Exploring Students’ Motivations in Using Blogs at the Primary School Level

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ABSTRACT

Blogs have been widely used in education for the numerous benefits the tool offers. Previous research has examined the use of blogs in various educational settings, but very few studies have been carried out at the primary level. This study explored students’ motivations to use blogs in a primary school context. A case study approach was adopted and data were collected through online reflections, supported by and triangulated with data from face-to-face interviews. Findings revealed several reasons that motivated students to blog, and students’ motivations to blog seemed to suggest that the students were subconsciously meeting one or more psychological needs, namely belonging, competence, freedom, and fun, and the need for competence was the most prevalent amongst students in this study. This study also provides teachers in the school some insights into what motivated their students to use blogs when they design instructional activities in the future.

Keywords: Blogs, Motivation, Primary Education, Reflections, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

English is both the medium of instruction and a subject of study in Singapore schools. A common language that bonds the different races, it allows Singaporeans to participate in a knowledge-based economy and a proficient command of the language will enable students to engage with the diverse communities beyond Singapore (Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2010). In order to enrich students’ learning environments, the Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the Third Master-plan for ICT in Education with an aim to prepare its students for the 21st century (Ministry of Education, 2008). MOE encourages schools to harness the affordances of ICT and share their best practices to promote the innovative use of ICT for learning and teaching. With the prevalence of social media, new possibilities for connectivity are opening up and learning may take place increasingly outside school.

An English language (EL) website was developed for Primary school students in Sin-
gapore with the aim to promote the learning of EL through web-based resources and the use of blogs to allow students to create content in a password protected learning environment. For this study, the blogging activity was not factored into the student evaluation process. Students’ responses to online questions and others’ postings were voluntary. Although participation on the website was at the students’ discretion as teachers were not required to monitor their online postings, interestingly, students were blogging on their own outside school hours. Within six months, there were a total of 1094 online postings from the case under study (CommonTown, 2011). This prompted a research interest to find out what motivated students to use blogs. An understanding of what motivates students to use blogs would enable the teachers in the school to know how they might include the use of blogs for learning and teaching. Specifically, the research question was: What motivated primary school students to use blogs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been an increasing use of blogs in the educational context in the last 10 years (Downes, 2009; Edublogs, 2011; Sim & Hew, 2010; Xie & Sharma, 2004; Zeng & Harris, 2005). Blogs are personal online journals (Godwin-Jones, 2003) where the content is arranged as entries of text and hyperlinks (Vogel & Goans, 2005). The posts or entries are arranged in reverse chronological order, with the most recent post published at the top of the blog (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright, 2004; Paquet, 2003; Vogel & Goans, 2005; Ward, 2004; Williams & Jacobs, 2004). This characteristic creates an expectation of updates that incites readers to visit the site on a regular basis (Paquet, 2003). A timestamp for each entry is also provided so the reader knows when it was posted (Vogel & Goans, 2005). Blogs are easy to use as no programming knowledge is required to post an entry online (Huffaker, 2005b; Zawilinski, 2009). The ease of use and access to blogs, together with the benefits of blogging, suggest that teachers could explore the use of blogs, especially for out-of-class teaching and learning.

Ferdig and Trammell (2004) expressed that the use of blogs increases student interest in learning as students are blogging about topics that are important to them. Blogs also allow students to have ownership of their learning while receiving feedback from others. Students can utilise blogs as a knowledge log (Brescia & Miller, 2006) and record learning journeys (Dickey, 2004). Blogs have been used to promote literacy in terms of reading and writing (Banister, 2008; Cole, 2011; Huffaker, 2005a, 2005b; Todras-Whitehill, 2005). The affordance of blogs in allowing students to comment on their peers’ postings provides opportunities for feedback (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004). Sharma (2010) mentioned that blogs emerged as the most possible alternative to engage students in writing and reflection as they allow students to access their own postings and those of their peers or anyone’s, anytime and anywhere.

Wang and Hsua (2008) found that some teachers used blogs to expand in-class discussions and gain insights into the thoughts of students who were very quiet during class (Greer & Reed, 2008) since those who did not usually participate in class tend to self-disclose more in blogs (Harper, 2005). Blogs can be interactive and facilitate online collaboration (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Hiler, 2002), promote knowledge sharing, reflection, debate (Hiler, 2002) and social constructivist learning as they enable users to exchange ideas and experiences (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004). Within the classroom, blogs can allow students to carry out peer reviews. Cottle (n.d.) mentioned that blogs could allow students to receive comments from other schools’ students. Teachers who face time constraint in getting their students to write reflections in class on a daily basis may consider using blogs to encourage reflections. As put forth by Burns et al. (2000), for reflections to be effective, writing should be ongoing. Blogging, especially in out of class context, will allow reflections on an ongoing basis.

Students will be motivated to give their best work when they showcase their projects on blogs.
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