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## The usefulness of a weblog as a tool for teachers' professional development\*\*

### Summary

This qualitative study examines teachers' use of blogs for professional development. It uses email interviews as a collecting data tool with six educators who regularly maintain educational blogs. It emphasises the significant role of weblogs as a platform that can transform the way educators interact, collaborate, and reflect on their teaching practices. Weblogs offer great opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous communication, fostering knowledge sharing and professional growth. Research suggests that social interaction enhances teachers' cognitive and professional learning and weblogs are considered as an effective tool in this regard. The findings reveal that blogging teachers recognise the educational value of blogging for professional development. The study highlights the importance of integrating blogging into the teaching profession as a means of continuous learning, professional support, and reflective practice. However, further research is required to explore both the benefits and potential challenges associated with blogging in education.

**Keywords:** weblog, professional development, teachers, media competences, lifelong learning

### Introduction

Technology has the great potential to create new methods of learning, as well as presenting innovative opportunities for teaching. The way that the Internet connects between different locations allows for wide-spread communication. For

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instance, homes, schools and public have become gradually online communities (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009). Anderson and Krathwohl (2000) state that this digital era emancipates educators and learners from the sole focus on acquiring and memorising information. Instead, it empowers them to focus on the creative side of building connections between concepts. Additionally, it provides new ways that make sense and determination in the current period. Selwyn (2011) cites that many psychologists and technologists agreed that digital tools can operate as influential social resources in one's learning context. It is argued that technology can be treated as a "social being" so that digital tools are seen more capable of providing knowledge than people (Bracken & Lombard, 2004). A weblog has the potential to provide enormous opportunities for teachers to expand their knowledge and understanding. Blogs potentially provide teachers with access to a wide range of resources that facilitate the gathering and sharing of knowledge. In addition, they promote lifelong learning by supporting professional development and adaptability to new educational trends. Moreover, blogs improve media competency by enabling teachers to critically analyse, create, and effectively use digital material in their teaching practice (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011). Blogs also facilitate social interaction, which is an effective method to gain new understanding and awareness, and should be encouraged where possible. Having said this, there is a lack of investigative research how sustained blogging influences teachers' professional development (Trust, Krutka, & Carpenter, 2017). Understanding whether continuous blogging participation leads to long-term improvements in teaching practices and professional learning remains an important research topic (Guskey, 2002). Therefore, the goal of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of the value of weblogs for professional growth.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Weblogs definition and characteristics**

There is no universally accepted consensus on the definition of blogs. However, Pomerantz and Stutzman (2006) state that "a blog is a web-based tool that allows an author (the blogger) to post information for consumption by other[s]" (p. 201). Weblog was first named in 1997 by Barger and then shortened to blog by Merholz in 1999. Thus, blogs are also referred to as weblogs and are used interchangeably in this study. Blogging can be described as a form of micro-publishing, and it is seen as a powerful phenomenon that attracts audiences interested in academia (Welch, Jensen, & Reeves, 2003). Thomas and Brown (2011) identify that blogging is a vehicle for representation of an individual's transformative knowledge and

life experience. Therefore, everyone who can construct a simple Microsoft Word document could build and maintain a blog (Yang, 2009). Bloggers can make their blogs more attractive by inserting pictures, website links or by adding media files. Additionally, to increase the appeal of blogs, readers are able to reply and comment on the blogs of others in a limited number of steps (Rodzvilla, 2002). Goodfellow and Graham (2007) mention the reasons underpinning the popularity of weblogs. They are free or cheap to create, does not require the installation of any specialised software, do not require any advanced computer programming skills, bloggers can easily update and publish content.

**Blogs on teacher professional development:  
Promoting lifelong learning and media competency**

In the digital age, the professional development of teachers has expanded beyond traditional workshops to contain continuous learning opportunities that provided by technology. One of the most effective tools in this regard are blogs that serve as a platform for teachers to think about their experiences, share best practices and to have significant discussions with colleagues. Blogs promote lifelong learning by encouraging educators to deal with new teaching methods, emerging technologies and innovative educational approaches (Waeber et al., 2023). Lifelong learning refers to the constant, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal and professional improvement. It is particularly important for teachers in the field of education, since they can adapt to the development of educational approaches, technological progress and various class needs (OECD, 2021). In contrast to the individual training meetings, which have a limited long-term effect (Brown, 2004), blogs offer a space for continuous reflection and construction of knowledge, so that the teachers can visit their learning again, pursue progress and refine their educational strategies over time. This current process is matched by the principles of self-directed learning, in which the educators take responsibility for their own professional growth by looking for relevant knowledge and enhancing reflective practice (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Moreover, blogs contribute to the media competence, an essential competence for modern educators. In today's digital age, teachers have to control an abundance of online resources, critically evaluate the credibility of digital content and create learning experiences that are rich in the media for their students. Blogs enable teachers to develop these skills by forcing them to deal with digital tools, organise and synthesise information and create original educational content. According to Hobbs (2010), media competency is not only to consume digital content, but also actively participate in the creation and spread of information. By maintaining a blog, teachers develop their skills to

effectively communicate in online environments, to integrate multimedia elements into their lessons.

Furthermore, blogs enable participation in professional learning communities in which teachers can work together beyond geographical and institutional borders. These communities create opportunities for feedback, discussion and problem solving that are essential components of collaborative professional development (Luo, Freeman & Stefaniak, 2020). Engaging teachers with other, can provide an opportunity to exchange ideas, receive support and remain updated about the latest educational trends. This type of interactive learning reflects Fullan and Hargreaves's (1996) concept of "interactive professionalism", which underlines the importance of dialogue and cooperation between educators and institutions. In this way, blogs transform the professional development of an isolated activity into a dynamic and socially associated process.

#### **Reflection in blogs:**

##### **A path to continuous professional growth**

Being able to reflect is considered crucial for ambitious, innovative teachers individually and for the community of teaching more broadly. For the aspirational teaching professional, it is likely that consistent reflection on the learning process is very significant for primary skills of pedagogy and subsequent professional development (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). For the community of teaching at large, the distinguished reflection skills are regarded as fundamental components for making and leading changes and reforms in educational institutions (Fullan, 2007). Luehmann (2008) examines in-depth a case study of an urban middle school science teacher who kept blogging her teaching experiences. The aim of the Luehmann's study was to discuss the use of blogs as a powerful platform of reflection in mature learners. The author argued that the teacher found that blogging is a great instrument to advance her professional identity, reflect on her classroom teaching practice, solicit others feedback, and to elaborate about issues connected to the educational context of her local environment. Moreover, Ray and Coulter (2008) attempt to define the depth and extent of reflection among a teachers community. The authors examine the blogs of language and art teachers and they found that the reflective blogs were the most popular. Most of teachers' blogging revealed critical trends toward teaching practices. Critical reflection is another function of using weblogs which can be seen as the largest driver of teacher's interaction through this online platform. Liou (2001) emphasises that the sustained way of raising teachers awareness is through critical reflection on their own teaching practice and it would generate affirmative changes. Critical reflection encourages the

effective interaction of teachers in a professional framework by inspiring teachers to take their position. This position can be taken through enquiring and challenging others' implicit assumptions in a way that can improve their teaching practice (Burnett & Lingam, 2007).

### **Blogs and communities of practice: Building collaborative learning networks**

Kennedy (2005) identifies the community of practice as one of the professional development modules vital to pedagogical advancement. The definitions of community of practice are diverse and depend on three dimensions: what the community is about, how it works and what capability it has produced. However, a community of practice can be defined as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) also maintain that, in a community of practice, the consideration of all members' contribution is highly regarded as a success for this community. The community of practice nature, its objectives and its communicative techniques are decided by all members in a manner that permits development and constant changes. Consequently, community of practice is perceived as a powerful platform for individuals to share knowledge and place information according to their needs and desire.

Furthermore, community of practice inspires all members to be responsible for sharing information and solving problems. In this context, learning is considered as a path in which each member can transfer from legitimate peripheral participant to primary participant in the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For a teachers' virtual community, they can blog to raise inquiries, encourage each other to enrich a discussion, share perspectives and express their feelings and opinions. Weblog can permit learners to collaborate virtually and synchronously. What distinguishes weblogs from other websites is the feature of allowing people who share a common interest to regulate their main objectives and principles (Richardson, 2005). A blog can be regarded as a small learning community working together towards a shared goal. Blog members can become highly involved in projects, to a greater extent than is the case with other educational and online environments. This creates a sense of community (Efimova & Fiedler, 2003). Nevertheless, Zhou (2011) argues that numerous studies have shown that factors such as perceived usefulness, engagement, trust, self-efficacy and outcome expectation are significantly related to online community user participation and knowledge contribution. He argues that prior studies only focused on the motivations affecting user partic-