, the increasing use of it together with academic writing in higher education makes it a new form of writing. With increased use of technology in higher education, there are also other new forms of writing, such as writing as communication. It is stated that “in contrast to the normal discourse of peer review, which I characterized as the primacy of speech and a separation of speech from writing, virtual peer review places the activity entirely in the realm of writing and thus challenges our perception of speech and written discourses” [20] (pp. 71-72). These two new forms, reflection and written dialogue, are frequently utilized in the blogging method. In this paper blogging, which includes these new forms of writing, is suggested as an alternative method to address the previously asserted problems in higher education.

### **4. BLOGGING AND WEBLOGS**

“Weblog is an easily created, easily updateable Website that allows an author (or authors) to publish instantly to the Internet from any Internet connection” [36] (p. 17). Blogging can be described as a process that embraces the interrelation of reading with criticizing, reflecting, questioning, writing, and commenting. So, blogging is not only relevant to writing but to all of these processes. Downes explained that “blogging is about, first, reading. But more important, 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, criticizing, questioning, reacting.” [32] (§52).

Blood categorized weblogs into three groups: blogs, notebooks, and filters. Notebooks are differentiated from blogs by their edited “longer pieces of focused content” and their main focus on ideas rather than on daily events [29] (p. 6). While in blogs and notebooks the links serve in supportive roles, links hold even more importance in filters. In this type of weblog, the bloggers provide a variety of links which they have personally selected from the web. Each of these three categories has its individual benefits for the bloggers.

The formats of blogs are similar. Generally there are areas for entries, comments, archives, categories of entries, search boxes, personal information areas, lists of links to other blogs, and

announcement areas. The main unit of a blog is called an entry, or a post, which may consist of text, images, videos, audios, and links. These entries are generally shorter than an essay but of varying lengths. They include a publication date, title, and body; and are usually accompanied by comments. The presentation of entries is in reverse-chronological order, so the most recent entry is at the top of the page. Each entry has its own unique link, which is called a permanent link and entries can be accessed directly from this link. The entries are generally archived automatically according to publication month and year. Moreover, users can define categories for the entries and organize them under these categories. Search functions can be utilized to search archived entries.

Bloggers are different from users of discussion boards and chat rooms because they have extensive control over the management of the system; therefore they feel ownership of their blog. In chatrooms or discussion boards, the dialogue can be interrupted by other people. However, in blogs, authors can manage their entries and the comments of others according to their preferences. Blogs may also be differentiated from websites in that, visitors can reach the blog archives and see the progression of ideas, while in websites, only the latest updated pages are shown.

The simplicity and ease of creating and maintaining blogs and publishing entries makes blogging a suitable method for progressive writing. Furthermore, authors can create and publish their entries at their convenience regardless of location or time of day. Also, the reverse chronological order is appropriate for both bloggers and readers to easily see what bloggers are working on currently.

## 5. COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE IN BLOGGING

Breuch in her analysis reviewed the theory and practice and claimed the resemblance of oral and written communication in new forms. She stated that "...virtual peer review resists the primary reference of 'conversation' or 'dialogue' to oral communication, and instead embraces these terms with a broader understanding" [20] (p. 70). It is explained that online conversation can be considered as a mixture of oral and written conversation. Therefore online conversation assumes some of the advantages and disadvantages of both sides.

For example, compared to relatively permanent and one-sided forms of writing such as books or some websites, blogging encourages the interaction of readers and demonstrates value of their suggestions. As in oral conversation, blogs bring the writer and the reader together, help the writer build audience awareness, and improve the role of the reader to a contributor.

The asynchronous nature of blogging is another advantage. According to Arendt, the first condition of thinking is withdrawal, therefore it can be inferred that one cannot engage in pure thinking during dialogues or during cooperative activities [4]. If Arendt is right in that when there is action we cannot get into a pure thinking state, and if Dewey is right in that reflective thinking is careful and thorough consideration of grounds [17], then we need solitary time to think rather than trying to communicate our best thoughtful fore-conceptions which are not examined much during oral or synchronous communication.

Even though the written communication is currently the most popular form of communication in blogging, it should be remembered that the capabilities of blogs are not limited to texts. The use of audio and video in blogs can accompany texts; and therefore some of the advantages of the oral communication (such as gestures, tone of voice, etc.) can be available.

These examples and explanations show that online written communication is a form of both written and oral communication. Therefore, in the next part the terms dialogue and speech should be considered from a wider perspective to accommodate this hybrid form of virtual written communication.

## 6. THEORY SUPPORT OF THE BLOGGING METHOD

The main activities in blogging are reflective thinking, written dialogue, writing, and reading. It is suggested that the use of these activities together will help the development of all of them. Since these activities are used together in blogging, theoretically blogging helps development of college students' reflective thinking, dialogue, writing, and reading skills. In the following, the relationship between these activities and their mutuality are described.

a) Reflection is needed for dialogue.

Socrates believed that we dialogue not only with others but also with ourselves; and these two types of dialogue are interconnected [10]. Similarly, reflective thinking and dialogue are incomparably important, interactive, and mutual processes. Different from Cartesian epistemology or one-dimensional pedagogical perspectives that over-emphasize either social dialogue or reflective thinking and use either one as a stepping stone for the development of another, in this paper both types of dialogues are considered as incomparably important and mutually connected.

According to Gadamer, we need to have a *horizon* and our own standpoint to place ourselves in the authors or interlocutors' position, to understand their perspectives, to increase the awareness of their individuality, and to distinguish their horizon from ours [11]. We need to reflect on our perspectives, be aware of our own prejudices, and examine "the origin and validity" of these fore-meanings that govern our understanding or misunderstanding [11] (p. 237).

Bakhtin also described the relationship between thinking and dialogue. He stated that one's experiences become integrated into one's inner speech [34]. Inner speech can become outer speech through introspection. Introspection is related to observing, understanding, and examining one's own inner experiences regarding their contexts and comparing them to other inner experiences. Bakhtin stated that: "the process of speech, broadly understood as the process of inner and outer verbal life, goes on continuously. It knows neither beginning nor end. The outwardly actualized utterance is an island rising from the boundless sea of inner speech; the dimensions and forms of this island are determined by the particular *situation* of the utterance and its *audience*." [34] (p. 96).

b) Text or conversation stimulates reflective thinking.

We cannot completely set aside or identify the prejudices that help us to understand from the ones that hinder us, especially because we cannot be completely aware of them while they are working unnoticed [11]. However, when our prejudices are

stimulated with a text or with a conversation, and when we are trying to be open to the meaning of the other person, we start questioning and reflecting on our prejudices [11]. Dewey as well stated that “origin of thinking is some perplexity, confusion, or doubt which disrupts the equilibrium state of the mind and challenges it” [17] (p. 12).

Similarly Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning [18], which is essential for adult development, also builds this relationship between experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. “Discourse becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected upon and assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and where meaning schemes and meaning structures are ultimately transformed” [6] (p. 11).

c) Thought is internalized conversation.

Vygotsky asserted that during early childhood, the development of speech and thought converge and mutually enhance each other [21]. Later inner dialogue evolves through internalization of social speech experiences and organizes children’s thinking process fundamentally. Moreover, the internalization drastically affects the use of language in social speech, since social speech will represent dynamically revised culture-based inner dialogue. In short, “...thought becomes verbal and speech becomes rational” [22] (p. 83).

The internalization from social to inner speech happens in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” [21] (p. 86). Thus, the level that learners achieve through reflection can be considered the actual development level. Similarly, the level that learners achieve by being challenged with diversity of ideas, comments, and suggestions of others can be regarded as the potential development level. In this dynamic process of development, once the actual development level is increased to the level of the potential development, the latter becomes the new actual development level with a higher potential development level [21]. This perspective signifies the importance of the relationship between inner and outer speech once more.

Vygotsky’s predecessor Bakhtin also supported the resemblance of thought and dialogue. Bakhtin claimed “closer analysis would show that the units of which inner speech is constituted are certain *whole entities* somewhat resembling a passage of monologic speech or whole utterances. But most of all, they resemble the *alternating lines of a dialogue*” [34] (p. 38).

d) Writing is internal conversation re-externalized.

Bruffee stated that “if thought is internalized public and social talk, then writing is internalized talk made public and social again. If thought is internalized conversation, then writing is internalized conversation re-externalized. Like thought, therefore, writing is temporally and functionally related to conversation. Writing is in fact a technologically displaced form of conversation....writing always has its roots deep in the acquired ability to carry on the social symbolic exchange we call conversation” [19] (pp. 90-91). Bruffee further suggested educators to provide opportunities for conversation during writing process [19].

e) Dialogue makes hermeneutic task easier.

According to Gadamer “...written texts present the real hermeneutical task. Writing involves self-alienation. Its overcoming, the reading of the text, is thus the highest task of understanding” [11] (p. 352). Gadamer believed that the major disadvantage of dialogue with text compared to verbal dialogue is its stability and one-sidedness. The reader tries to understand the author’s point of view with only the help of what is already written and as an answer to a certain question [11]. Misunderstandings may not be identified by the reader when they arise, and the text cannot provide nonverbal communication such as gestures, tone of voice, etc. Moreover, authors can not know how different readers react to the text. Therefore, bringing the writer and reader together helps the writer develop audience awareness, minimizes misunderstandings between the two parties, and helps the reader to understand the text easier by asking questions not only about the text, but also about the original author and his/her perspectives. The reader is no longer just a reader, but also a contributor to the text [11].

## 7. RESEARCH AND FURTHER SUPPORT OF THE BLOGGING METHOD

This part is presented by three main sections: pedagogical benefits of blogging, the voice of the blogger, and the purposes of blogging.

### Pedagogical Benefits

Although there are a limited number of empirical research studies about the pedagogical benefits of blogging, there are a lot of opinion articles that support the use of blogging in education. Unfortunately, the pace of publishing empirical studies about the use of the blogging method does not catch up with the fast implementation of blogging in schools [36] and universities [15]. Some of these universities that started using blogging are University of Iowa, Rice University, and Harvard University [15].

In the literature, the blogging method is described as a technology that “... has the capacity to engage people in collaborative activity, knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate, where complex and expensive technology has failed” [15] (p. 3). Similarly, it is explained that “weblog development can empower students to become more analytical and critical; through actively responding to Internet materials, students can define their positions in the context of others’ writings as well as outline their own perspectives on particular issues” [14] (p. 618). Regarding these assertions, in a research study it is found that the participants’ entries were improved in terms of the depth of reflection and evaluation when blogging was incorporated into courses [9].

Correspondingly, two doctors specialized in Neurolearning analyzed the materials about blogging and concluded the following statements along with their rationales: “Blogs can promote critical and analytical thinking; blogging can be a powerful promoter of creative, intuitive, and associational thinking; blogs promote analogical thinking; blogging is a powerful medium for increasing access and exposure to quality information; blogging combines the best of solitary reflection and social interaction” [7].

It is also explained that students' engagement with blogging includes selecting and organizing resources that they find on the Internet, hyperlink these resources to support their ideas, and critique and contextualize these resources [14]. When this process occurs regularly, bloggers can expand their point of view [29] and they can extend their focused knowledge-base in their areas of interest [30]. Furthermore, during these processes students may pay more attention and make more careful decisions in their writings due to the large audience [36].

Another benefit of the blogging method for students is that the use of it offers students "legitimate chances to participate" [30] (¶ 17-20). A research study conducted by Williams and Jacobs reports this benefit of the blogging method. In their study, the blogging method was experimentally used with students as an optional method. 55% of the students expressed that the blogging method was beneficial for their learning in the course, and 77% asserted that using blogs improved "the level of meaningful intellectual exchange between students" [15] (p.8). Williams and Jacobs concluded that blogs may promote interaction between students and support students' autonomy at the same time [15].

Finally, Blood presented another advantage of blogging: "weblogs promote media literacy" [29] (p. 14). Bloggers' decisions about the language being used, the exclusion or inclusion of certain information, their processes of searching and selecting web materials, and their presentation of these materials are all matters of media literacy. Blood further asserted that by writing briefly and regularly, and by continually trying to better express their thoughts, bloggers can become better writers.

### **The Voice of the Blogger**

Bloggers' diversity of interests and personal goals result in a variety of blog entries. Entries represent authors' reflections on their experiences, ideas, events, others' ideas, and anything else they are interested in writing about. They also represent bloggers' personalities and individuality because they are bloggers' reflections and selections. They are subjective in that, bloggers may present biased and speculative view points [29]. In a research study Nardi et al. reported that "our bloggers found their voice by using blogs to express their opinions.... they blogged to comment on topics they found pertinent and important" [1] (p. 43-44).

Publishing entries is a democratic process. Anybody who has something to say can write and publish without any barriers of standards or quality-checks [29]. Blogs can be based on one topic or they may include entries about a diversity of topics in different categories. Entries can be relevant or irrelevant to each other. Rather than being bound with linear, dull, template-style writings, bloggers are free to decide the content and style of their writing, thus, they can represent their voice.

Regarding the voice of the blogger, Kline and Burstein stated that "blogs, in the broadest sense, derive from the human urge to give voice to our ideas; to have our ideas understood, acted on, and remembered; and to engage in the quest for knowledge and understanding interactively and collaboratively.... The blogging phenomenon may well represent a revitalization of real citizenship in the political and governmental sense, as well as the door-opening tool giving visibility and voice to diverse individuals with diverse ideas that never could have been seen

or heard before" [3] (xvi-xxi). Blogging can help students to consider their own standpoints for different contexts; allow them to express their ideas or reactions freely, openly, and broadly; and provide students with opportunities to develop their voices [14]. Blood asserted that "a weblog's quality is ultimately based on the authenticity of its voice" [29] (p. 59).

### **Purposes of Blogging**

The results of an ethnographic study which was conducted to investigate adult bloggers' motivations for blogging showed that blogging is "an unusually versatile medium" [1] (p. 46). These researchers identified main motivations for blogging. Similarly another research study that was conducted with graduate students who took an elective online course that utilized the blogging method also outlined purposes of using blogs [8]. Combined list is as follows:

- Recording [1] and archiving experiences, and sharing these experiences with real-world friends [8]
- "Expressing deeply felt emotions" [1] (p. 43)
- Archiving ideas [8]
- Reflecting upon one's experiences and ideas [8]
- "Articulating ideas through writing" [1] (p. 43)
- "Providing commentary and opinions" and represent one's voice [1] (p. 43)
- Building identity online [8]
- Gain recognition from others by publishing one's ideas [8]
- Contribute to the body of knowledge of a group who has the same interest [8]
- "Forming and maintaining community forums" [1] (p. 43)
- Build connection with others who have the same interest [8]

Martindale and Wiley as well emphasized the stimulating effect of having readers on the students, which encourages the students to continue their blogging [33]. They stated, "clearly, two keys to effective blogging are knowing who one's audience is, and knowing that an audience is in fact reading one's blog. My students were motivated, and willing to write regularly and with clarity, knowing that fellow students and the instructor were reading the blogs" [33] (p. 59). Similarly, Nardi et al. explained that having readers or being in a community of other bloggers motivates bloggers to continue writing [1].

Blood also presented another reason: reputation building. Some individuals and companies maintain a blog focused on a specific subject area and practice searching, information sharing, and evaluating processes with their audience in mind. Because of this specific information flow, they become known as experts [29].

Regarding the appreciated characteristics of blogs, Stiler and Philleo reported that the participants in their study liked the progressive writing support offered by blogs, their archiving capabilities, and their easy-to-use interface. Moreover, the participants expressed that they liked reflecting on the course and informing the instructor of their thoughts via these reflections [9].

As blogging is not suited to every student, the repulsions of blogging have also been explored. They are listed as follows:

- Technological problems [9, 15]
- Limited time [9, 8]
- Privacy problems [9, 8]

- Unsatisfactory external incentives to maintain a blog (such as marks in a course) that would make the effort worthwhile [15] [8]
- The feeling of possessing inadequate knowledge to contribute [15]
- Preference for reading over writing [15]
- Preference of not publishing any writing that is unpolished [8]

In the research study conducted by Williams and Jacobs, blogging was used as an optional method. But to encourage participation, letter grades were awarded to students who blogged. Twenty percent of the participants reported that they would not participate in blogging, with or without a grade reward. According to these researchers rewarding students who blog may lessen the value of the blogging experience for some students, if they only participate in order to obtain these external incentives [15].

The purposes of commenting or not commenting on others' blog entries are also specifically explored. The purposes for commenting are: contributing to others' ideas without expectations, to be recognized and appreciated by other bloggers, building relationships with other bloggers, encouraging other bloggers to continue writing, and directing audience to one's blog. The reasons for not commenting are similar to reasons for not blogging: limited time, not valuing quality and adequacy of one's comment to other bloggers, privacy problems, having no interest in contributing to others' ideas, feeling not comfortable making oneself present in the discussions [8].

In short, theory, research, and practitioners' opinions about the potential of the blogging method are consistent. In the conclusion part a synthesis of all the discussions made so far are presented, specifically considering the problems in higher education.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the blogging method, which includes new forms of writing, is supported as an alternative approach regarding the problems previously presented. Both theoretical and research background information is provided to clarify the rationale of using this method in higher education. In the following, the relations between the presented problems in higher education, the characteristics of blogging, and theory-research background information for blogging are summarized.

When the blogging method is used according to the suggestions provided in the next section, this method can have the following solutions for the problems. First, theory supports the combined use of reflective thinking, dialogue, reading, and writing for the mutual development of all of them. Regular engagement in these processes help students to reflect upon their own standpoints for diverse situations and help them to find their style in writing. While the goal of higher education is to help students to become autonomous thinkers, in academic writing personal opinions are discouraged unless supported by the literature. Furthermore, due to strict class schedules and class sizes, it is not feasible to discuss everyone's assignment during courses. On the other hand, with the blogging method students can engage in all of these processes. They can write reflectively, read other sources, critique them, receive and evaluate comments of other bloggers', etc. Furthermore, personal

opinions and reflective writing are very much encouraged in blogging.

Secondly, because of the differences between discourses of different academic disciplines, students are required to write in different ways for different classes. It is possible that they may not be able to form their own style while trying to adapt to these different rules and conventions of each discipline. With blogging, students can experiment with different styles until they find their own. Furthermore variety of other media that can be included in blogs such as video, audio, and pictures can also give students variety of options to represent their inner speech.

Thirdly, there is a distinct power difference between the instructor and the student in college courses. The instructor is usually an authority figure who evaluates and gives grades according to a certain criteria. Some of these instructors do not value students' written assignments as a contribution to the academic literature and this may weaken students' self confidence in their writing. Furthermore, since the only audience of the student is usually the instructor, the student may not develop audience awareness in college courses and may not know the conventions of the specific discipline. By blogging however, students can actually participate in the practice of the academic community. They can contribute to the discourse of their discipline by writing blog entries, criticizing and commenting on other academic writings, etc. Similarly other academics around the world in the same discipline can also contribute to students' entries. Rather than having feedback of only one instructor, students can get a variety of feedback with diverse opinions. Therefore, students can further extend their point of view, feel a sense of membership in the academic community, and build self confidence due to their actual contributions and social relations with other academics.

Finally, another problem described before deals with the common use of product-oriented feedback. Instructors usually evaluate only the latest work. This does not allow students time during a semester to improve their drafts. Usually at the end of a semester students do not feel the need of modifying their assignments again. Furthermore instructors usually do not make much effort to encourage students to write regularly. In theory, inner speech is continuous and it changes with different experiences. When there is no regular writing or no continuous modification in previous papers, students' earlier writings will not represent their latest inner speech. On the other hand, blogging is process-oriented. By keeping record of all the writings and commenting, both instructors and students can see the progress students are making in an organized form. It also allows students to write and modify their writings regularly. Entries are always in their revision forms, and they are open to change any time.

## 9. SUGGESTIONS

It is claimed that the use of different technologies in courses does not affect much about 'writing for assessment purposes' in formal education [25]. While researchers support students' writing in new forms as well as their academic writing [31, 27], in practice, the conflict still exists between academic writing and writing in new forms [25].

Therefore including new forms of writing or using different technologies in courses make little difference if the organization

and instructors continue to have the same approach that creates previously-mentioned problems. Because of this reason, the use of new forms of writing and new technologies must come with new directions to be used in higher education.

There can be numerous ways to use blogs in education as presented by Downes [32], Richardson [36], Warlick [2], Ferdig and Trammell [30], and many Edu-Bloggers. Their suggestions differ according to their goals of using blogs. The suggestions presented in this paper are focused on the described problems in higher education. For different contexts, these recommendations might be different.

### **Deciding**

a) Are there any problems?

Currently, some instructors use blogs because they are a new and popular 'technology' in education. At that point, they start thinking about only technology integration, while forgetting the real problem (if there is any). Then students begin to wonder why they are using blogs. They will engage in blogging just to please their instructor and earn a certain grade. This will lead some students to have negative experiences toward blogging since they are not informed about its benefits.

It is crucial to note that blogs are useful for *some* individuals and groups, in *some* learning situations, regarding *many* other issues. For some situations, other methods would be more useful than blogging. For others, the use of blogs makes the learning process easier and more beneficial than other methods. Therefore, our first suggestion is to decide if there is any problem that requires revision in the current methods. If problems arise, instructors should analyze them and think carefully to be able to see more appropriate methods rather than jumping to something just because it is new or popular.

b) First, you use it

Blogging is an experience that can only be learned through practice as opposed to reading news, articles, or books. Instructors should have a diversity of blogging experiences first before using blogging as a method in their courses.

### **Training**

a) First, instruction about blogging...

First of all, it is crucial that instructors should provide students some information about blogging, the importance of it for higher education students, the goals of using blogs, different styles of writing in blogs, and ways to determine the reliability of blog content in the Blogosphere. Then the responsibility of the instructor is to help all students build their first blogs and ask students to use blogs to practice for a few weeks. The practice involves regular reading of others' blogs, regular writing and posting blog entries, and commenting on other students and other bloggers' blog entries. Instructors' regular and timely comments on students' blog entries are very useful during this phase.

During training, instructors should not force students to write about a specific topic. This may discourage and distract students from writing in blogs, especially when they have nothing to say about that topic or when they think their ideas in that specific topic are not valuable. Since one of the important benefits of blogging is helping students have confidence in their voice, the instructor should encourage students to write about any area in the discipline or anything students find meaningful for writing

that could contribute to the knowledge base of the academic community.

If possible, it is also useful to set aside some part of the class time to discuss interesting postings or comments in students' blogs, other experienced bloggers' relevant writings about the course topics, and other bloggers' writing style. This training period will allow students to expand their understanding about this new form of writing, begin to recognize their own styles, and start connecting them with other bloggers in the Blogosphere.

b) ... then freedom

After these few weeks, instructors should give students full control in whether to continue using blogs or not or how to use their blogs. In this phase motivating and encouraging students to continue blogging are critical responsibilities of the instructor. Continuing class discussions about students' blog postings and comments could encourage students to keep blogging and make them feel that instructors value their contribution to the knowledge base of their discipline as bloggers.

### **After the Training**

a) Blogging should not be a requirement

It is essential to allow students have the full control of their use of blogs. Making blogs a course requirement, giving specific topics to students to read and write about, and evaluating their writings with letter grades are unsuitable methods for blogs. Such actions amount to nothing more than asking students to write their essays and put them on the web to get feedback. Deadlines are another problem not suitable to this method. They are barriers for students to feel the ownership and control of their own blogs. Instructors should understand that blogging is a different method from academic writing, and it is not inferior to the latter.

The best method of using blogs in courses is to suggest blogging as an optional method in addition to the primary instructional method. Blogging should not be associated with any requirement or grading. If students are not interested in writing blogs, nothing will lead them to write good, insightful blogs. The instructor may continue to scaffold students during this period.

Similarly instructors should not require students to write comments to each others' blogs, but encourage it. Some students are individually-oriented and do not care much about others' progression. Other students may be willing to help each other without the need of a course requirement. Making students comment on each others' blogs might have negative effects on students' attitudes. When it is a requirement, individually-oriented students may write comments which are shallow and written without any personal motivation. In this situation community-oriented students might lose their enthusiasm to help others as well.

When writing comments to students' blogs, instructors should give useful feedback without trying to edit or evaluate their writing according to the quality standards of academic writing. It is also crucial that instructors should not dominate the discussion with their comments. They should show that they value the ideas in the blogs and are interested in learning more. Asking open-ended, discussion-oriented questions will be useful to students. In their comments instructors may share their own experiences with the students. Inserting links of other students' similar ideas in the comments can be a good way to increase

communication and discussion among students. In short, instructors should coach students through this process and encourage them to sustain their writing.

Another thing that instructors should keep in mind is that they should not expect any relation between students' blogging experiences and their performance in the course. Blogging should not be bound with semesters, courses, grading, or the instructor.

#### b) Respecting students' choices for using or not using blogs

Writing is about passion. When there is no interest in writing or when the interest is lost due to previous negative experiences, forcing someone to write blogs may make the situation even worse. Moreover, blogging experience requires a lot of time that should be spent on students' interests. Therefore, a primary suggestion is to respect students' choices for not using blogs after the training period.

A competitive social environment also has an affect on students' choice to blog or not. For example, students may be unwilling to publish their original ideas because they may think someone will use the idea and publish an article before them. Similarly, some students who like competition may not want to share their ideas with others until they complete their essay or project and get credit for it.

There can be many other reasons for not blogging as presented before in this article. Some students may prefer to keep their experiences private and some others may prefer posting their writings only when they are polished. Thus, instructors should know that blogs may not be useful or attractive to all students.

#### c) Process rather than product

Archived and updated entries are useful for instructors to gain information about their students' personalities, progress, and misunderstandings. If instructors believe that the process is more important than the product, they should start analyzing the progress in students' written pieces in their blogs, even though the pieces are not directly related to the course content. To keep track of the progress, instructors may suggest to students to open a new entry whenever they have substantially improved their understanding or ideas, so that both the student and the instructor can keep track of how and why their ideas changed, and get meaningful feedback from others at every stage.

#### d) Opportunities for diversity of contributions

Blogs can be used to build connections between students and other bloggers. Through dialogue, cooperation and coaching can be accomplished between bloggers who have common interests, experiences, and difficulties. Instructors' role is to encourage such dialogues by motivating their students to read and comment on other students and other bloggers' blog entries. Suggesting different ways of searching blogs, joining Bloggings, and getting an audience would be useful for their students.

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