

Second International Communication Conference



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Glocal 2.0

Blogging: Evolution Treated as Revolution

May 8 -10, 2008



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Skopje, june, 2008

„Blogs in Education-New didactical challenge”

**“The Key to community is not doing things for people,
but enabling them to do things for themselves”**

Stephen Downes

Changing concepts of knowledge

The new appealing concepts of knowledge do not refer only to the concept of truth but it is recognizing truth as arguable and agreeable category. They understand knowledge as instrumentalization and commodification of the present knowledge and experience and as creation of new communicational meanings. Today, more than ever, knowledge supposes a big communication potential. Because of that, the process of learning and education, as important socialization processes increasingly integrates and include IT technologies and social software solutions with an aim to incorporate the digital technology and new constructions of knowledge that digitalization impose into the educational process. Applicative software solutions are used as effective environment and tools for socialization of the students and their active participation into the processes of learning and education and are optimizing the teaching process and teacher's potential and participation.

The new paradigm of e-learning is positioning the student in relation with certain learning scenarios that are rich in communication, that secure collaboration and critique and before everything that stress the social and organizational framework of the learning process. Because of that, the applied educational technology and its software solutions functions per se as a tool-for-result for developing a collaborative and creative learning environment for the students and not only as a source and tool for collection and process of information. This

approach involves the organization of the present knowledge, the interpretation and analysis and stimulates the collaborative construction of the new understanding and knowledge (Leinonen et al., 1999).

The new knowledge methodologies and especially the appliance of the Interactive social technologies into the learning environment secure production and exchange of knowledge and new practices in the school community, regardless of its being real or virtual. The type of used technology and software in education depends of the defined didactic goals (Santoro, Borges и Santos, 2000). The developmental didactical goal is consisted of the possibility of knowledge construction and its appliance to individual and group qualities and meanings of the students. It is not enough for the students to only engage in interaction with the professor, but together wit the professor to define, understand and build the educational material. It is very important for the students to have benefit from the educational content and to feel capable and responsible to change the direction of the didactical activity, using their own experience and motivation to construct the material, very easily and intuitively.

The basis of the usage of the social software solutions and the development of the contemporary educational discourse is in the ***process of reflection*** which according to Boud, (2001) represents the learning process that transforms the student's experience into new constructions of knowledge. According to Brockbank et al. (2002) the *reflective learning* is the aspect that connects the internet platform or blog structure with the learning process and it is an intentional activity that accents the social context and experience of the students. This learning is realized when active individual is using the medium to engage in the discussion with others and to challenge them (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003). The process of reflectivity is enabling the students to use the social software solutions in order to reach the phase of deepening of their learning process and to engage their experience, to connect with the rest of the learning group and to contextualize new meanings (Rosie, 2000 according Bartlett-Bragg, 2003).

Logging the Web

Regarding Paquet (2003) the term "blog" is defined by Barger in 1997, using the terms „web“ and “log” that together define the term weblog, known as blog. Blog represents the simplest form of web page with date defined posts, information

and links, presented in reversible time frame (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003). It refers to existence of digital space called blogosphere in which the collective world or activities of the users of the blogs, so called bloggers is organized. Even though the blog is seen to simplified characterized as a personal web page or personal diary, it can offers a flexible and easily manageable structure of knowledge and communication. The simplified meaning of the blog comes from its easy manageable structure and maintenance of the web content (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003).

A lot of researchers, scientists and people criticize the blog as too simplified to develop knowledge construction base because it only contains personal comments and views. Besides that, Rebecca Blood (2000) sees the blog as something more than posting a personal content, more as a unique proportion of significant links, comments and personal opinions and essays (according Downes, 2004:14-26).

Blogs and the blogging are defined by the format and the process that is realized through their structure. Because of that, Downes (2004:14-26) always differentiated the blog from the personal online diary. According to him, the difference is that the blog post and with that recommends certain significant links, and in the same time creates personal mark in reflection of the personal opinion.

According to Alexander (2006:33-44), the blog is a leader in the social software because it is a lot more than just simple digital writing, but a phenomenon that has an influence in the inside and outside of the digital space. One of the reasons for its popularity is the appearance of the Google search of the blog post that satisfies the tendency and the structure of the blog for intensive and extensive linking. The popularity of the blogs started to raise after the year 2003 when Google company bought the most effective and known blog hosting service Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>) from the Pyra Labs (Downes, 2004:14-26).

Paquet (2003) considers the blog to be specific software process defined by the personal editing policy, the structure of hyperlinks and hypertexts, the possibility for frequent post of information, the open and uncensored approach to the content, the freedom for commenting and developing of the posted information and content and existence of an archive that provides a total insight of the posted information (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003).

Educational Blogs-EduBlogs

The academy, the researchers, the teachers and students are the first ones that used and popularized the **Educational blogs or EduBlogs**. Their usage in the process of education is very applicable because it insures more comprehensive review of the learning and thinking process (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003). They present the opportunity for integration of the individual way of learning and knowledge acquisition through collaborative practice that connects the learning with the personal meanings and incorporate them into collective dispute. According to Kennedy (2003;11) the use of the blogs in high schools creates a sense of real and all-time engaged public to which the students constantly approach, the collaborative environment open to constant feedback and space through which the students acquire specific cognitive and writing skills (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003).

Henry Farrell (2003, according Downes, 2004:14-26) recognized 5 main usages of the blogs in education:

The First Use refers to the usage of the blog on the behalf of the teachers as a substitute of a standard web lesson. The teacher post the themes and materials for further discussion, poses the rules of discussion and governance of the blog, recommends significant learning sources and useful links for reading and provides working tasks. The students very easily approach and govern this kind of blog, because this environment already post a significant learning units that lead to concrete analysis of the problem and its solution and development.

The Second use accompanies the first use and refers to post of various significant links regarding the elaborated subject and allows the students direct approach do the significant post contents. This recommended links contribute to the possibility of choosing and using different web contents when addressing the actual subject regarding the interests and the capabilities of the student. This way, the blog provides space for development of individual learning process and dynamics.

The Third use refers to organizing a discussion within the school class or learning community. The possibility of involvement of more students through their blogs can initiate and develop an online discussion on various topical subjects. According to Mireille Guay (2004) the blog here manifests as a surprisingly good tool for development of community of students that mutually and constantly will communicate through their personal

blogs, they will get to know each other better and will start to feel and shape the democratic potential of this new digital space. Regarding this use, the blog is now more focused on the cognitive and emotional characteristics of the students than on the temperamental ones.

The Forth Use of the blog refers to organizing seminars and new educational units, summarization and post of the entire necessary material for the actual studying unit. This blog can be created and authorized by the whole group, because this is the opportunity when the individual blogs develop into the group blogs. This way, the blog facilitates the coordinative and educative obligation of the teacher and the student access to the needed educational materials.

The Fifth Use refers to creation of individual blogs by the students as inseparable part of the educational curricula. This is inseparable aspect of the deepened observation of the students regarding the teaching material. This is also an opportunity for the student to reflect and articulate its specific interest in his individual way, and to connect with other students that share the same learning methodologies and interests. The teacher receives only feedback of the student's opinions and of their motivation and will to further more analyze some specific subject, topic or area of interest.

According to Bartlett-Bragg (2003), the educational blogs can be defined in accordance of their different structure and specific appliance into the teaching process.

Group Blog- Regardless of the primal blog function as an individual online journal, blog can be used as a space for mutual collaboration. In lack of developed interactive online systems of learning, the blog represents a suitable substitution. The group blog is consisted of posts that usually refer to specific subject and of space for group interaction. This blogs are also used for group comments and evaluation of the posted student essays and other working papers.

Blog for publishing of Academia reports (papers, essays, etc). The published student reports on this kind of blog can move from journalistic to scientific. This way the blog can be used for practicing and development of the writing skills and building the expression stile of the student.

Blog as a space for professional practice, in which the practical and field work of the students is reported, followed and reflected upon. That leads to developmental process of shaping and building more active and deeper professional attitude.

Blog as a space for expression of the subjective thinking includes short essays on actual and concrete themes and questions regarding the student learning process with an aim to provoke the audience, the other students to comment the events and to develop a productive discussion. The blog can be used by the teachers or academics to post a content of question with an aim to provoke the students on more active and comprehensive attitude toward the things that surrounds them.

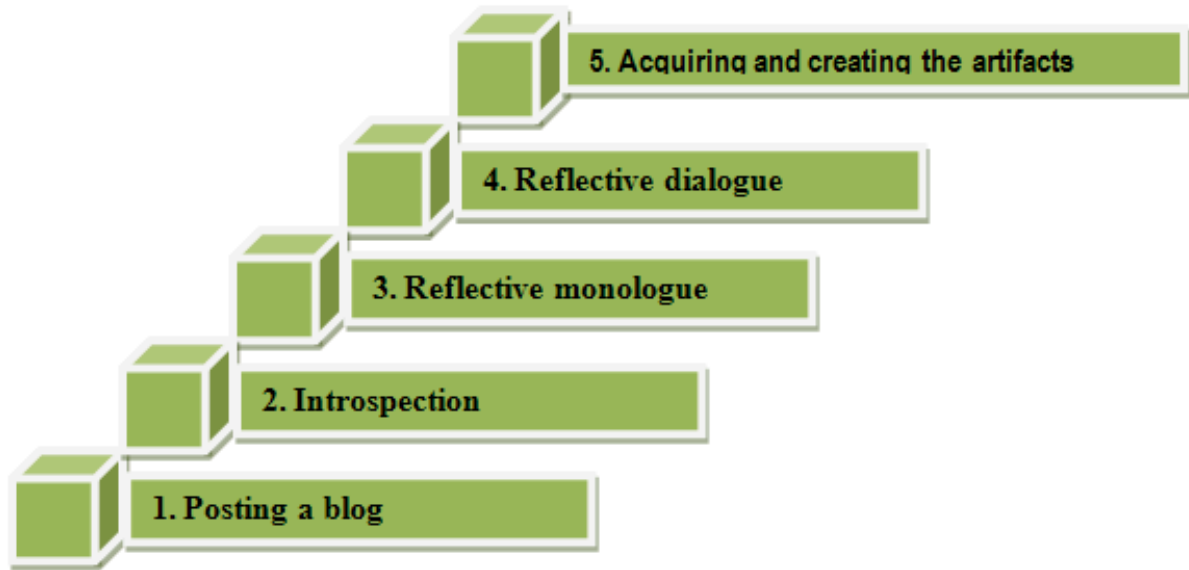
Academic Blog contains and presents academic attitudes and thoughts that open and develop discussions not only among the academic structure but for the whole public. Here we can find a stronger need for fast and efficient feedback of the person that posts the subject, in order to use it for his/her further research.

Researching Journal stresses the importance of connection and compilation of various subjects with an opportunity to emphasize separate instances and to develop already initialized ideas. Because this blog is not structured it allows posting of non-defined research ideas that can be developed in the further online discussion.

Personal/Individual Blog has the aim to lead and manage learning process of specific subject through stimulation of flexible and open discussion that incorporates the whole group. The content of this blog is in responsibility of the author/ student and it is under his/her control. This is one of those structures that strongly connect with the concept of e-learning because it allows the reflective process to take place and to transform the students experience into new arguable knowledge constructs.

Development of Educational Blogs

Regarding the researches that Bartlett-Bragg (2003) has done about the function of the educational blogs and their effective usage in education the **Model for effective usage of the blog in Educational Process** has been created. Even though the blog is easy manageable, in order to justify the imposed didactical goals, the model has to consider the *goal-centeredness*, *goal-effectiveness* and goal-development.



Scheme 1. Model of educational blog development in 5 phases (Bartlett-Bragg,2003)

Posting a blog is the first initial phase of this model. For this period, the blog initiate practice of collecting and posting of the educational material or events, stressing the way students should express and develop their views and emotions. This phase is very sensitive one in the blog development.

Introspection is the second phase in which the students is encouraged to follow the educational content and to show bigger readiness to respond and bigger emotional openness. In this phase, the content of the blog and blog activity is also simplified and the students post very small personal views. The experience of the students regarding the blog activity is in bigger focus then the educational process and posted material.

Reflective monologue is the phase in which the students are more aware of the reflection learning process and are posting more structured questions and comments accenting with that a significant contents that will be used and developed in the following evaluation and discussion. In this phase a lot of new themes are initiated by the students and a bigger responsibility for blog governance and activity is transferred to the students.

Reflective Dialogue is the phase that signifies deeper reflective process and shows a rise of individualized style of expression and publication of student's attitudes and

thoughts. In this phase, the students invite others to participate into discussion of the post individual material.

Acquiring and creating the artifacts- this is a phase where students produce new meanings of the discussed subjects and are trying to articulate and offer them to the rest of the audiences. There is bigger attention and visits of the student to the blogs of the other students, commenting specific issues with an intention to influence the current discussion and opinions and with that to promote their own perspectives. In this phase the whole responsibility regarding the blog maintenance and the knowledge management belong to the students.

Challenges for implementation of the Web 2.0 concept into the educational process

Educational blogs are meant for creation of communicational meaning and context of events and experiences that lead the student to self-reflective and self-directive researches on themes/subjects of student's interest. At the same time, edublog produces internal responsibility for the environment that we explore and produce. Thereby, the edublog erases the mainstreaming of the student potential and insures a space for the qualified and persistent scholars.

According to Downes (2004), although the primary function of the blog is reading of the posted content, the blog enables this reading to have significance for the personal and group life of the student and its brother school community. This type of activity enables development of independent learning process and personal research activity as constructive and critical review towards owns opinions and those of the others.

EduBlogs in Macedonia regarding the school learning environment is a matter of individual initiative, one-way communication process and a space for simply posting some actual information regarding the current subject. It is area where there is low interest from the school community because of the focalized educational roles and system supported by the lack of computer and internet literacy and accented by the fact that students today are more skillful than teachers in managing this kind of IT networking platforms. EduBlogs in Macedonia are still reconsidered as a part of the student's leisure time and its extracurricular activities. So, that supposes that there is

still no opportunity for involvement of the blog as an educational environment and tool into the regular school curricula.

Regardless of that notion, the utilization and contextualization of the social software solution in educational sector in Macedonia is a matter of:

1. Acquiring the up-to-date computer and Internet literacy from teachers and students and mutual communication of their current concepts;
2. Existence of effective computer and Internet support in the schools and at home;
3. Adequate skills, personal and organized will, initiative and persistence of the teachers and the schools but also of the students, especially in the phase of initiating and sustaining of this kind of communities;
4. Stimulating and inclusive school environment that will support and value the teachers and students blog initiative and will create an opportunity for bigger inclusion of the other school community;
5. Adequate implementation and use of the Web 2.0 and its software solution into school curricula throughout recognizing and developing very clear and defined didactical and pedagogical goals;
6. Introducing, Implementing, contextualizing and sustaining new methodologies of knowledge management and e-learning.

Educational blogs and their opportunity for simple but effective appliance and management into the school environment propose bigger promotion, presentation and implementation of already suggested simple models of blogger communication in Macedonia. Their entrance in specific segments of institutionalized educational life impose initiative, vision and concrete action from the responsible institutions (Ministry of Education and the Department of Education development, Electronic Communications Agency and the Government of R. of Macedonia in their e-government projects), the will and openness for didactical challenges and changes from the management of the schools, the collaboration from the NGO sector, and the responsibility, initiative and collaboration of the independent Macedonian blogosphere.

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