



Using blogs to support learning during internship

Samuel K.W. Chu^{a,*}, Carol K.K. Chan^a, Agnes F.Y. Tiwari^b

^a Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong, Hong Kong

^b School of Nursing, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 September 2010

Received in revised form

23 August 2011

Accepted 23 August 2011

Keywords:

Collaborative learning

Blogs

Teaching/learning strategies

Professional learning

ABSTRACT

Blogging has been recommended as a suitable tool for learning during internship due to its associated usefulness in collaborative learning, reflection, communication, and social support. In this study, blogging was incorporated into the internship activities of two discipline-specific groups of interns: information management ($n = 53$) and nursing ($n = 28$). In examining the behavior, perceptions and processes of blogging among interns from the two disciplines, a mixed-methods design was used to obtain quantitative and qualitative data through structured interviews and blogging entries. Results revealed that the interns engaged regularly in the writing and reading of their own blogs, and commented on others' blog-writing. The interns perceived blogs to be useful during internship in providing an avenue for knowledge construction, problem solving, reflection, and communicating their emotions. Positive perceptions were not influenced by discipline background, frequency of use, or blogging platform. Qualitative analyses of blog contents indicated that the students engaged in cognitive, metacognitive-reflective, affective, and social-collaborative learning processes in blogging. Higher engagement was found in cognitive and metacognitive processes. Responses to open-ended probes suggest that pedagogical factors (e.g., grading system, supervision) may also have influenced students' blogging behaviors and perceptions. Overall, this study offers evidence to support the use of blogging during internship as computer-based support for learning.

© 2011 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

The growing interest in using blogs for educational purposes has been accompanied by a number of studies that have demonstrated their effectiveness in higher and basic education (Buffington, 2007; Churchill, 2009; Downes, 2004; Gleaves, Walker, & Grey, 2008). At the same time, challenges associated with the use of blogging as a pedagogical strategy have also been identified (Krause, 2004). Researchers have suggested that blogging may support collaborative learning (Du & Wagner, 2007), and that its applications appear to have potential beyond classroom education (England, Fatzinger-McShane, Scarpero, & Stapley, 2008).

The term “blog” is an abbreviated form of “web log”, which is a web-based journal presented in reverse chronological order that consists of a person's thoughts and ideas posted on the web for multiple viewers (Flatley, 2005). It is a database containing text entries and other forms of content, including pictures and sound files, which can be created, edited and published on the Web in a flexible manner.

Blogging has recently been recommended as a useful tool for professional education or internship since blogs are simple and accessible personal diaries that allow a community of users to interact and communicate with each other (Levy, 2009). The main purpose of an internship is to facilitate the application of theoretical concepts learned in classroom settings to professional practice. In a way, internship shifts an individual mind to a social setting (Gonczi, 2004). While blogging appears to have the potential to support the development of cognitive processes and the social aspects of internship, empirical evidence supporting its use and how it may influence learning during students' professional education is still scarce. In view of the increased emphasis on collaborative learning and recent research showing the effectiveness of blogs in knowledge construction, this study explored blogging as an online learning environment for interns in two different disciplinary areas. The study specifically examined students' participation in and perceptions of blogging during internship, and their processes of learning while engaged in blogging.

We examined the blogging behaviors of undergraduate students in the University of Hong Kong who had been placed in different local and overseas organizations during their internships. The interns came from two distinct professional fields: information management and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 2241 5894.

E-mail address: samchu@hku.hk (S.K.W. Chu).

nursing. This allowed the study to examine students' experience of blogging and whether blogging could be effective as a supportive tool during the internship of students from different backgrounds. Students' perceptions of and attitudes toward blogging were also examined through structured interviews. How blogging might support student learning in internship was assessed by an analysis of the blog contents.

1.1. Collaborative learning

The changing paradigm of learning has shifted from individual toward collaborative learning (Hmelo-Silver, O'Donnell, Chan, & Chinn, *in press*; Sawyer, 2006), which is a form of constructivist learning. Constructivist learning approaches highlight the importance of learners taking active roles in processing and interpreting new information as they co-construct new knowledge (Dillenbourg, 1999; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). Designing for constructivist learning requires providing students with opportunities for active processing of information and interaction with others (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007).

Collaborative learning has been promoted as a means of facilitating knowledge construction (Dillenbourg & Schneider, 1995), and the key features of collaborative learning are articulation, conflict and negotiation (Crook, 1996). Social constructivist principles support the use of collaborative interactions among students to promote deep learning through exposure to alternative perspectives (Brett & Nagra, 2005). In collaborative learning, two or more people learn together through communication, negotiation, and production of materials (Gros, 2001). Collaborative learning emphasizes both social and intellectual engagement, as well as focusing on mutual responsibility (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). The ensuing peer interactions, which represent an important component of the education experience, tend to increase (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Earlier studies have shown that collaborative learning is effective in fostering shared understanding, retention of learned material, and deeper cognitive processing (Crook, 1996; Dillenbourg & Schneider, 1995). It has also been shown that collaborative learning promotes higher-order learning such as critical thinking and knowledge construction (Anderson, Howe, Soden, Halliday, & Low, 2001; Chan & van Aalst, 2008; Gokhale, 1995; Meyer, 2003; Webb, 1989).

Vygotsky (1986) maintained that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. In further research on cognition, Green (2005) suggested the term "spaces of influence", whereby an individual learner can learn more effectively through the support of others in dynamic collaborative problem-solving roles. Collaborative learning places great emphasis on the extent and quality of the exchanges that occur among students in a given environment (Dillenbourg & Schneider, 1995). As such, the discussion that occurs during task engagement is an important component of collaboration (Pressley & McCormick, 2006). A major research field, computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL), has emerged showing that learning in groups can be enhanced by students constructing and synthesizing complex interactions of ideas during collaboration (Stahl, 2002). Evidence indicates that collaborative learning is successful in online learning environments (Chan & van Aalst, 2008; Chu & Kennedy, 2011; Curtis & Lawson, 2001; Wang, 2010; Woo, Chu, Ho, & Li, 2011) and allows students to broaden their knowledge base through interactions with other learners (Chu, 2008; Tyran & Shepherd, 2001).

One approach to examining collaborative knowledge construction in a CSCL environment has been proposed by Hmelo-Silver (2003) using qualitative and quantitative analyses from a socio-cognitive perspective. To capture the thinking and discourse processes of students engaged in an online platform, transcribed online conversations were coded into the following categories: knowledge, meta-cognition, interpretation, and collaboration. Collaboration was further categorized as conflict, questioning, and facilitator input. In a similar approach, van Aalst (2009) employed qualitative and quantitative analyses to examine the collaborative knowledge construction processes of secondary school students using an online platform for an inquiry project involving knowledge building (van Aalst, 2009). These aspects of learning are thus considered in this current research in deriving the schemes of analyses.

1.2. Online learning environment: the educational benefits of blogs

Blogging has been increasingly recognized as a popular web technology for education (Blood, 2002, p. 2; Downes, 2004), especially in distance learning settings (Buffington, 2007; Churchill, 2009; Downes, 2004). Blogs are designed to allow simple and fast creation of web content, frequent interactions with posts and comments, and instant hyperlinks to information sources (Du & Wagner, 2007). Blogging has initially attracted interest from professionals whose tasks involve information retrieval and search (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Clearly, blogging is particularly appealing in disciplines that put a high value on information acquisition, knowledge construction, and reinforcement of learning through feedback and comments (Betts & Glogoff, 2004; Chu, Kwan, & Warning, *in press*). Furthermore, interest in blogging as an educational resource has also been fueled by the capacity of blogging as a means to promote individual self-expression and social connectivity (Burgess, 2006). Various researchers have discussed the use of blogs in education and have suggested the potential benefits of blogging among learners (Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006; Clyde, 2004; Duffy & Bruns, 2006; Grassley & Bartoletti, 2009).

One particular benefit associated with blogging relates to its potential to facilitate collaborative and constructivist learning in terms of social interdependence through knowledge sharing, feedback sharing, and social support (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). For instance, an analysis of blogs in an undergraduate course demonstrated their effectiveness in supporting constructivist learning models in higher education (Du & Wagner, 2006). The study reported that blogs supported the social and cognitive construction of knowledge by facilitating university students' involvement in knowledge construction and heightened awareness of the learning process. Social construction of knowledge refers to the expansion of information resources among blog users, and cognitive construction of knowledge to users' construction of mental models. The usefulness of blogging for constructivist learning was also supported by Ellison and Wu (2008), who suggested that blogging encouraged critical and analytical thinking as it allowed students to develop wider perspectives by interacting with their peers.

Closely related to knowledge construction, blogs have also been found to be a useful learning environment by providing a useful platform for reflection (Churchill, 2009; Stiler & Philleo, 2003). It has been suggested that blogs may serve as online journals (Richardson, 2005), encouraging learners to reflect on their experiences (Godwin-Jones, 2003). In this respect, reflection among students has been found to be enhanced by blog entries that were analytical in nature (Stiler & Philleo, 2003). This may be explained by the discussion and exploration that occurs with blogging, leading to reflection in the form of guided discovery (Glogoff, 2005). Furthermore, access to different perspectives through the comments of the other members of the community encourages better individual reflection (Lin, Hmelo, Kinzer, & Secules, 1999). The distinct characteristic blend of personal narrative and critical reflection in blogs has also been identified as potentially effective in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10312266>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10312266>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)