Blogs as E-Portfolios for Learning

Using Blogs as a Tool for Reflection, Collaboration and Engagement

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Review of the Literature

Teaching in an increasingly digital world has open the door to an entirely new kind of strategies, and tools that give opportunities that we could not have dreamed a few years ago, and that reach students from all abilities and backgrounds. With the development of mobile devices information is at the palm of our hands. Educators are to bring innovation to the classrooms, incorporate it into the curriculum and put it to the service of all students.

One of the blooming technology tools is the blog. A blog is an online journal that displays artifacts in reverse chronological order; it is a platform in which the author expresses his perspective and opinions about a particular topic. In education, the blog is not just a web journal is a platform in which by posting comments on the published content interactions among all participants are generated creating a learning discussion. The use of blogs in education has been evolving, and it has proven to have significant benefits in many aspects of students' education. Using a blog as a digital portfolio showcases student's learning in the form of reflection and enable students to have a dynamic interaction among participants when digital conversations are generated.

The following document has the purpose of reviewing valid group studies, articles, research, case studies, etc. that investigated the effects and benefits of blogging in education. The emphasis will be placed using the blog as a digital portfolio and the inherent power of reflection and interaction among participants produced when it has been adequately implemented. This literature review is focused on the use of the blog in secondary schools.

Benefits of Blogging

Blogging in the classroom have countless benefits, based on the notion that students that participate within a collaborative discussion community construct knowledge through the interaction with each other (Albaugh, 2013). Blogs allow students to communicate using a

variety of formats, video, audio, images or simple text that promote a personalization of the experience through choice, encouraging ownership and development of the student's personality (Sawmiller, 2010). Blogging in school settings has been found to increase student motivation, collaboration and literacy skills (Morgan, 2015). Meinecke, Smith & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2013, found that creating blog post over a specific prompt helps promote critical thinking and collaboration with other students that in turn supports and challenge students to perform better.

Among the benefits are:

Improvement in Written Communication

In her article *Classroom blogging: what is the role in Science learning* (2010), Allison Sawmiller concluded that blogs in the secondary classroom enhance student learning by allowing them to show personal interests, creating a greater variety of opportunities to write, promoting self-reflection, critical thinking and improving writing quality and skills. Student motivation for writing is also increased by the promise of a larger audience instead of having only the teacher looking at their work which also positively affect writing making it authentic and applicable. It was found that blogging provides quiet students a platform for communication without the so feared face to face interaction.

Writing for English as Second Language students

In a study made by Namouz, Misher-Tal, and Sela (2017), it was found that integrating blogging into the English as a second language (ESL) class had many advantages. Student's improved their expressive writing skills as a consequence of the high amount of feedback provided by other students which fostered the use of language. Results indicated that students developed a richer vocabulary and better their use of the correct grammar; they were able to identify their mistakes improving the quality of their writing as well. An essential element identified was the need to emphasize the writing process as well as training the students on the

appropriate ways to provide feedback on a blog post and how to reply to comments made to their own posts as much as the use of the technology.

Building a Learning Community

Angelaina & Jimoyiannis (2012), analyzed students' learning presence in an educational blog community, in their study, it is said that blogs are unique technology tools because they allow the construction of a collaborative learning community that besides of reflection, provides a space for meaningful peer interaction. Evidence shows that the use of blogs can effectively introduce a community where work and ideas can be shared, and deeper learning can be produced from community interactions. It was also found that if a blog is appropriately implemented in the classroom, it will help bridge experiences and learning that happens inside of the classroom with informal activities and learning that are carried on at home. Findings have demonstrated that students involved in a school blogging community develop the ability to connect ideas and create meanings showing a deeper understanding of the matter of study.

Motivation and engagement

Sawmiller (2010) found that students' motivation is improved as blogging makes a connection between life experiences and school experiences. Although blogs were not designed for the classroom, students experience motivation and engagement when working with them (Angelaina & Jimoyiannis, 20I2). Research revealed that the creation of an environment in which students perceive themselves as essential pieces of the learning process encourages motivation and self-confidence (Churchill, 2009). McGrail and Davis (2011), indicated that by incorporating blogs as a teaching strategy, students participated to a greater degree in discussion and the writing process. It is also noted by Allen and Flint (2014), that by providing initial prompts that students can relate to when creating their blog posts, the level of engagement notably increased.

Blogs as Digital Portfolios for Reflection and Enhancement of Student Voice

Reflection and Critical Thinking

Kilbane and Milman (2017), discovered that the student reflection is a critical component of learning that gives teachers the ability to recognize and understand the student's thinking and misconceptions. According to Russell (2018), the digital portfolio helps facilitate a reflective process creating a student-centered space for growth and development that cultivates critical thinking encouraged by the interaction of the student and the teacher. In her article, she noted that students become creators of knowledge by capturing their understanding in different formats, through images, videos, audio or text. Husid and Wallace (2015), indicated that critical thinking and decision making is required to determine what work to include in the e-portfolio and recommended reflecting on a vision that could give the e-portfolio a sense of direction for the future. They considered reflection as an opportunity to put things into perspective and a fundamental piece of the digital portfolio. Clancy and Gardner (2017), found that among other teaching strategies, the digital portfolio has been the most successful at increasing student reflection in the special education population.

Reflection within the e-portfolio gives the student the opportunity to understand him or herself as a learner (Cote & Emmett, 2015). On their study on acknowledging student's voice and metacognitive understanding using e-portfolios, Fahey and Cronen (2016), made interesting findings. Digital portfolios allow students to document their creative process and reflect on it giving students a voice in the appraising of their own learning and a visual image of what the know. They also recognize that the digital portfolio serves as an effective platform to think metacognitively (analyze one's learning) that requires more profound student's involvement and reflection than traditional assignments, creating ownership in the creative process where students begin to make choices in their education.

Student's voice

It is recognized that the creation of e-portfolios allows students to express their personality and creativity, by curating and reflecting on previous work they self-regulate their learning, make connections and show their progress over time (Karlin, Ozogul, Miles & Heide, 2016). In their study, Kilbane and Milman (2017, p.105), found that "through the creation of digital portfolios, students learned academic standards, developed self-assessment and reflection skills, and engaged more with content because they were motivated to learn." They also concluded that when teachers create and work on their own e-portfolio as well as the students, they both engage in a reciprocal experience where they learn from each other. One of the most critical aspects of the e-portfolio for students is their ability to demonstrate their individuality (Cote & Emmett, 2015).

Building a positive online presence

Studies recognized that e-portfolios empower students to develop their voice, showcase their achievements and create an online identity in preparation for the future. Reflecting on the before mentioned, students should understand the meaning of "appropriate" and "responsible" when it comes to sharing any artifact online. In the same way, it is also recommended to teach students to make every entry to their e-portfolio clear and concise in a way that cannot be misinterpreted (Husid & Wallace, 2015). The e-portfolio is recognized as an exceptional asset to student learning, where students reflect to show their growth finding in it a space for future planning whether it is college or career (Cote & Emmet, 2015).

Digital Portfolios for Assessment of Learning

The development of digital portfolios changes teachers' pedagogy, plan, and cause to reexamine the way they propose to assess students work (Kilbane & Milman, 2017). In their study, Fahey, and Cronen (2016) concluded that by requiring students to reflect on their creative

process within their e-portfolio, the teacher is better able to evaluate the student thinking and determine the best course of action for each student. By reflecting on their work and the work of their peers, students are able to reassess their performance and adjust and grow as they increase their experience and knowledge. In a study on the validity of teacher assessment on the digital portfolio, it was noted that teacher assessment, self-assessment, and peer assessment were used as valid methods for evaluation of the e-portfolio, in all cases, feedback was a crucial component to improvement (Chang & Wu, 2012). In a study that explored consistency among the self, peer and teacher assessment, it was found that the teacher assessment was the most rigorous opposite to the peer assessment which tended to have the lowest standards, in a surprising finding it was discovered that the most consistency existed between the self-assessment and the teacher assessment (Chang, Tseng, & Lou, 2012).

According to Chang and Wu (2012), the establishment of rubrics will enhance the credibility and validity of the e-portfolio evaluation. In the same study, the authors developed a rubric that proved to be successful to assess the e-portfolio. The rubric included the following aspects: portfolio creation (diversity of portfolio content), learning goal (degree of achievement), artifact, reflection (self-reflection and peer review), attitude (collaboration with others) and other (personal characteristics and ability to use resources). The rubric included the six main categories with 27 items scored by points from 1-5 with 0.5 points interval for better precision. The score on the rubric was found to have a strong correlation to students' performance on the final examination.

Special Education

A study has found e-portfolios especially useful for special education students since they can be adapted to their needs and learning disabilities. This study proved the e-portfolio to be an alternative assessment instrument that provides more opportunities to show learning and progress

than old multiple-choice tests. It was mentioned that E-portfolios capture students' life and workplace skills of the student and his/her growth over time making his/her assessment more accessible to related service professionals. Another benefit of the e-portfolio is the possibility for students to carry it as a tool to demonstrate readiness after graduation (Clancy and Gardner, 2017). The same study recognizes the e-portfolio benefits of assessing special education students more accurately in the core and traditional areas as well as giving parents and other organizations a more complete picture of the level of functioning of their child.

Conclusions

After reviewing the literature over blogging and its benefits as well as the e-portfolio, I recognize that without a doubt, one of the most important benefits of blogging is the ability to evaluate your own learning through reflection. Every post that is published is evidence of the student's understanding and by commenting on other students' posts knowledge is constructed through interaction with peers. Blogging provides the space for the development of a collaborative community that provides feedback from many different perspectives and backgrounds that brings meaningful interactions. Another great benefit of blogging is that provided to quiet and shy students who feel invited to participate, avoiding the face to face interaction that otherwise leaves them out of the discussions. Within these digital conversations, teachers have the opportunity to teach and model citizenship skills, etiquette, and safety during online interactions.

The inherent reflection involved in blogging develops in students the ability to connect ideas and create meanings to show a more profound understanding which in turn improves performance and achievement and promotes critical thinking. The continuous feedback proved to be effective in boosting writing and the development of better language skills and grammar in all students but especially in ESL students.

Through the work on the blog/e-portfolio, students become creators of knowledge using their creativity to produce images, videos, audio, and text. The e-portfolio is an excellent platform for the student-centered classroom offering a space for growth and development where teachers and students learn together and from each other. E-portfolios provide a personalized experience that increases motivation and engagement by encouraging ownership. Students have the opportunity to develop a positive online presence, and voice perceiving themselves as an essential piece in the learning process.

By using e-portfolios teachers change their pedagogy and reexamine their assessment instruments. When students are required to reflect on their creative process, teachers can evaluate the student's performance more accurately learning better about the student thinking and his or her misconceptions. By utilizing self-assessment and peer assessment, the student can adjust and grow. A valid and accurate way to evaluate an e-portfolio is a rubric that could include in addition to the artifact and the e-portfolio itself, reflection, a learning goal and the degree of collaboration that the student has with others. The e-portfolio is especially useful for special education programs since it provides an alternative device for assessment of the proficiency of students with learning disabilities since it shows an accurate picture of the student's life and work skills in addition to the traditional school areas.

It is evident that the implementation of blogs as e-portfolios for learning at GHS will bring great benefit to our student body and it is an option that should be considered if we want to innovate and disrupt education for the benefit of our students.

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