



Remediation, Genre, and Motivation: Key Concepts for Teaching with Weblogs

Comments

I've seen many news articles and some academic essays that include a statement like "Blogs are many things, not only A, but also B, C, D and E," but where the author proceeds as if a "real" blog is mostly A. So it was refreshing to read this article, in which the authors examined blogs as remediations of familiar academic/writing genres such as notebooks, journals, notecards, and freewriting. There's been plenty of scholarship on each of those genres.

Still, spending too much time examining how blogs can help us do what we already do may downplay the ways that blogs can open up student experience beyond the classroom. My students are energized when, from time to time, a professor from a different class at our school, a student at a different university, or the author of the text we have been discussing drops by to weigh in. My own talk at CCCC '04, on "[Forced Blogging](#)," did some preliminary investigation into the social networks that comments made visible (my students don't use Trackbacks, but that's in part because so far I haven't introduced the concept in any classes). The serendipity, the surprises, the community that formed in a core of committed bloggers (some of whom are still blogging over the summer, purely for pleasure) was very rewarding to some students, and generated a critical mass that kept me from feeling that I was obligated to read and comment on every student assignment.

I am planning to introduce blogs, in a very minor way, in this fall's freshman comp course; it's a two-semester course, and we share a common syllabus, so there really isn't room to carve out a major assignment.

This article is a useful reminder that freshmen will probably not be that interested in what blogging can do for their academic writing, particularly at the beginning of term, when many are still expecting to be able to "coast" on the survival techniques (lots of plot summary and personal opinion) that helped them get through their senior English classes.

In order to demonstrate what blogs can do for students, I could, for instance, assign students to write a "filter" blog entry as advance preparation for an oral presentation. We know that Google is just too tempting to ignore when launching out into unfamiliar fields, and as writing teachers we know what happens when students quote from "onesidedextremistwebsite.com" and "specialinterest.org" -- they look for information that confirms their own biases.

I'm puzzled as to why, in the Fall of 2002, fewer students claimed weblogs motivated them to write "for your class assignments" than claimed that weblogs helped them write for "any school-related task". Aren't class assignments school-related tasks? Did students interpret the second question as referring to "any *other* school-related tasks"?

And, as with any survey that asks people to give their personal responses, I'd like to have seen some qualitative data to back it up. Did students who claimed that weblogs helped them stay motivated actually write more entries? Get better grades in the course? (The authors note, "We have no benchmark for measuring the success of weblogging relative to freewriting or note card taking as a motivating activity, but the initial results suggest the activity is worth pursuing, the

pedagogical understanding and techniques worth developing." Agreed -- I'd love to read more in that area.)

The authors note that that in one survey set, students were permitted to chose more than one genre, so there was some motion towards collecting more information, but reducing the question to a binary "do you like subgenre A or not" reduces the amount of data one can collect. I would have asked students to respond on a seven-point scale, rating their response towards weblogs in general, and each of the subgenres in particular. Perhaps those who are most likely to dislike blogs in general will like subgenre A best (or dislike it least), which may provide some insight for how to motivate students who aren't excited by the social and networking possibilities of blogging culture.

But these are all quibbles -- I'm glad I found this article. Some of the statements about the value of individual blogs vs community blogs will bear further investigation. I'd like to know what steps the instructors took to generate community, what the on campus culture is like, etc.

Posted by: [Dennis G. Jerz](#) at July 7, 2004 07:58 PM

I was happy to find this article as I prepared a manuscript on the potential use of blogs in nursing education.

Yes, I would like to know for future educational purposes if the students in your study who state that weblogs helped them stay motivated write more comments or posts?

I will be using weblog technology this semester with a few nursing students as we explore the positive use of reflection in action following a clinical day. We are also thinking of using the technology to help Clinical Nurse Leaders develop e portfolios for their career as students.

Posted by: [margaret maag](#) at August 29, 2004 06:11 PM

Thanks for leaving comments, Dennis and Margaret.

My co-author, Sybil Priebe, has done the most to try and establish a blogging community on our campus: visit [The Bison Blog](#). A few of the students who contribute to that collective site got their start in our classes, but most were bloggers before The Bison Blog appeared.

Will Richards, at [weblogg-ed](#) noted that after three years of working with blogs, they continue to function well in his classroom, but few students emerge as bloggers.

I've been exploring weblog software for portfolio purposes, Margaret, and I definitely think weblogging software like TypePad / Movable Type is an economical alternative to the e-portfolio software being sold to some higher ed. institutions. Chris Boese (sp?), who has an essay in this collection, has a nice online portfolio composed with MT.

Maybe Cindy and Sybil will come along and elaborate.

Kevin

Posted by: [Kevin Brooks](#) at August 30, 2004 02:55 PM

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