A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FIVE AUTHORS OF FIVE BLOGS ON TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Study of Five Authors of Five Blogs on Training and Development

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This study analyzed what it means to be a blogger in the field of training and development—an edublogger—as well as the credibility of blogs intended for the training community. The specific research questions were posed from the insider's or *emic* perspective. The objective of this study was to attempt to paint a portrait of an edublogger and uncover areas for further research.

A phenomenological qualitative research design methodology was used in an attempt to observe the connections between edubloggers and their readers, which is in harmony of the spirit of the blogs as well as to understand the essence of experiences in the blogosphere. A grounded theory was constructed from a cross-case analysis—case studies were developed using interview transcripts of the 5 bloggers and artefact analysis of each of their blogs over a 4-month period—with the intention of identifying key phenomena.

Common themes related to the edubloggers' motivations, writing style, community building and other general practices were uncovered as. In addition, a substantial set of emerging questions specifically relating to readership and the qualitative assessment of blog content were noted.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

One of the challenges of working in a profession is keeping current with the field. Consider the profession of training and development, in which I work. In the past 20 years, training programs have increasingly moved from being presented in the classroom to being presented on the computer. Training organizations increasingly use Learning Management Systems to handle enrolments, manage facilities, and track operations, reducing their reliance on human administrators. Trainers rely on an increasingly diverse set of approaches providing learners with new skills and knowledge, including approaches that do not involve instruction. Trainers increasingly describe their work as building performance rather than merely teaching for skills. In response, the name of training has changed several times during this period, from Training and Development, to Human Resource Development, to Learning, to Workplace Learning and Performance Improvement. (All of these terms are now in use.)

With so many changes, how do training professionals keep abreast of them? The act of doing so is called *professional development* and this chapter explores how training professionals engage in professional development. It first defines what professional development is and provides examples of professional development for training and development professionals. Then, this chapter explores the role of communities in shaping professional development opportunities. Next, it explores online tools for professional development, then explores one type of online tool that is increasingly used for professional development—the blog. Last, this chapter identifies opportunities for conducting research on the power and potential of blogs as professional development tools.

WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Professional development is about building on the already established conceptual framework developed in formal degree programs for the purpose of acquiring new information about a field, improving one's skills and abilities, and integrating all of this into one's practice (Booth, 2006; Herrington, Glazer, & Herrington, 2003). Schlager and Fusco (2003) define professional development "as a career-long, context specific, continuous endeavour" and that "its objective is to develop, implement, and share practices, knowledge, and values" (p. 205).

Workplace learning professionals have used a variety of resources for professional development. For example, those who join the field of training and development without any prior education in the field can take introductory training courses from either a professional society like the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) or a private provider, like Friesen-Kaye and Associates, both of which offer Train-the-Trainer type courses. Newcomers to this field can read a primer, such as one of the "Basics" series of books published by the ASTD and complement their knowledge with ongoing reading in trade publications like *TRAINING Magazine* (Nielsen Media) and *T&D* magazine (ASTD). Newcomers can also improve their knowledge in a certain aspects of practice by reading books, including well-regarded books like Allison Rossett's *Training Needs Assessment* (Educational Technology Publications), Harold

Stolovitch's *Telling Ain't Training* (ASTD) and Judith Hale's *The Performance Consultant's Fieldbook* (John Wiley & Sons Inc).

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITIES IN PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Because no organized roadmap to these resources exists or is provided to practicing professionals, they often have difficulty finding these professional development resources—or when they do, they often feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of material to read and absorb. To help make sense of the content, professionals seeks the advice of others in the field—that is, they seek the advice of their professional community. Because such a community focuses on the practice of the field, it is called a community of practice. According to Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), a community of practice is a group "of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p.4). Such a community is often informal in nature and born out of need as people who share common experiences and challenge seek each other out for information, advice and feedback, such as artists or writers who meet in cafés to discuss styles and techniques, or a group of workers that form a group to discuss the impacts of upcoming corporate changes on their jobs. Communities of practice need not be limited to practicing professionals. For example, a group of parents who meets regularly to discuss parenting issues is a community of practice.

Some communities of practice are formalised organisations or units within larger organisations. Several such formal organizations are available to workplace learning professionals. Some principal ones in North America are the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), its Canadian counterpart the Canadian Society for Training and Development (CSTD), as well as the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI). All of these organisations have local chapters that host regular meetings and in some cases annual conferences, providing access to industry news, resources and expert opinions and mentorship programs in addition to learning and professional networking opportunities. Both also present their members with a model for implementing the concepts of performance improvement in their work, as well as numerous resources for learning about and applying these models and related skills.

Regardless of their level of formality, communities of practice are an indispensable asset to professional development as it harnesses the power of the collective nature of knowledge. Wenger et al. (2002) argue that "[a]ppreciating the collective nature of knowledge is especially important in an age when almost every field changes too much, too fast for individuals to master. Today's complex problem solving requires multiple perspectives" (p.10).

THE ROLE OF ONLINE RESOURCES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition to their local chapter meetings and annual conferences, professional organizations have recognized that providing online resources is essential to serving their professional communities. Not surprisingly, professional organizations like ASTD, CSTD, and ISPI have extensive Websites, as do private organizations like the e-Learning Guild and individuals, like Don Clark who designed the Performance, Learning, Leadership, & Knowledge Site (http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/).

This section describes online resources used in professional development. First, it describes general resources that are available online. Next, it describes online resources for promoting interaction among professionals, starting with a discussion of early resources, continuing with a discussion of current resources, and closing with a discussion of the evolution of the blog.

General Resources Available Online

Professional organizations, private organizations, and individuals all provide online resources to promote the professional development of their readers. Professional organizations provide resources such as publications, research reports, descriptions of their performance improvement models, and information about training programs and services. In addition, most professional organizations have online tools that promote networking among members. At their most basic, they include membership directories and guides to products available. At the most, they include sophisticated networking tools, like ASTD's MemberConnect, which provides a means for members to find others with similar interests and make contact with them, and like ISPI's online chapter, the Performance Improvement Global Network.

Networking resources are also provided by private organizations and individuals. For example, the eLearning Guild (www.elearningguild.com) is a for-profit online community of practice for designers of e-learning programs. It offers learning opportunities, networking services, resources and publications to its paying members. In addition, the consulting firms of industry experts like Brandon Hall and Josh Bersin offer newsletters and sell their research reports, knowledge bases and services through their Websites (www.brandon-hall.com and www.joshbersin.com). Universities, too, offer online resources for professional development. For example, many universities that offer degrees in educational technology and instructional design have online networks such as the Illinois Online Network (ION).

Individuals offer similar resources, too. Some are attempting to promote their professional services, such as Geary Rummler (http://www.geary.com/). Others are individuals who are merely making the information available for public use. Some are university professors, such as Martin Ryder of the University of Colorado at Denver, who has created a Website of Instructional Design Models (http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc_data/idmodels.html) and David Jonassen of the University of Missouri Columbia who has created a Website on Design of Constructivist Learning Environments (http://www.coe.missouri.edu/~jonassen/courses/CLE/).

Online Conversation as a Professional Development Resource

One particular type of online resource for professional development is the online conversation. An online conversation provides a means for people who share a professional interest to exchange information, ideas, reflections, and contacts through computer-based communication. The earliest forms of online conversations appeared in the 1980s and early 1990s and took the forms of:

- Usenet groups, which are electronic bulletin boards where a network of users carry out online conversations or post news items.
- Email lists, which are programs whereby an individual relay a message to a group of people by typing in a single electronic mail address.
- LISTSERVs ™ are similar to email list but have the added function of promoting a discussion via an e-mail. It is the first electronic mailing list software application, developed in 1984 by members of the BITNET computer network.
- Bulletin board systems (BBS) were popular applications in the 1980s and 1990s, predecessors to the modern Web 2.0 as they facilitated online discussions in message boards, content publication, software downloading, gaming and many more social activities using a single application.
- Online forums and discussion threads are asynchronous activities (any activity which is not live, like chat, but rather out of synch, like email) where electronic messages are posted by participants and to which other participants usually post replies which are linked to the original message.

Early online networks, including the early form of the Internet as well as private networks, like IBM's VNET, facilitated the use and growth of these communities. Because access to these networks was limited before the Internet was made more widely available in the mid-1990s, participation was primarily limited to members of university communities, and employees of government agencies and large corporations.

In 1994, online diaries emerged and gained quite a bit of popularity (*Blog*, n.d.). An online diary is a personal journal that is published on the internet and hosted either on a personal Website or a community Website designed to host online diaries such as Xanga, Open Diary and LiveJournal. The next section explores the use of blogs as professional development resources.

Because online diaries are available through the World Wide Web and are a type of "log," (like a log of a particular type of experience), they became known as *Weblogs* or *blogs* for short.

THE BLOG AS A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE

This section explores how blogs arose as a professional development resource. It first defines the term, blog. Next, it briefly describes the emergence of blogs as a phenomenon of the Web. Last, it explores the uses of blogs for professional development.

What a Blog Is

Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary defines a blog as "a Website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer" (Blog). The term blog is a contraction of Web log, a term coined by Jorn Barger on December 17, 1997 (Wortham, 2007) and defined as "a Web page where a Web logger 'logs' all the other Web pages she finds interesting". (Blood, 2004, p.54) Later on, the prefix Web was dropped and the blog stood alone and quickly became a part of the vernacular. As blogs emerged, there began to be as much variance in their purpose as in their form:

> Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual although some focus on photographs (photoblog), videos (vlog), or audio (podcasting), and are part of a wider network of social media. (*Blog*, n.d.)

In addition, blogs can be used for professional development. A person who writes a blog is called a blogger. A blog appears as one long Web page, with new additions appearing at the top of the page. Additions are commonly called entries, or posts, and can also be displayed on their own Web pages. Material is presented in reverse chronological order; that is, the most current entry appears first, followed by the next-most-current entry, and concluding with the oldest entry. (Brady, 2005; Cohen & Krishnamurthy, 2006).

When the number of entries becomes large, bloggers can assign them to categories and archive entries by category, so readers can easily find content.

Figure 1.1 shows the structure of a complex blog whose entries are archived.

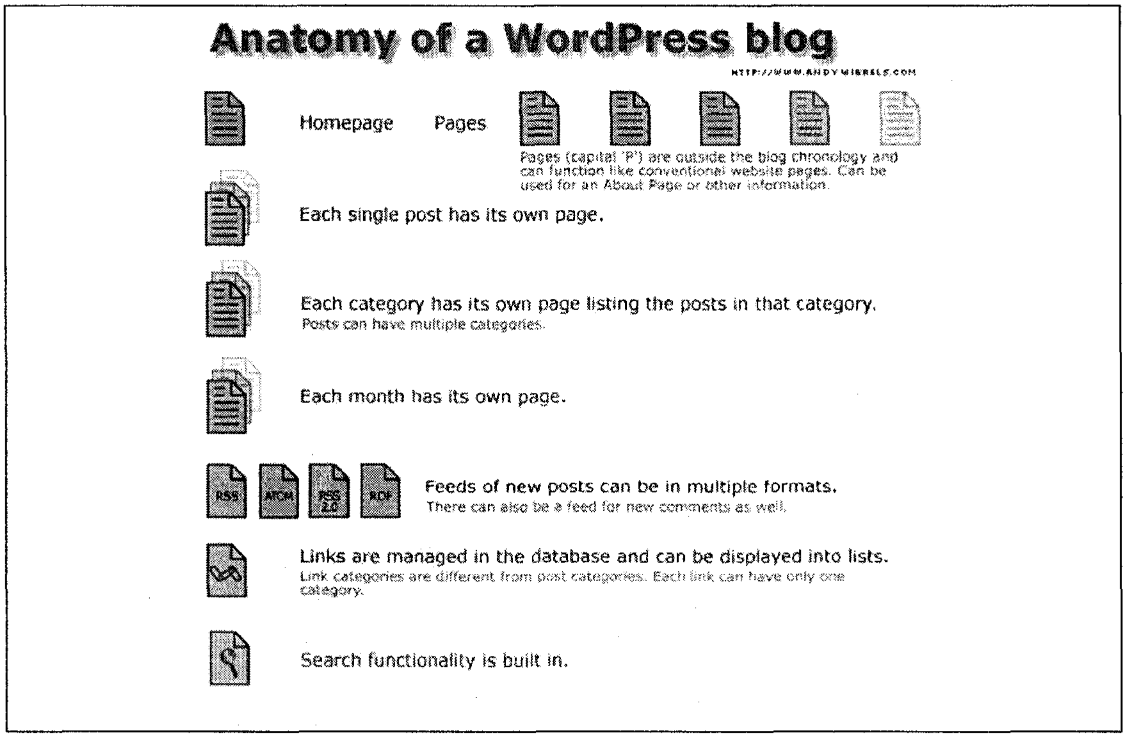

Figure 1.1: Anatomy of a WordPress blog as viewed by Wibbels (Wibbels, 2006) "Used with permission".

In addition, a blog entry can include a place for visitors to comments on it. Other users, in turn, can be notified of changes to the blog—including comments—through an automatic message—called an Really Simple Syndication RSS feed—so that they are advised when to check the blog. This ability for visitors to provide comments has influenced the use of blogs by users. "What distinguishes Weblogging from previous Web media is the extent to which it is social, and one can say that the medium came into existence when the set of Web journal writers recognized themselves as a community" (Marlow, 2004, p.1). Figure 1.2 shows a sample of a screen in which users can leave comments to a blog.

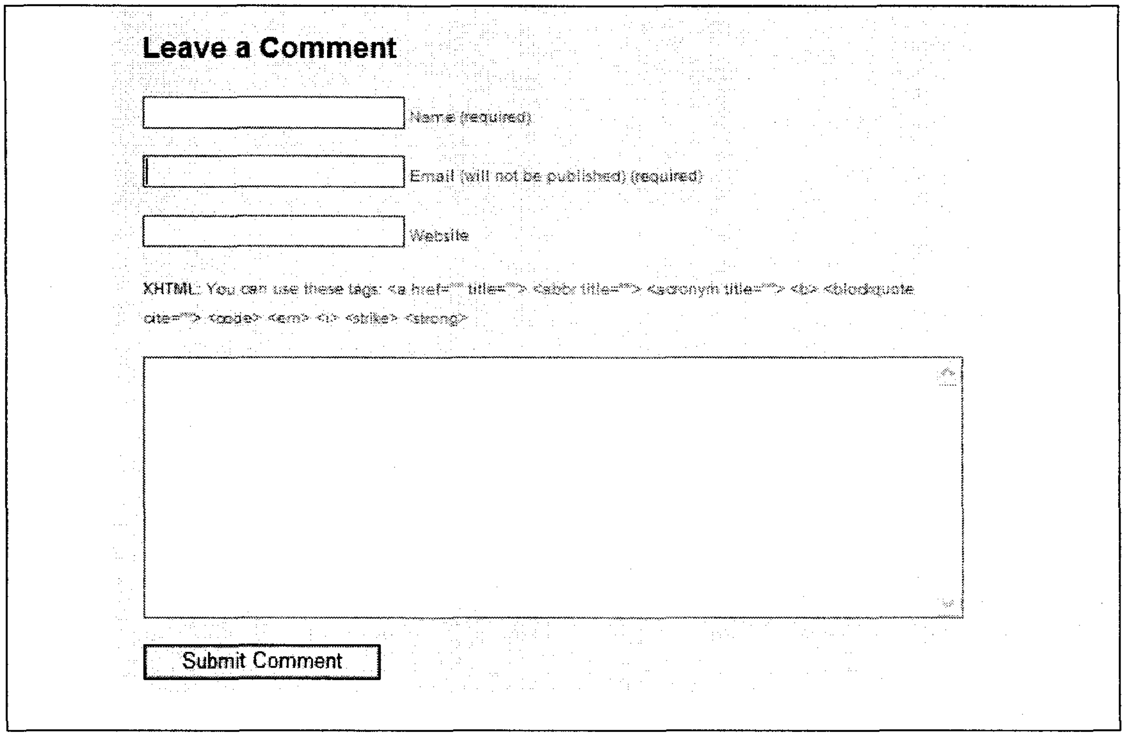

Figure 1.2: Sample screen from a blog, in which readers can post comments.

Blogging software, most of which is available through the World Wide Web, use templates like the one shown in Figure 1.2 to guide not only the posting of comments to a blog, but to guide all work on blogs. The easiest-to-use tools let users who want to set up a blog first go through a series of Web-based forms to describe the blog. Then the tools ask users to choose the appearance of their blogs by choosing from several possible designs. Then, users can post their blog entries by using a fill-in-the-blank form that is similar to the one for creating comments. Tools for creating blogs include WordPress and Websites like Blogger.com. This ability to create blogs by responding to a fill-in-the-blank form, the posting entries by typing them into a form, then clicking Publish—

without knowing the complex HyperText Markup Language (HTML) required to create most Web content—facilitated the fast growth of blogs as a phenomenon on the Web.

THE EMERGENCE OF BLOGS AS A PHENOMENON OF THE WEB

Blogs are one example of a larger category of Web-based applications that promote the social uses of computing. This category of applications is known as Web 2.0 because they represent a second generation of uses on the Web (Shank, in press). Web 1.0, taglined Web-as-information-source, refers to applications that are mainly read-only, or non-participatory. Web 2.0, taglined as Web-as-participation-platform, refers to applications that permit the user to generate Web content as a participant in a venue of open communication, decentralization of authority as well as freedom to share and re-use (*Web 2.0*, n.d.). Other examples of Web 2.0 applications include: Wikis, Podcasts and Social Bookmarking.

One of the first online applications for preparing blogs was Blogger.com, which was launched in 1999 (Blood, 2004). Blogger.com is one of the earliest dedicated blog-publishing tools created by Pyra Labs and later bought by Google in 2003. That Blogger.com has, since 2000, given each blog not only a unique Web address (called *permalink*), but one that is easy to remember, has only hastened the use of blogs. Specifically, Blogger.com automatically assigns Web addresses that start with the name of the blog, has only hastened the use of blogs. For example, if a user creates a blog named “MyRecipes”, Blogger.com would automatically assign it the Web address, Myrecipes.blogspot.com. This is called permalink.

As early as 2001, bloggers began crossblogging (posting on another person's blog) and commenting. Crossblogging was also facilitated with the invention of the trackback feature which enabled bloggers to ping one another's blogs by placing a reciprocal link in the entry they were referencing. The arrival of the trackback also facilitated conversation amongst bloggers and "emphasize the conversational nature of the Weblog form while collating for readers all available responses to an entry" (Blood, 2004, p.55) which is essential to online community development.

As a professional development resource, ". . . blogs highlight useful information that [I] may never find on [my] own--or think to find on [my] own", Cross (2002) observes. Some of this information includes latest technology developments, industry news as well as tips and tricks.

Blogs have grown rapidly since their first appearances in 2000 (Cohen & Krishnamurthy, 2006). Their origin however is neither clearly identified nor credited to any one person or organization but rather seems to have emerged from various endeavours and sources (Brady, 2005). However, an important factor in the history of blogging is the development of blogging software:

> It was not until 1999 that a number of companies emerged to produce software that allowed blogs to be created and updated very easily. This allowed people with previously little or no knowledge about HTML and the internet to begin producing their own blogs. The move towards making the medium more accessible spurred a

growth in the number of bloggers, and therefore the diversity of blogs (Brady, 2005, p.6).

One reason for the growth of blogging was the increased availability of easy-to-use blogging tools and how-to manuals (Blood, 2004). In addition, tools such as blogrolls, which are a list of links that blog writers posts on the sidebar of their blog to other blogs that might deal with similar topics or interests, and Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, which are an aggregation of regularly updated Web content such as the blog content for the purpose of syndication, were integrated into blogging tools and promoted the creation and reading of blogs. Blogrolls promote other blogs, forming a sense of blogger community. RSS feeds informed readers of new posts to blogs, and encouraged them to read them. *Blogosphere* emerged as a term that refers to all blogs as a community or social network (*Blogosphere*, 2006).

As a result of this growth, many professional and business communities accorded blogs increased importance and this, in turn, motivated members of these communities to add their voices to this growing form of discourse (Lasica, 2002). In addition, attention to blogs as a cultural phenomenon in business and professional communities began to emerge. As attention to blogs increased, a few authoritative bloggers became popular as sources of commentary (Hewitt, 2005). Much of this influence was felt on the political landscape (Hewitt, 2005; Smolkin, 2004). In contrast to the strict editorial structure of traditional news sources, blogs created and open forum for personal commentary, providing a source of diverse view points, sparking conversation (Hewitt, 2005), and ultimately inspiring online debates.

The number of blogs has grown extensively. According to its 2007 *State of the Live Web*, Technorati.com identified more than 70 million blogs and estimated that 120,000 new blogs are created daily (Sifry, 2006).

CREDIBILITY AND BLOGS

With more than 70 million blogs, the quality of the content is likely to vary among them. The concept of quality can be defined in a variety of ways: its effectiveness in achieving goals, quality of content can refer to the ability of a blog to achieve its stated objectives, to provide useful information, and to provide credible information (Carliner, Qayyum, Sanchez-Lozano, Macmillan, and van Barneveld, in preparation). Because, in the case of blogs, which are primarily used for informal learning, the readers establish their own objectives, quality of content primarily focuses on the usefulness of the information and its credibility.

Credibility is a particular issue on the Web. Credibility is a quality attributed to information that is considered believable or trustworthy and can vary in degrees from very credible to incredible. Oftentimes, authority and reputation of the source of the information will influence the degree of credibility of the information.

On the one hand, by their authority as bloggers, authors of blogs have become a source of authority. In fact, the goal for many bloggers is achieving "opinion leadership" in the intended community, becoming a "gatekeeper" or "maven" of sorts (Marlow, 2004, p.1). Sometimes, this thought leadership merely results from popularity. In other instances, it results from the authority of the content.

On the other hand, because bloggers can communicate directly with professionals, many without going through the gatekeepers of conference managers, editors, and similar types of reviewers who determine what information will be released to the professional public and what will not, their material is essentially self-published. In practical terms, that mean that, in many cases, no one is reviewing or approving the content. So, although the content has the authority of the blogger, it may or may not be accurate or balanced.

Credibility is a concern not only for professional development, but in other disciplines. One of the ones in which it is most widely discussed is the field of journalism. Some of the dimensions of more interesting questions they raise are (*Online Ethics Guidelines: The Wikis*, 2007):

- How do we make sure we provide adequate context, including the presentation of conflicting views?
- How do we decide when to edit and when not to? Before publishing, afterwards, never?
- How much do readers and viewers care about the values of the people producing the content?
- What value do anonymity and pseudonyms have in emerging media?

Drum adds his "doubt about whether blogging and professional journalism can go together..."(Smolkin, 2004, ¶ 75). Drum, an established journalist, considers that while standards for sourcing and reporting are established in the field of journalism, that the problem with blogs "is that the standards are lower" (Smolkin, 2004, ¶ 74) because "[bloggers] able to toss stuff out that a reporter on a daily newspaper couldn't. They express opinions loudly and with fervor." (Smolkin, 2004, ¶ 74). Drum therefore attributes credibility based on the medium that content was published with, insinuating that because the standards for publication aren't as rigid, believability and trustworthiness aren't as strong.

One of the key reasons that credibility is an especially important issue with blogs is that many are either fake (called *flogs*) or a paid vehicle for advocating for a particular point of view. In many instances, these paid bloggers do not disclose their relationship with the patron. For example, PayPerPost.com, an internet marketing site, "pays bloggers to write nice things about corporate sponsors—without unduly worrying about whether or not bloggers disclose these arrangements to readers."(Fine 2006, ¶ 3).

Although the issue is most widely raised in the field of journalism, it is also one that concerns blogs in the field of training and development. How do these bloggers determine what to write about? From where do they receive their information? And how do they verify their information? That's what this study intends to find out.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study specifically intends to study the credibility of blogs intended for the training community, as the credibility is reported and identified by the bloggers themselves.

Specifically, this study defines credibility as the following:

- The nature of the content being reported (experienced based, research based or opinion based)

- The ways in which facts reported are validated

- The ways in which readers respond to the blog entries

Specific research questions are:

- Who are the bloggers in the field? That is, what motivates them to blog and what qualifications do they believe they bring to the task?
- What is their purpose in blogging? That is, what do they hope to accomplish? What influence do they hope to achieve, if any?
- What do professionals in the educational technology who choose to blog choose to write about?
- How do they select the content to report? How do they verify the content, if at all?
- What evidence do the bloggers have of their influence?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Blogs contain information that has the potential to influence practice, but, unlike other published sources of information, like magazines and academic journals, we don't have much information on the process that they follow and the measures they go to ensure the quality of the content that they publish.

So, although the body of literature on blogs and blogging is growing, it has primarily focused on the various journalistic and pedagogical uses of blogs as well as their various forms and applications. Little research has been done from the blogger's perspective, which explores the process bloggers go through when deciding what to blog, when and why they blog, as well as their relationship with their readership. This study is intended to fill that gap. The next chapter places this study within this growing body of literature on blogs in general, and their use in professional development in particular. The subsequent chapter explains how this study will be conducted.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

OVERVIEW

Although the phenomenon of blogs is relatively new—they started in earnest around 2003(Cohen & Krishnamurthy, 2006) and were a popular topic in the business and technology press in 2005 (Hewitt, 2005; Smolkin, 2004)—online tools have been used for at least two decades to build and create professional communities online. This chapter reviews that literature, and is intended to place blogs within the larger contexts professional development and of social computing in education. Specifically, this chapter first explores the general phenomenon of professional development for training professionals and the forms it takes. Next, it explores the phenomenon of social computing for professional development, including predecessor technologies like LISTSERVs, discussion boards, instant messaging, and similar technologies. Next, it reviews the emerging body of literature on blogs, with a special focus on their use for professional development. In addition, because the research questions explore issues of credibility of the data posted on blogs and their perceived credibility, this chapter closes by reviewing the role of credibility in online sources.

LITERATURE ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TRAINING PROFESSIONALS AND THE FORMS IT TAKES

In the last chapter, professional development was defined the way in which the people who practice a particular occupation access knowledge and information to improve their skills and abilities and, ultimately, their practice.

This section explores professional development for training and development professionals. It first describes the many forms of professional development. Next, it presents the three general approaches to professional development. It concludes by talking about learning and teaching approaches inherent in the forms of professional development that are representative of blogs.

The Many Forms that Professional Development Takes

Professional development takes many forms. According to Herrington, Glazer and Herrington, these forms include:

- Professional associations such as the *American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)*, the *Canadian Society of Training and Development (CSTD)*, the *International Society of Performance Improvement (ISPI)*, the *International Association for Continuing Education & Training (IACET)* and the *Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). These organizations offer networking opportunities through local, regional, national, and international meetings. Each also offers* publications, collaborative projects, standards, policies, and resources. Most also espouse a particular view of the profession. For example, both ASTD and ISPI believe that the primary goal of training and development professionals is to improve the performance of the organizations they serve.

- Professional associations are a form of a community of practice. Although the concept of communities of practice is often associated with online communities, professional communities characterized by associations long predate the online communities. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder define a community of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002) They identify the value of a community of practice, more specifically in an organisation, in its ability to link personal and professional development of its members to the corporate strategy.

- Knowledge-building opportunities such as online classes, workshops (including some that come with certificates, like the basic training programs offered by Langevin Services and The Training Clinic, and the broader array of certificates available from programs like ASTD's and Nielsen's certificate programs), and self-assessment tools, like ASTD's and CSTD's self-assessments for certifications.

- Publications such as peer-reviewed journals like ISPI's *Performance Improvement Quarterly* and the Academy of Human Resource Development's *Human Resource Development Quarterly* and *Human Resource Development Review;* trade publications like Nielsen's *TRAINING Magazine, ASTD's T&D magazine*, and CLO Media's *CLO Magazine;* Webzines such as ASTD's *Learning Circuits* and the Association for Computing Machinery's *e-Learn Magazine*; research reports such as ASTD's *Annual State of the Industry Report;* electronic newsletters (e-newsletters) such as Nielsen's *e-Learning News and Reviews* and e-newsletters of the chapters of ASTD, CSTD, and ISPI, announcements, notice boards, what's new and calendars of events.

- In addition to periodicals, are published books and similar resources, such as Newstrom, Scannell and Nilson's *Games Trainers Play* (McGraw-Hill Training Series, 1998), Shank's *Online Learning Idea Book* (Pfeiffer, 2007) and *Thiagi's Interactive Lectures* by (ASTD Press, 2005)
- Databases of professional development opportunities such as the *Globewide Network Academy*, a repository of open source tools that promote distance learning and online communities and is part of the *Wikiversity*, a source of free learning opportunities online.
- Mentoring opportunities, which partner new and experienced professionals for the purpose of helping the new person integrate into the field. For example, ASTD has a Mentorship Program. ISPI offers a specialized mentoring program to help people prepare to become qualified for the Certified Performance Technologist program.
- Conferences, which are organized meetings for the purpose of exchanges of views and ideas. The major associations listed earlier each sponsor international conferences; many also sponsor regional and local conferences. Online seminars or Webinars (Web seminars) are also becoming increasingly popular as facilitate access to experts around the world. Outsourcing.com has a series of Webinars as does www.on24.com, which hosts instructional Webinars for businesses and universities.

One last professional development opportunity includes communication tools and resources, such *LearningTimes.org*, an open community for education and training professionals, which offers chat rooms, discussion boards, LISTSERVs, email lists, help and lists of frequently asked questions. More focused resources also exist, such as the

Education Review Listserv, which announces and archives reviews of books in education and ASTD's discussion boards on topics like performance improvement. In addition are resources that supplement live events, such as online forums the *eLearning Guild,* which are essentially archives of ten focused, interactive. live online sessions presented over a period of one or two days and that are intended to provide an intensive learning experience. Most significantly, one particular type of communication tool for professional development is the blog.

The Three Types of Professional Development

Professional development can be structured, semi-structured or informal (Herrington et al., 2003; Herrington, Herrington, Kervin, & Ferry, 2006; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002):

- Structured professional development is usually set up as a program through which one receives an official diploma or certificate of completion, or continuing education units. Structured professional development usually takes the form of classes (online or in the classroom), or participating in a formal mentoring program.
- Semi-structured professional development usually provides an individual with an opportunity to choose from several professional development opportunities to achieve a personal goal, which may or may not involve receiving a certificate or diploma. Semi-structured professional development usually takes the form of conferences and Webinars and use of professional development databases.

- Informal professional development usually provides an opportunity for individuals to seek out information and, often, make meaning of the experience(s) through exchanges with other professionals. Informal professional development usually takes the form of reading journals, magazines, professional development resources, and online resources, and attending networking opportunities.

One characteristic common to semi-structured and informal professional development is that both rely on participants to be self-directed in their learning. Self-directed is said of any endeavour where individuals guide themselves without being directly influenced by any external guides. Like the training that training and development professionals ideally design, some advocate that professional development for trainers should also be designed using adult learning theory, known as *andragogy*. Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) propose that the way adults approach learning is highly influenced by their (1) need to know, (2) self-concept, (3) prior experiences, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning and (6) motivation to learn. These six issues are known as the characteristics of adult learning.

Huang (2002) adapts Knowles' principles of adult learning to constructivist theory, proposing that adult learners need to know how the learning will happen; adults apply prior-knowledge to their learning to make it more meaningful; adult learners demonstrate readiness to learn when they have a need to learn; adults prefer problem-solving types of learning activities; and adult learners are intrinsically motivated to learn. Huang advocates that learning for adults should be designed as self-directed learning. Self-directed learning is when "the individual takes the initiative and the responsibility for what occurs. Individuals select, manage, and assess their own learning activities, which can be pursued at any time, in any place, through any means, at any age" (Gibbons, 2007). Huang adds that self-directed learning permits adults to take control of their learning; adults have usually developed the ability to think contextually and critically; adults profit from experiential learning, which is the acquisition of knowledge or skills through direct action and participation followed by reflection on outcomes; and that, by learning to learn, adults develop an ability for lifelong learning.

Learning and Teaching Approaches Inherent in Forms of Professional Development that Are Representative of Blogs

One key characteristic of most forms of professional development is the sharing of experiences. This is a common characteristic of workshops, publications, and conferences; it is one of the common means of teaching through communications tools.

In addition to serving as a teaching mechanism, Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) explain how the sharing of experiences serves as a valuable learning experience:

> The role of narratives and conversations is perhaps more complex than might first appear. An intriguing role in learning is played by "legitimate peripheral participation," where people who are not taking part directly in a particular activity learn a great deal from their legitimate position on the periphery (Lave & Wenger, in preparation). It is a mistake to think that important discourse in learning is always direct and declarative. This peripheral participation is particularly important for people entering the culture. They need to observe how practitioners

at various levels behave and talk to get a sense of how expertise is manifest in conversation and other activities. (p.40)

In addition to playing an important role in a variety of other professional development activities, narratives are specifically important to this study because, on quick inspection of blogs, narratives are one of the key means that bloggers use to convey content. Similarly, conversations are an essential component of blogs, providing readers an opportunity to comment on the narratives presented.

THE USE OF SOCIAL COMPUTING FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Because blogs are a form of social computing, a study of blogs should consider them in light of the broader discussion on the topic. This section explores the literature on social computing. It first defines what social computing is. Next, it describes background principles guiding social computing in education and explores the use of social computing as a tool for socially constructing knowledge. The section concludes by naming early applications of social computing for professional development.

What Social Computing Is

Social computing is the use of digital systems and their applications such as the Internet and World Wide Web to promote and support community building, sharing and conversation.

Social computing has become increasingly popular since 2000, as new applications have exploited the social potential of computers. Some of the technologies that support social computing include blogs, email, instant messaging, social bookmarking, podcasting and Wikis.

Principles of Social Computing in Education

One principle that guides social computing in education is Gordon Pask's Conversation Theory, which states that learning occurs through conversation. That is, through conversation, individuals co-construct understanding on a given subject and, as a result, make knowledge explicit. Boyd (2001) amplifies this: "The primacy of multi-level, externally grounded, conversations to promote agreements (including agreements on where precisely to disagree) which constitute understandings which, in turn, can constitute higher order participants" (p. 563).

The Use of Social Computing as a Tool for Socially Constructing Knowledge

Social computing promotes such co-creation of knowledge by setting up a conversational framework that, ideally, stimulates and supports conversations through which participants can co-create knowledge. This framework enables participants to reflect on their thoughts, experiences and prior-knowledge, taking their reflection beyond an internal level to a discursive and interactive level. Furthermore, feedback given to the participants by their peers is intended stimulate further reflections and affect learners' future actions. In a conversational framework, content and process are interdependent and provide a framework that facilitates the linking of theory to practice (Laurillard, 1999).

The online conversation facilitated through social computing is not necessarily intended to replace an in-person one. Rather, the online conversation should be considered on its own merits. As Rovai (2000) notes:

> [The Internet's] ability to promote text-based communication for the purpose of discourse can support the construction of knowledge, as learners formulate their ideas into words and build on these ideas through responses from others. The opportunity for reflective interaction can be encouraged and supported, which is a feature not often demanded in traditional classroom settings where discussion is often spontaneous and lacks the reflection that is a characteristic of asynchronous online interactions. (p.146)

In particular, peer-to-peer learning, in which people learn through exchanges with other learners, is one instructional strategy that is especially suited to online communication, as Rovai (2000) observes:

> [g]ood interactions in online discussion boards are discursive; that is, each participant actively attempts to understand the viewpoints of others in the interaction and then to modify his or her own postings to help others better understand that viewpoint. (p.146)

Participants constructing knowledge together adds to the richness to an online learning experience.

In addition to co-creating knowledge, the discussions promoted by social computing can foster critical thinking skills. According to Greenlaw and DeLoach (2003), online discussion, when structured properly, promotes the development of critical thinking skills "because it captures the best of both traditional writing assignments as well as in-class discussions" (p.36). One the one hand, writing forces learners "to develop persuasive arguments supported by logic and evidence" (p.40). On the other, group discussion enables learners to develop higher-order cognitive thinking skills as "[t]he dynamic and sustained nature of an effective discussion allows for cross-fertilization of ideas and development of all participants' thinking. There can be a synergy whereby the whole is greater than the sum of the parts" (p.40).

Early Social Computing Applications for Professional Development

Although the blog is relatively new and continues to generate a lot of enthusiasm among learning professionals as a technology for learning, it is not the first social online tool to be employed for the purpose of generating reflection discussion among learners. In fact, technologies for promoting discussions among learners have been in somewhat wide use since the 1980s.

As noted earlier, these technologies include Usenet groups, email lists, LISTSERVs, Bulletin board systems (BBS), online forums and discussion threads.

Discussion boards are asynchronous online activities in which electronic messages are posted by discussion participants, and other participants respond to them. Discussion boards are asynchronous in that the participants do not need to be online at the same time. A person posts a message at his or her convenience; the reader views the message at his or her convenience. Specifically, in a discussion board, an initial question or comment is posted by a participant. Other participants read the question or comment (called a *posting*) and, if desired, post a reply. The responses are displayed in the form of a thread. In a discussion board, the thread refers to the hyperlink connections that link the various parts of the discussion together. Sometimes threads are displayed in a tree or hierarchal view in order to get a timeline and see what new discussions branch out.

Discussion boards can bear many names depending upon preference and context. They are also referred to threaded discussions, electronic discussions, electronic message boards, bulletin board systems (BBS) as well as computer-mediated communication (CMC).

THE EMERGING BODY OF LITERATURE ON BLOGS

Around 2002, blogs begin appearing as a topic in academic and research journals, as well as news magazines, the media and other forms of non-research literature. The popular literature reported on blogs, focusing on the emerging group of bloggers and their opinions. For example, in a 2002 interview, in 2002, consultant and former IBM vice-president of Internet technology, stated that he was into blogging (Crainer, 2002). (At the time of the article, the term blogging was so new and non-standard that authors placed it between quotation marks ("blogging"). A review of the archives of Patrick's blog indicates that he posted the first entry to patrickWeb.com on January 22, 1997. Patrick added that, although he viewed his blog comparably to discussion groups, a comparison to a diary was more appropriate. At the time, Patrick believed that blogs would become the primary source of published material (Crainer, 2002).

The scholarly and quasi-scholarly literature on education reported that blogs were useful for forming communities (Embrey, 2002) and encouraged collaboration between individual with common interests and needs in which more experienced individuals assist others in learning and in turn assess and revise their own knowledge and skills, both of which link to constructivist learning theories. Blogs could "be used to promote current awareness of any subject" (Downs et al., 2002). For example, citing the blog, Serious Instructional Technology (formerly located at http://instructionaltechnology.editthispage.com/), Downs, Carlson and Repman noted that this blog served as a resource on current issues in instructional technology. Indeed, Downs, Carlson and Repman claimed that Web tools such as blogs could facilitate "personal productivity and instruction" (2002, p.1) as they are give quick access to a variety of sources and perspectives on an issue or topic.

One particular area of interest in blogs is their role in facilitating the communication of ideas. This is a multi-faceted area of investigation. One facet is the inter-relationships among blogs, also known as distributed citation networks, but handled at a smaller, faster and more amateur level (Coates, 2003). For example, Coates explains:

> Imagine, if you will, that a prominent Web magazine had decided to start hosting Weblogs. Imagine if shortly afterwards another prominent online publisher said they were doing the same. And then imagine if rumours abounded that they weren't

going to be the only ones. And then imagine that you had been talking with a representative of a major UK newspaper who revealed to you that - if only for a short while - they too had been thinking of hosting Weblogs on their site. What would you think? Would you think 'what a wonderful thing for the medium'? (Coates, 2002, ¶ 1)

A second facet is that major media publishers might take away the essence of the blog, including link-filtering, commenting and idea generating and also might attempt to take over the blog market which benefits from the network which is strong because of the volume of bloggers (Coates, 2002). Since Coates wrote this article in 2002, many major publishers have actually launched blog, such as ASTD.com's *Learning Circuits Blog* which seems to have a few posts a month and *T&D Blog,* which has had 3 posts in the last year, not nearly as much activity as their more formal publications.

A third facet, and the one most relevant to this discussion of using blogs as a form of professional development, is the emergence of blogging as a form of journalism within the field (Lasica, 2002). In 2002, Lasica predicted:

While no one is really sure where this is all heading, my hunch is that blogging represents Ground Zero of the personal Webcasting revolution. Weblogging will drive a powerful new form of amateur journalism as millions of Net users — young people especially — take on the role of columnist, reporter, analyst and publisher while fashioning their own personal broadcasting networks. It won't happen overnight, and we're now seeing only version 1.0, but just wait a few years when broadband and multimedia arrive in a big way. (p.72)

Because blogs can let authors communicate directly with readers, without going through an editor or other gatekeeper (unless they are blogs sponsored by an organization), they offer the potential of increased credibility (Grabowicz, 2003) .Indeed, Grabowicz (2003) reported that "62 percent of the public believed news organizations try to cover up mistakes rather than admit to them" (p.74) according to a 2003 poll by the Pew Research Group.

In terms of the types of content presented in blogs, Coates uncovered "four kinds of posts and a relatively predictable pattern of their usage" (Coates, 2003, ¶2):

- Lengthy opinion and moulding of a topic around between three to fifteen links with one of those links the instigator of the story
- Vote, in which the blogger agrees or disagrees with a post on another site
- Reaction, in which a blogger provide her or his reaction to a single post on another site
- Summation, in which the blogger provides a summary of material on other blogs and perspectives on the content

In addition, because they provide a feature for readers to comment on posts, blogs have the potential to foster discussion. In doing so, they operate similarly to an academic citation network:

The Weblog sphere has taken on a great many of the characteristics of the distributed academic community's citation networks - just at a much smaller, faster and more amateur level. Consensus can emerge (briefly or otherwise), reputations are made (deservedly or not), arguments occur regularly (usefully or otherwise). Nonetheless, discussions do occur, they do progress and they do reach conclusions. But it's happening at a granularity of paragraphs rather than articles. It's happening at a scale of hours rather than months (Coates, 2003, ¶ 6). Figure 2.1 shows how this process works.

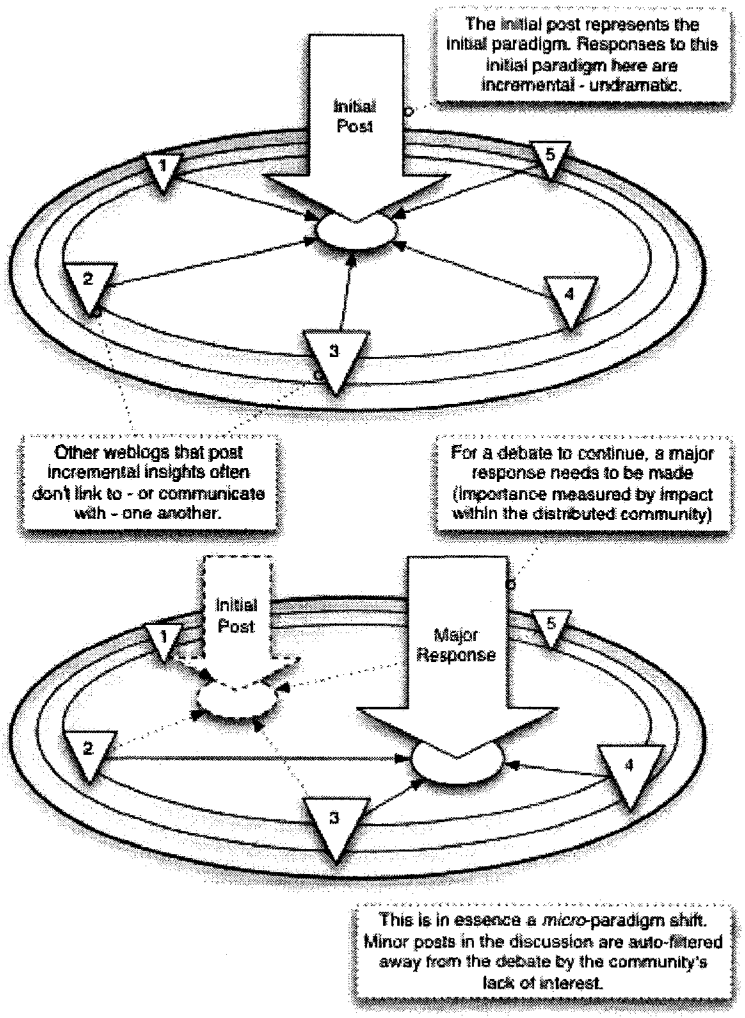

Figure 2.1: How discussion happens between Weblogs according to Coates (Coates, 2003) "Used with permission".

Indeed, as they have in other fields, blogs have become important sources of information in the field of training and development, with several blogs serving as sources of news and opinions. These include *Corporate eLearning Development Blog* (http://elearndev.blogspot.com), the *Learning Circuits Blog* (http://learningcircuits.blogspot.com), the *eCornell Research Blog* (http://researchblog.ecornell.com/), the *Educause Blogs* (http://connect.educause.edu/blog), *eLearn* (http://www.elearnmag.org), eLearningpost (http://www.elearningpost.com/), the *T+D Blog* (http://tdblog.typepad.com/td_blog/), George Siemens's *elearnspace* (http://www.elearnspace.org/blog/), Jay Cross' *Informal Learning Blog* (http://informl.com/), Stephen Downes' *Stephen's Web* (http://www.downes.ca/) and Harold Jarche's blog (http://www.jarche.com). Some of these blogs are individually published, others are official publications of professional associations and corporations trying to serve the profession; and others are hybrids—representing organizations but published by individuals. As a result of these different publishing arrangements, some blogs are published directly from the blogger; others go through an approval process. In some cases, those approval processes ensure that the content in the blog is accurate; in others, the processes ensure that the content in the blog communicates the messages intended by the sponsoring organization. These review, approval, and verification processes raise the larger question of the credibility of the content in the blogs, a topic explored in the next section.

CREDIBILITY OF BLOGS

"The success of individual blogs in attracting readers and influencing opinion depends less on their formal credentials than on the quality of their ideas and their writing (what Winer, 2003, calls their "voice")" (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2004, ¶ 1). This is not however a unanimous opinion as some attribute the level of credibility directly to the medium that content has been published with (McLuhan, 1964; Smolkin, 2004;

Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). In fact, Flanagin and Metzger report that "Compared to more traditional sources, the credibility of Web-based information may be less reliable due to the structural and editorial features of the Web environment" (2007, p.320). This section explores the credibility of blogs. First, it defines the term credibility. Next, it describes general issues in the credibility of online content, suggesting why this is an important issue. Then this section closes by describing unique issues in the credibility of blogs.

What Credibility Is

Flanagin and Metzger define credibility as "as a perceptual variable rather than as an objective measure of the quality of some information or source of information" (2007, p. 321). Credibility therefore is attributed by the reader and the degree of credibility of a source can differ from one reader to another based on their perception. Constantinides and Swenson (2000) identify four types of credibility for online content, including presumed credibility, which is based on general assumptions and stereotypes, reputed credibility, which is based on reports from third parties, surface credibility, which is based on simple inspection, and experienced credibility, which is based on first-hand experience.

Flanagin and Metzger (2007) reported that online news and reference information had a higher credibility ranking than other types of Web-based content due to the institutionalized rigor and fact-checking practices of the journalism industry whereas content found on a special interest group's Website "might be considered to be somewhat biased and therefore less credible, in view of the political and persuasive motivations that tend to underlie such groups" (2007, p. 321).

Issues of Credibility in Online Content

Credibility online is a unique issue—not just for blogs, but for any online content. Because anyone can publish information online, verifying the credibility and authenticity of the information as well as the authority of the contributor is difficult.

Constantinides and Swenson also analyze credibility of Websites, e-mail and electronic informed consent products, and LISTSERVs and bulletin boards.

- Websites–raises questions concerning the quality and rating of online medical information, privacy as it pertains to online data collection, and self-interest or commercial gain as implied by online advertising and external links.
- Email and electronic informed consent products–raises questions of patient privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent, as well as physician responsibility and potential liability.
- LISTSERVs and bulletin boards–merges the concern with content, discussed with respect to Websites, and the concern with interaction, discussed with respect to email. Because LISTSERVs and bulletin boards both provide information and facilitate communication between patients or between patients and physicians, issues of content quality, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, physician responsibility, and liability are all relevant.

Issues in the Credibility in Blogs

In addition to these general issues of credibility of online content, blogs raise specific issues of credibility. One is the social nature of granting authority to blogs; it seems to be based more on popularity than on other externally validated criteria. Popularity is the frequency with which a blogger or blog is mentioned by other bloggers or blogs on the Web, as well as the ratings assigned to a blog on sites at which people can comment on blogs. In his Blogodex project, Marlow (2004) observed that the top ranked bloggers were often members of communities of authors such as Metafilter, Slashdot, Plastic and Fark.

So far, the studies on authority conclude that it is determined by popularity and the social ties that have been developed. Though popularity must be earned and is not simply granted, there are no guarantees that authority equates to credibility. The question therein lies in what criteria are readers using to analyze online sources.

On this notion of acquiring notoriety and visibility, Blood (2004) argues that:

> To some extent, the permalink also elevated Weblog commentary to a legitimate form of discourse. A link is, after all, a link. Whether it leads to a Weblog entry or a syndicated column, each link on a page has equal weight. If the nature of Weblogs is to democratize publishing, perhaps the nature of hypertext is to equalize influence, at least within the context of the page. (p.55)

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

This chapter describes how I conducted this study. After reminding readers of the research questions, this chapter first explains how I chose the methodology. Next, it explains how I chose the participants, performed the study, and analyzed the data. The chapter closes by explaining how the reliability and trustworthiness of the study was assured.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As stated in Chapter 1, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- Who are the bloggers in the field? That is, what motivates them to blog and what qualifications do they believe they bring to the task?
- What is their purpose in blogging? That is, what do they hope to accomplish? What influence do they hope to achieve, if any?
- What do professionals in the training and development field who choose to blog choose to write about?
- How do they select the content to report? How do they verify the content, if at all?
- What evidence do the bloggers have of their influence?

CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY

Note that these questions are posed from the insider's or *emic* perspective. As a result, the research questions are posed from the perspective of the blogger, rather than that of the audience(s) for the blog. That is, this study sought to understand the phenomenon of blogging for the purpose of providing training and development professionals with professional development opportunities—It is intended to describe how bloggers write their blogs, what they blog about, how they interact with their target audience, and how they might gain a status of authority and credibility (if at all), rather than confirm a hypothesis about the phenomenon of blogging.

The research techniques chosen therefore focussed on collecting as complete a description of the phenomenon as possible. Qualitative research techniques were most likely to do so. As Creswell notes, "Qualitative researchers . . . attempt . . . to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, quoted in Creswell 1998, p.15).

Within the family of qualitative research techniques, this study used a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach describes "the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon. Phenomenologists explore the structures of consciousness in human experiences" (Polkinghorne, quoted in Creswell 1998, p.51).

The phenomenon that was studied was the use of blogs for professional development. An increasing number of learning professional as well as training and development authorities have a blog that complements and, at times, is the centerpiece of their publications and organizations.

PARTICIPANTS

According to Polkinghorne (1989), "[p]henomenologists need reports of the experience as it actually happens in a person's consciousness … thus, the production of phenomenological protocols requires that subjects' awareness be redirected towards their own experiencing" (p. 46). Moreover, he adds that in a phenomenological study experiences are shared and that, "meaning and contents of experience are not *within* but *between* persons" (p.47).

As a key concern in a phenomenological study is with the nature of the experience itself, Polkinghorne (1989) argues that "[the] purpose of selecting subjects in a phenomenological research is to generate a full range of variation in the set of descriptions to be used in analyzing a phenomena, not to meet statistical requirements for making statements about distribution with a group of subjects" (p.48).

When choosing the number of blogs to study, I wanted to ensure that, on the one hand, the number was large enough that there would be several to compare and small enough that time would be available to both interview the bloggers and analyze their entries. Ultimately, it was determined that five existing blogs would be explored. That would provide sufficient breadth of blogging experience while, at the same time, be a manageable number to study.

When choosing the specific blogs to study, I wanted to ensure that they were as representative as possible of the range of blogs available on training and development. They range from personal or opinion-based, to news and reviews to technical in nature.

Blogs may also differ in editorial structure. Some blogs were to have a single author while others are written by a collective or are selected by editors. Assuming that editorial structure may have an impact on the overall experience, that is a single author would have more liberties with content where as an edited blog would likely have a more rigorous content screening process, an analysis of each type is required to get a better picture of the phenomenon. As a result, the study will focus on two blogs written by a single contributor, two blogs written by an organized collective and one to one editor based blogs with invited contributors.

Criteria such as the blogger's availability for an interview and relevance to the field were essential to the selection process. For the other criteria such as the focus, the blogger's experience, posting rigor, readership and perceived authority, a weighted matrix was used whereby the weighting factor will be multiplied by the scoring factor to calculate the weighted score totals for each criterion and define the order of importance of each. Table 3.1 presents this matrix.

Criteria (in order of importance)	**Flexibility**	**Grading**
That the blogger agree to be available for interview	No	
The blogger is in the field of educational technology	No	
That the blog is focused solely on the area of expertise	More focus = higher ranking	3pts: highly focused 2pts: moderately focused

The blogger has been blogging for a minimum of 6 months	More experience = higher ranking	3pts: 2 yrs + 2pts: 1-2 yrs 1pt: 6m – 1 yr
That posts are made regularly and with a certain amount of rigor	Higher # of posts = higher ranking	3pts: 3+ posts/wk 2pts: 1-2 posts/wk 1pt: 1-3 posts/wk
That the blog demonstrates a relatively large readership (determined by the number of comments)	Higher # of comments = higher ranking	3pts: 5+ comments per post 2pts: 2-4 comments per post 1pt: 1-2 comments per post
That posts are made with a certain assurance of authority on the subject matter	Based on initial perception guided by Constantinides & Swenson (2000)	

Table 3.1: Criteria for selecting participants

Participants were offered as much anonymity as possible. Identifying information has been removed and no segments of blogs were directly quoted.

DATA COLLECTION

This study used mixed data collection methods to generate insights into blogs for professional development of trainers from a number of perspectives. First, it used artifact analysis to assess the content of the blogs. Second, it used interviews to identify the intentions and motivations of the bloggers. I analyzed both types of data to generate conclusions about blogging for professional development of trainers. I chose to analyse the data through triangulation, which consisted of using two methods and from five blogs, in order to reduce assumptions.

The following sections describe this methodology in detail.

Data Collection Method 1: Artifact Analysis of the Blogs

The first form of data collection was through artifact analysis, which "consists of looking for what people do (*behaviors*), what they say (*language*), and some tension between what they really do and what they ought to do as well as what they make and use (*artifacts*) (Spradley, cited in Creswell 1998, p.59)

For each blog, the following background information was noted:

- Stated purpose (if provided)
- Regularity of contributions (based on dates)
- Number of contributors (main contributors and guest contributors)
- Associations to larger blogging networks

For a three month period, I analyzed a minimum of 10 posts. For each, I tried to answer these questions:

- What are their topics?
- What is the average size of blog posts?

- What is the nature of the content, such as an expression of opinion, advice or "how-to," report of research, or comment on material posted elsewhere?
- Are they written in the first person, casual terms or in an academic form?
- What is the extent and nature of citation of sources?
- Are there key words identified, tags or other references to index the blog (category in the main list)?
- Was there a timeline index?
- Are there references to other blogs within the blog posts? Are there references to other blogs in a blogroll sidebar?
- Were there syndication options for their readers?
- Were there any other additional or special features?
- Have others posted comments? What is the nature of those comments? Have the comments been replied to on the blog?

To assess the potential credibility of the blogs and their entries, I kept in mind the following criteria for evaluating the credibility of online content which I adapted from The Health Summit Working Group (Rippen, 2000). These criteria include:

- Credibility: What are the sources cited in the text? What is their currency? How relevant are these sources? What is their utility? What types of sources are they: Peer reviewed? Popular press? Other blogs?

- Content: Is the material known to be accurate and complete? Are disclaimers used to indicate opinions and unsubstantiated facts? Are citations used to support broad claims?
- Disclosure: Is the mission and purpose of the blog transparent? Are the bloggers and/or interested parties clearly identified? Is there a clear distinction of whether the blogger(s) is reporting fact or volunteering opinion?
- Links: Do the blog entries have a permalink, that is their own permanent and distinct Web address for referencing purposes? Are the links framing the blog (e.g.: the blogroll) active and operating properly? Are the links relevant? Do the links lead to credible sources?
- Design: Is the overall site designed with the user in mind? Do the sites visuals overload the user? Is information framing the blog logically organized? Is there an internal search capability? Are the blog entries tagged and stored in categories that are accessible via a menu?
- Interactivity: Do the blog entries provide an opportunity for readers to leave comments? Do the entries have a pingback or trackback feature? Does the blog have an RSS feature so that it might be aggregated to another site? Is there a contact email address to contact the blog owner directly?
- Caveats: (closely related to disclosure) Is the intention of the blog disclosed? Is it indicated whether the blog is informational in nature or is set up for marketing or advertising purposes?

Data Collection Method 2: Interviews with Bloggers

To "explore the meaning of the experience for individuals and [ask] individuals to describe their everyday lived experiences" (Creswell, 1998, p.54) as bloggers, I conducted interviews with the bloggers.

Specifically, the purpose of these interviews with bloggers was to learn their motivations for blogging, how they chose topics for blogging, how they vet the content that they publish, and their reactions to the blogging process. Figure 3.1 presents the interview guide that was followed.

- Describe your professional background—your work in training, how you came into that work, and what you consider to be your area(s) of expertise?
- Why did you start your blog?
- What inspires you to blog?
- How do you choose topics to blog about?
- What is your process for preparing a blog posting, drafting it, and posting it?
- How do you verify the content in your blog?
- Describe your relationship with your readers.
- How do you ensure your own professional development?

Figure 3.1: Interview Questions for Bloggers in this Study

Interviews where all conducted by phone as geography and finances prevented them from being in person.

All bloggers were notified and consented to the interviews being taped using an Internet based telephone recording software. Interview transcripts and recordings were stored on my personal computer. To protect these transcripts and recordings from unauthorized access, the computer has been password-protected and protected by a firewall. To protect the transcripts and recordings from loss, a back-up copy was stored on my external hard drive.

DATA ANALYSIS

I analyzed the data by adapting Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory methodology. More precisely, an open coding technique was used with the purpose of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61).

To conceptualize the data and generate an initial set of codes or patterns, I wrote case studies of each blog studied, integrating the data generated from the artefact analysis and the interviews. These case studies first describe the purpose of the blog, the background of the blogger, the posts observed on the blog, the bloggers' reflections on these posts, and an assessment of their credibility.

Recurring patterns in these case studies have been used to generate the next two levels of codes. The first level of codes defines the categories or phenomena. Categories emerged through comparing and contrasting the case studies. The second level of codes is related to themes that emerge from the data and become the properties for each category. Then each property is dimensionalized in order to qualify it.

In accordance with Strauss and Corbin, the constant comparison of each case study has "help [me] to think analytically rather than descriptively about data, to generate provisional categories and their properties, and think about generative questions" (p.85).

EFFORTS TO ENSURE THE TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY OF THE CONCLUSIONS

To ensure that the data is as trustworthy as possible, and that the conclusions generated are as credible as possible, the following measures were taken.

First, because I have been a blogger myself, that self-definition might bias my data. According to Creswell (1998), in a phenomenological study, the researcher should "set aside all prejudgments, bracketing (see epoche) his or her experience (a return to a 'natural science') and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience" (p.52). To identify the biases that I am entering with, I have asked Sheryl Guloy, a recent graduate student of the Educational Technology Program at Concordia, has conducted a frame interview with me. See Appendix D for the protocol and Appendix E for the biases identified.

To ensure that the conclusions are truly representative of the data, the data was triangulated. First, conclusions were based on two sets of data for each blog: the artefact analysis and the interviews. Second, conclusions were based on several cases. These cases were selected to represent the diversity of blogs available for professional development of trainers.

Last, to assure that the biases identified in the frame interview have not affected the analysis of the results, and that the conclusions are supported by the data, they have been audited by Marci Araki, a graduate student of the Educational Technology Program at Concordia and qualitative researcher, whose assessment is included in the final report.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES

OVERVIEW

In this chapter, I present the findings about the blogs. First, I identify issues that arose in the recruitment process. I then describe which blogs I chose to study, my rationale for selecting them and how I recruited them for the study. Next, I present information about each: a background on the blog, my analysis of the blog entries and, finally, the blogger's perspective on the blog as provided in an interview with me.

SELECTING BLOGS TO ANALYZE

As noted in Chapter 3, the specific blogs and bloggers that would be studied were intended to be representative as possible of the range of blogs available on training and development. They range from personal or opinion-based, to news and reviews to technical in nature.

Using the criteria described in Chapter 3, I used a purposeful recruiting strategy to recruit bloggers to participate in this study. However, problems arose in the recruitment. The original list of criteria indicates that at least one of the blogs to be studied would be a collective blog. A blog is collective when blog posts are contributed by more than one author and might be overseen by an editor on a single blog. However, I was not able to find a collective blog to participate in the study. I did find one blog that met the criteria for a collective blog in its description, but a closer review of actual blog entries suggested that it was not collective in practice. Furthermore, the blog was not active at the time I was making my selection as the last was post dated seventh months back. So I recruited, instead, a blogger who participates in a network of bloggers in her organization, each blogging about their field of interest and expertise.

As noted in Chapter 3, I was also seeking bloggers who met the following criteria (in order of importance):

- That the blogger agree to be available for interview
- The blogger is in the field of educational technology
- That the blog is focused solely on the area of expertise
- The blogger has been blogging for a minimum of 6 months
- That posts are made regularly and with a certain amount of rigor
- That the blog demonstrates a relatively large readership determined by the number of comments
- That posts are made with a certain assurance of authority on the subject matter

Issues Related to Determining Blog Readership and Popularity

I then identified 5 bloggers who met these criteria. However, during the recruitment process, I discovered that readership and popularity could not be ranked based solely on the number of comments, as one the blogs that qualified for the study did not have the comments feature activated. Also, it became increasingly apparent that not all readers of blogs left comments on the blogs they read. Also, not all the readers referenced them with trackbacks (a feature which enabled bloggers to ping one another's blogs by placing a reciprocal link in the entry they were referencing). Some readers simply read the blogs but at this time, it is impossible to measure how many actual readers visit a blog. It was therefore necessary to gather other types of information to identify the popularity of each blog. It became obvious that Website statistic metrics could provide additional information on a blog's popularity. The two measurement tools selected to rank the level of readership were the Technorati Authority ranking and the Alexa's report on sites linking in to the blog.

The first measurement tool, the Technorati Authority, counts the number of blogs linking to a Website in the last six months. This tool was developed in May 2007 by Technorati, an Internet search engine devoted to indexing, searching and ranking blogs. Technorati states on their site: "The best way to increase your Technorati Authority is to write things that are interesting to other bloggers so they'll link to you. Linking to source material when you blog is also a great way to engage in conversation and help others find what you find interesting." The higher the number, the more Technorati Authority the blog has. Technorati measures the number of blogs, rather than the number of links, which means that if a blog links to another blog many times, it only count as +1 toward a blog's authority.

The bloggers in the field of training and development that were selected for this study have a Technorati Authority that ranges between 41 and 706 links that refer back to their blogs. To put things in perspective, the blog that holds the top position in terms of authority on Technorati has approximately 25,000 links that refers to it. The top 100 blogs have somewhere between 2,500 and 25,000 links that refer to their blogs. The top 100 blogs cover a variety of subjects categorized by Technorati under business, entertainment, lifestyle, politics, sports and technology. There is no category or sub-category that is linked to education, training and development, learning or by extension human resources development. A search for blogs containing the keyword phrase "training and development" returned 43 blogs which had authorities ranging from 0 to 256. Moreover, 37% of the blogs had an authority of 0 and an additional 51% had an authority between 1 and 15. Only 12% or 4 blogs had an authority between 16 and the top authority of 256. In looking at those 4 blogs, their main focus was not specifically on training and development. One focussed on brand marketing, another on human resources marketing, another on leadership, team and change management and finally the last one was on training and development and a Technorati Authority ranking of 38.

It is important to note however that none of the bloggers selected for this study actually used the tag "training and development". The most common tags used by the bloggers selected were variations on "learning" such as eLearning, collaborative learning, blended learning, learning design, learning technologies to name a few. Another search using the keyword "learning" generated 15,496 blogs. A cursory view at the first 10 results indicated that the blogs were not necessarily focussed on learning but rather discussed learning in various fields such as photography, cooking, Web design to name a few.

Alexa Internet, an Amazon.com company that deals in traffic rank, browser toolbars, Web search and more, provides a page rank by computing the reach and number of page views for all sites on the Web on a daily basis. Rather than use the site rank, which would compare the bloggers sites against all the Websites in the world, the reported number of sites linking in to the blog was used. However, Alexa generates two types of reports, individual sites linking in to the blog and the number of actual links to the blog (because one Website might link to an individual blog more than once).

It is important to note that unlike Technorati, Alexa doesn't just search blogs, but all Websites. Yet, like Technorati, Alexa does not have anything related to training and development or anything related to learning in its categories. Searches for Websites related to "training and development" or "learning" in the top 100,000 Websites returned nothing. However, a search for "learning" returned 125,272,000 Websites and a search for "eLearning" returned 45,598,000 Websites. It is however difficult to measure the amount of links to the blogs selected against similar blogs as the sample size is too large. In this case, the Alexa results will be compared against the Technorati Authority rankings.

Bloggers Who Meet the Selection Criteria and their Recruitment

Table 4.2 indicates who was selected, how they meet the selection criteria of the study, and how they were recruited.

Blogger	How this Blogger Meets the Criteria Sought	How this Blogger was Recruited
Jeff is an independent consultant based in the United States of America who blogs about informal learning.	Jeff has been blogging since 2000 and makes blog posts regularly (41 times over a 4-month period). Comments were left on 27 of Jeff's posts and the total number of comments is 92, which is an average of 2.24 comments per post. Technorati grants his blog an Authority of 113, which represents the number of blogs linking to his blog Website in the last six months. Alexa reports that 43 sites link into his blog Website for a total of 408 links.	I discovered Jeff's blog when researching informal learning. I analysed his Website against the criteria and deemed he was a good candidate. I had the opportunity to approach Jeff in person to discuss his participating to the study. He immediately accepted. The consent form was emailed to him and he returned it within a few days. A week later, Jeff granted me a phone interview.
Jill is a training and development researcher based in the United States of America	Jill has been blogging since 2007 and makes blog posts regularly (47 times over a 4-month period). Comments were left on 42 of Jill's posts and the total	I initially approached one of Jill's colleagues to participate to the study. He referred me to Jill, saying she was much more of an avid blogger than he was. It was

who blogs about Web based learning.	number of comments is 353, which is an average of 7.51 comments per post. Technorati grants her blog an Authority of 53, which represents the number of blogs linking to her blog Website in the last six months. Alexa reports that 149 sites link into her blog Website for a total of 455 links.	also his opinion that she was more widely read. Next I visited Jill's blog and ascertained that not only did she blog quite frequently but that she had also had made the Technorati Top 50 Analyst blogs. I emailed Jill, explaining my study and inviting her to participate. She accepted, signed the consent forms and granted me a phone interview a week later.
Kate is a learning consultant for an organization based in the United Kingdom who blogs about the learner's perspective on learning.	Kate has been blogging since 2005 and makes blog posts regularly (67 times over a 4-month period). Comments were left on 43 of Kate's posts and the total number of comments is 131, which is an average of 1.96 comments per post. Technorati grants her blog an Authority of 41, which represents the number	In discussing this study with a professional acquaintance, he recommended that check out Kate's blog. Though not as widely read as some of the other subjects of this study, Kate demonstrated a relatively large readership for someone who was not as well known in the field as her counterparts in this study.

	of blogs linking to her blog Website in the last six months. Alexa reports that 13 sites link into her blog Website for a total of 316 links.	What struck me as I read Kate's blog was that 2 of the other subjects in this study, Stuart and Jill commented on her blog on a few occasions, as she did on theirs, and also referred to some of her posts on their blogs. This indicated to me that she was read by some of her peers. I emailed Jill, explaining my study and inviting her to participate. She accepted, signed the consent forms and a phone interview was granted shortly after.
Mark is an independent consultant based in South East Asia who blogs about the links between trends in training and knowledge	Mark has been blogging since 1998 and makes blog posts regularly (33 times over a 4-month period). Mark does not allow for comments on his blog though he does self-report in the interviews that he receives comments via email. Technorati	Mark's blog made many people's top eLearning blogs lists, which prompted me to explore his blog. Mark blogged quite differently from the other bloggers in this study and oddly enough didn't have comments turned on. In addition, Mark is in

management.	grants his blog an Authority of 46, which represents the number of blogs linking to his blog Website in the last six months. Alexa reports that 300 sites link into his blog Website for a total of 690 links.	South East Asia. I was curious to see if this would bring a different dimension to the study. I contacted Mark via email explaining my study to him and inviting him to participate. Mark was not available immediately but agreed to participate by signing the consent forma and granted me a telephone interview within a one month time span.
Stuart is an education researcher based in Canada who blogs about what he learns through his research.	Stuart has been blogging since 1995 and makes blog posts regularly (64 times over a 4-month period and because Stuart compiles several posts in a daily post, the total of individual blog posts is approximately 8 times more, approximately 500 posts). Comments were left on 54 of Stuart's posts and the total number of comments is 258,	I discovered Stuart's blog when researching eLearning trends. I analysed his Website against the criteria and deemed he was a good candidate. I had the opportunity to approach Stuart in person to discuss his participating to the study. He immediately accepted. The consent form was emailed to him and he returned it within a few

	which is an average of 4.07 comments per post. Technorati grants his blog an Authority of 706, which represents the number of blogs linking to his blog Website in the last six months. Alexa reports that 899 sites link into his blog Website for a total of 5835 links.	days. A month later, Stuart granted me a phone interview.

Table 4.1: Participants in the Study

INTERVIEWS WITH BLOGGERS

Specifically, the purpose of these interviews with bloggers was to learn their motivations for blogging, how they chose topics for blogging, how they vet the content that they publish, and their reactions to the blogging process. Each interview was transcribed word for word. From the transcripts were developed the case studies that will be presented in this section. The five cases will focus on Jeff, Jill, Kate, Mark and Stuart's professional background and area(s) of expertise, original motivations to blog, inspiration to blog, blog topic selection process, blog preparation, drafting and posting process, blog content verification, relationships with their readers as well as how they ensure their professional development.

The following are five case studies that report the findings about these blogs. Each starts with a brief background about the blogger and his or her blog, which presents the professional background and areas of expertise of the blogger, the topic of the blog, and the topic of the blog. Next is an analysis of the blog, in which I present the results of the discourse analysis. For each, I reviewed all blog postings for a 4-month period beginning January 1, 2008 and ending April 30, 2008. Last is a summary of an interview with the blogger. I conducted all interviews by telephone between December 11, 2007 and February 1, 2008. These interviews explore the bloggers' original motivations and inspirations to blog, how they select topics to discuss in their blogs, the process they follow to draft, and post blog entries, how they verify content, their relationships with their readers, and how they perform their own professional development.

CASE 1 – JEFF

About Jeff and His Blog

Jeff describes himself as a strategist, speaker, consultant, designer of corporate learning and perform systems and lives in the United States of America. He works in the field of training and development. After obtaining a Master's degree in Business Administration over 30 years ago, Jeff wrote a business curriculum for an American online university. His next project involved joining friends who were working in the banking training business and, for about 20 years, he worked with them as a corporate trainer. During that time, Jeff witnessed the enthusiastic early adoption of the training CD-ROM. When the Web emerged as a training medium in the late 1990s, Jeff was ready to move into it, but his enthusiasm was not shared by his employer; Jeff says that this is when they fired him.

Convinced of his belief that the Web would be the next technology platform for computer-based learning, Jeff turned in 2000 to writing about technology, providing forecasts about what was coming down the pike, and publishing his writing on the Web. Soon afterwards, Jeff reports that AltaVista was returning his online articles as top results on the topic of what he and others began calling “eLearning”. This got Jeff noticed. He said that his opinions and predictions were now carrying a lot of weight with companies like CBT Systems and Cisco, who provided him with consulting opportunities, launching his career as an independent consultant on technology

As training technologies evolved, Jeff ensured he stayed current and built his practice of consulting with companies on how to best leverage learning technologies. Today, Jeff continues his work as a consultant, and in addition independently researches and writes about various trends and issues in the learning field for his own company, specifically informal learning and helping people transition from the industrial age to the network age.

Jeff started his first blog in 2000 and he states that his blog focuses on learning outside the classroom. He referred to as his personal blog when this study began but since has switched to the vocation to his business blog. He began a second blog in 2006 that solely focuses on informal learning, a topic of interest to him and on which he published a book in 2006. He refers to his blog on informal learning as his professional blog and this is the blog that will be analysed in this study.

Jeff is the sole contributor to his blog, though he does welcome comments. Jeff uses WordPress 2.5.1 to run his blog which is hosted on his company's server. His blog is independent and is not associated to a larger network of bloggers, organization or association. It is however part of a larger site where he also provides resources services that he offers and books he's published as well as a link to his personal blog (a separate blog, which was not studied).

Following Jeff's Blog

Between January 1, and April 30, 2008, Jeff published 41 blog posts to his professional blog.

The text in posts ranges between 50 and 200 words. Of the 41 posts, 40 have text in the body of the message and 37 (90%) have media of some kind. Of the 37 with media, 15 have images which are used to illustrate concepts. Seven posts have photographs, 3 have diagrams, six have logos of products or companies he's describing, 6 have screen shots from software applications and Websites mentioned in the blog, and 6 have videos. Of the posts containing videos, 2 have videos featuring Jeff reporting about conferences he's attended, providing summaries, interviews with conference participants, and footage shot at the conference. One video post consists of a video interview with a third party, one has is a tutorial about networks and one post has 3 videos of Jeff discussing informal learning, the role of the Chief Learning Officer (CLO) as well as about engaging communities of practice. The sixth post containing a video has a broken link. The caption below it suggests that it is a movie but there is not enough information in the post to indicate what the movie is about. He simply tells the reader to make up a story about what is happening in the video which is apparently some sort of psychological test.

Jeff states opinions in some form or another in almost all of his posts, but 15 of his 41 posts specifically report his opinions about a particular subject such as a Web resource, an online article or a business practice. For example, he states his opinion on the quality of Websites, such as: "Don't go to his new site for the standard 20-second hit-and-run skim. The beauty of the design and clarity of message will force you to stay a while". He also states his opinion about the name knowledge management: "Knowledge Management needs a new name, for the best KM is spontaneous and self-managing." A third example is of the trade press: "eLearn magazine has released predictions for 2008 from twenty-one of us. Nobody is going to question Editor [name concealed to protect identity of the study participant]'s commitment to diversity. Predictions inevitably tell more about the predictor than about the future, but this is a great collection of scenarios to ponder."

Specifically, he comments on events in which he is scheduled to appear. For example, in his post on February 24, 2008, he writes: "Mark your calendar! A month from today, March 25th, Speaker 1 [name concealed to protect identity of participant], Speaker 2 [name concealed to protect identity of the study participant], market researcher [name concealed to protect identity of the study participant], and I are presiding over an intensive one-day conference hosted by [company name concealed to protect identity of the study participant]. In 4 instances, he posts the text from an article that has been published elsewhere, 2 of which he has written for other online sources, 1 of which he has written for a print magazine and 1 which was written by a third party who conducted an interview with him. In 4 posts, he mentions his activities, such as conferences he is attending (and later, reports on those conferences). For example, in April he writes: "Today I'll be heading across the Bay to attend Web 2.0 Expo" and the next day, his post starts off with "The message from the stage at the Web 2.0 Expo: We are at an inflection point in human history." In 4 posts, he reports on a Web resources or technologies that he uses. In 1 post, he reviews a book and in 5 posts, he reviews conferences. He also comments on online learning tools such as when he writes: "[name concealed to protect identity of the study participant] sent me this three-minute lesson on creating a Gantt chart in Excel. She plans to put out a series in numerous languages. Pleasant, fun, effiicient [*sic*], and soon to be on iTunes."

Furthermore, 3 of the posts are about Jeff's own personal experiences in his daily life. In one entry, he writes: "Not a week goes by that I don't hear from a college student asking about informal learning. I am generous in answering thoughtful inquiries, but I do not intend to rob students of learning experiences by doing their thinking for them."

When writing blog entries, Jeff writes in the first person and in a contemporary writing style. For example, he writes about the way he learns: "I generally learn better by seeing something rather than reading about it. Whatever. I haven't owned a manual for Excel in a dozen years. Not that I'm an Excel master. Far from it. But I know I will never learn Excel from a book." Another example is how he starts a post summarizing what he learned: "Here are some lessons learned from my interviews last week with a company that lives and breathes community."

In addition, Jeff tells stories in 19 blog postings. These stories may or may not have anything to do with informal learning. Consider this story: "Today I got locked out of one of my online credit card accounts. My fault: I've got too many usernames to cover my split personalities. A box popped up asking me if I wanted live help. You betcha. This saved me time and strengthened my relationship with the bank. Thanks, Edward."

Jeff's blog posts often links to or quotes from other sources. In 28 posts, he provides links to external sources and in 8 he has blocks of quoted text. The types of sources that Jeff typically cites include links to articles he's written, to other people's blogs or Websites, to conferences, to videos and to resources on his personal Website.

Jeff also tags his blog by category, such as "general" (which is the sole tag for 30 or the 41 posts), "change", "need", "metrix" (*sic*) and "unworkshop" (*sic*). However there does not seem to be a list of the tags used anywhere on his blog. The only place that tags are displayed is under the subject header of each individual post. This is an issue because at first glance, it is not possible to know the full gamut of subjects that Jeff blogs about. If a reader wished to see all his posts under the "metrix" category, they'd have to first determine if Jeff has a "metrix" category, then find a post that talked about "metrix" to then click on the word "metrix" to view all the posts under this category.

Although he indexes by topic, Jeff does not index posts by date of posting; that is, posts are not indexed by the year, month, or date published. Instead, he provides links to the 100 most recent posts.

Jeff does not have a blogroll (a list of links that blog writers posts on the sidebar of their blog to other blogs that might deal with similar topics or interests, with the intent of promoting other blogs, forming a sense of blogger community).

Jeff allows readers to subscribe to his blog via Really Simple Syndication (RSS). As a result, they are notified when Jeff posts new material on the blog.

One of the features on Jeff's blog is suggestions of other blog posts that a reader might like to read (sort of like Amazon suggests other books based when a customer is checking a book). The box on the right hand side bar that states "Visitors to this page also liked" and I notice that the last few posts I clicked on appear in this box.

Users can comment on Jeff's blog and 24 of 37 posts I reviewed have comments. Of those posts that received comments, one post received as much as 15 comments. The average, however, is between one and nine comments. Usually Jeff does not respond to comments unless he's addressing a question or a remark that is directed to him. In some instances, however, Jeff does respond to a comment. A reader posted this comment:

> When did you start preaching about Wikis for education? I hope you've got evidence it was AT LEAST 5 years ago - or you're simply a 'follower', or lamer, or plagiarist. Evidence please. I doubt it… lame!

Jeff responded:

> Lame? Plagiarist? Because I was not the first to bring up wikis for education? Please remove the chip from your shoulder. By the way, here's your evidence. I was promoting wikis before this, October 25, 2003. (Provides link to blog post in archive).

Jeff's Perspectives on His Blog

At first, Jeff felt like his blog was just an experiment. He had discovered a new technology and simply wanted to see what it was like. While experimenting with the technology that he realized why blogging was so important to him: "And then it struck me that it's more important for information to be current than to be polished. And this was certainly a way to get there. I mean, I fell in love with it."

Initially, he was working with a format that was the precursor to blogging, which was essentially keeping a Web html file up to date. But nine months later, he discovered Blogger, an online blog publishing system, and that's when thing really took off for him. Jeff has since migrated from Blogger to the WordPress application, which he hosts on his own server.

When he started blogging, Jeff didn't have many peer bloggers. He explains that: "Well, there weren't many of us at the time, and people thought it was sort of a strange behaviour. A lot of us knew each other just because the community was so small." In fact Jeff claims that, at the time, there weren't many educational or learning technology bloggers around and he really only noticed that there was about thirty of them at the first edublogger event in 2004. An edublogger is someone with a stake in education who writes a blog about education-related topics. There is unfortunately no online reference to the edublogger conference, what the purpose was, who organized it and what topics were covered. Jeff blogs for many reasons. He explained that:

> I've written about blogging as a way of learning and I think … it forces one to consider what's important, to draw conclusions, to sort of shape up thinking and, for me, it creates an ongoing resource I can look back in, I mean if I'm looking for something I'll often just look in my blog.

Jeff remarks that blogging is also great for business development, noting that: ", the way people not only hear me speak but the way they used to find me was that I was prominent in the blogosphere."

When asked if he considers that blogging has been an important factor in building his reputation, Jeff responded: "Well it's very, very, very, important."

Although his blog has served him professionally, Jeff also blogs for personal fulfillment:

> Well, I consider myself as a creative individual and this is an outlet. (long pause) And it's rewarding. I mean I'll go to a conference and people come up to me and they know me and what I'm writing about, and some of them say "hey thanks, this is why I got into this business, I learned how to start from your blog".

Jeff blogs about whatever comes to mind. He's interested in informal learning, so he usually has two to three posts a week on informal learning. In one of his 2006 blog posts, Jeff defined informal learning as "the unofficial, unscheduled, impromptu way most people learn to do their jobs. Informal learning is like riding a bicycle: the rider chooses the destination and the route."

On his professional blog, Jeff lists what he considers to be the typical stuff one would find. He first discusses a post containing a video of a conference presentation that he delivered in Europe, and shortly before that, a report on what he thought was important, a summary of sorts, after attending another European conference. He shares that he's done this after conferences for years and this helps him remember what was at the conference. He also comments on an article on how to reinforce memory, what a large American newspaper was referring to as the new big research in education.

Jeff explains that in his blog posts, "Sometimes it's just for a personal account. Often it's tied somehow to learning, because life is for learning." Jeff admits freely that his professional life and personal life are blurred and the he could never keep them separated in neat little packages. That is reflected in his blogs. His personal blog, which was not studied for this project, often explores professional topics.

To prepare blog entries, Jeff is somewhat spontaneous. He'll take notes about something that he's just written for himself, pulls them out and "stuff" them into the blog. But the professional blog is more structured and more focussed.

To refine the content of his blog, Jeff explains that he does some revisions and general editing:

> I'll read back to an entry and say oh, what's a better word for that, but generally it's much important for me to get the idea out there than to work and re-work posts. I have sort of a unique writing style so people expect it to be a little quirky I think. Spelling, I don't bother with a spell check but if I hit some word I don't use very much and I'm unsure we'll just jump on an online dictionary and then come back.

Jeff also doesn't think his posts need fact checking because he writes about. He explains that:

> I write about what I believe in. And I'll recognise sources. I some times say, this next part is speculation, or my best guess but, that's the way it comes out. It isn't some thing I go back and try to police.

Jeff explains that a number of his blog readers are friends of his and that he and they comment on each others "stuff" and help one another out. Some of the people that visit his blog he's never been acquainted with until he shows up at a conference and they come up to him and tell him that they love his blog and have been reading it for years. But they've also rarely left comments. Jeff notes that a certain amount of his readers must be lurkers but because they are lurkers, he doesn't know anything about them.

Jeff explains that most of his readers read both his professional and personal blogs, formal learning, the professional. But some people who just want the information on informal learning and, for them, it is helpful to have a blog that is devoted to it.

In Jeff's own blog reading practices, he says he comments a fair amount on other people's blogs, adding that he has more comments on other people's blogs than he has posts on his. He is glad that at least he gets some responses but he thinks most people just read and go on. However, Jeff's opinion is that comments are a problem fundamental to the structure of blogs because, in Jeff's opinion, the blog structure doesn't encourage comments or show them off:

> It's the fact that they started out as ways to say "Hey I found this so look". It is very one-way. And then, like I've talked with the people at Blogger about this and comments are sort of an afterthought, you know. And I don't think that many people read them, to tell you the truth. They are like some kind of second class citizen. I'd rather see some sort of a split screen deal where you can have dialogue instead of monologue.

Another way people comment on Jeff's blog is on their own blog and in this case he ends up with not a comment but a trackback. Jeff believes he is controversial and he'll draw people who support his position point and people who strongly disagree with his position.

Jeff is also of the opinion that blogrolls are obsolete. In his opinion, blogrolls started because bloggers wanted to publicize one another. Jeff has made his RSS feeds public so if anyone wants to see what he's reading, they can see exactly what he's reading. Therefore, Jeff's blogger community is much more informal and he aggregates the blogs he reads through Google reader.

Jeff considers that blogging satisfies his curiosity which, for him, is about the same thing as professional development. But this is his style, he admits. He refers to himself as being much more of a cowboy than a professional. Other than reading blogs and other books, Jeff does not mention engaging in more formal professional development, such as attending workshops and classes.

CASE 2 – JILL

About Jill and Her Blog

Jill describes herself as a lifelong learner who specialises in instructional design for online learning. She works for a research company based in the United States of America and works remotely from her home office. For over ten years, Jill worked as a training coordinator and did work in learning and development. Even though she was always responsible for some aspect of training, she didn't formalize her title as a corporate trainer until 8 years ago.

When Jill first started working in training, she says that she based most of the decisions about the development for training programs on her "gut feeling" but was concerned that she didn't have any professional training or background in instructional design to strengthen her knowledge base; she enrolled in a Master's degree program in instructional design. Through those studies, Jill became increasingly interested in research on training and development and often read and referred to her current employer's research for best practices and reports. Through this reading, she learned that the organization was looking for a researcher who was exploring the same subjects she was focusing on in her degree work. What started off as independent contract work in 2005 eventually turned into a full-time position in 2006 for Jill. In this position, Jill focuses on researching, evaluating and writing about learning technologies and how to implement them.

Since starting this full-time work, Jill's focus has evolved. She does a lot more work in areas such as social computing, e-learning 2.0 and learning technologies. Her job provides her the flexibility of choosing additional areas of interest to research. Jill remarks that when she worked in the corporate environment, her work focused more on creating e-learning courses and a related e-learning infrastructure. In her current research position, she has transitioned from "doing it" to taking a step back and analyzing "how do I do it"—that is, suggesting to companies reading her research reports how they might leverage technology to implement e-learning.

Jill also admits that research in the corporate environment in which she works is more "fast-tracked" and less methodical and structured than academic research. Mostly she performs surveys and writes up case studies but every now and then, she performs a lengthier study with other types of data. However, her impression is that there is not a lot of interest in the corporate environment for lengthy studies like these. She claims that people just don't seem so interested in knowing all the facts. Rather, they are looking for shorter answers. This gives her the impression that the readers of corporate research tend to trust the researcher's professional knowledge and background and are simply looking for advice on what to do.

Jill started her blog in February of 2007 as part of her job responsibilities with her employer. That is, Jill is paid to prepare her blog as part as part of her job. Jill states on her blog that she provides practical advice for implementing new learning tools, technologies, and methods to advance learning as well as other miscellaneous "stuff".

Jill is the sole contributor of her blog, though she does welcome comments. Jill's blog is one of series of blogs hosted on her current employer's Website. She creates her blog using WordPress 2.5.1 and it is posted on her employers' Website.

Following Jill's Blog

Between January 1, and April 30, 2008, Jill published 46 posts to her blog.

Jill's blog posts vary in length from 100 to 300 words, to as many as 1,500 words. Of the blog posts analyzed in this study, all have text and 36 (83%) have media elements. Of those posts with media, 24 of them are images. Jill uses images in her posts to illustrate concepts described in them. For example, Jill was writing about motivation in a post and displayed an image of a hand reaching for a carrot, a common metaphor for motivation. On another post about physical spaces for learning, she adds a picture of a toilet paper dispenser on which sits an iPod. Although the images are added in her posts, she might not have rights to use them. For example, in response to one of Jill's posts, a reader commented: "I love the graphic. Would it be copyright free? I'd love to use it." Jill replied: "I got it here - from a t-shirt place. Not sure about the copyright on it. I should have attributed it. Anyway, if you want to use it, you'll want to check their policy."

Jill has video in only 2 of her blog posts and in both instances is the primary focus of the post. In one instance, the video gathers the opinions of several individuals on social media, its impact and uses. In the other instance, her video is used to demonstrate an educator's teaching style. In one instance, Jill adds a SlideShare presentation to a post. SlideShare is a free service for sharing presentations and slideshows, mainly produced with Microsoft PowerPoint or Apple Keynote, over the web. The presentation was produced by another party and it is their presentation on what is a "2.0 learner".

In 7 posts, she blends in popular culture icons. For example, one of her posts proposed an alternative to the Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE) model used in instructional systems design; one that follows the writing model of the American crime drama series, Law & Order.

Four of Jill's posts provide lists such as "6 dangerous things learning professionals should do" and "5 USB gadgets with educational applications". She also uses checklists such as "You just might be a 2.0 geek if…" which she follows up with 14 descriptors

Jill always writes in the first person and frequently shares personal information. For example:

> Since my first post a year ago, my blog has become an important tool much like my minivan, my new bistro pots & pans (shiny, shiny BTW), and my binoculars. Like my van, my blog gets me from point A to point B with a little fuel in the form of commenters. Like my pots and pans its content nourishes me. Like my binoculars, it hangs around my neck and zooms in on things that I want to take a closer look at. It's also a big time-sucking pain in the ass at times (like my kids) except it behaves nicely at Applebee's.

She also relates how she feels about certain issues:

> This could be a post about Canadian bloggers, or Australian bloggers, or male bloggers, or under-30 bloggers or bloggers with Webbed feet…whatever. But it's not. It's a post about women bloggers (mostly in the education space), a topic I wrote about several times last year. So hear me roar already (or is that al-'reddy').

When she presents research or evaluates tools, Jill's tone can be slightly more formal. But she also refers to popular culture and uses colloquial language. For example:

> Did you ever feel like your "learning" bucket has overfilled and you actual feel stupider? (Yes, stupider is a word the stupid use when they are too lazy to spell out "more stupid" or, *it's not a word at all* if you are an uncool teacher of English). Anyway, my stupid bucket runneth over. I know this because my Outlook reminder popped open 30 minutes ago and reminded me.

When responding to something, Jill includes an excerpt from the blog post and provides a link to the original. Sometimes Jill uses a bibliographic reference when including resources, ideas or quotes from offline resources though, as noted earlier, not always.

Jill also tags her post and uses a tag cloud to display them. Tag clouds are a stylized way of visually representing occurrences of words a blogger selects to describe the content in their posts. Figure 4-1 demonstrates a tag cloud of the common terms found in the Wikipedia Entry on Tag Clouds on June 25, 2008. Tag clouds permit Jill to not only list the categories alphabetically but visually depict their importance, as the more posts are tagged with a certain word, the larger the font size of that word in the "cloud." Jill does not tag her posts by category nor does she provide chronological access to posts, other than her five most recent posts.

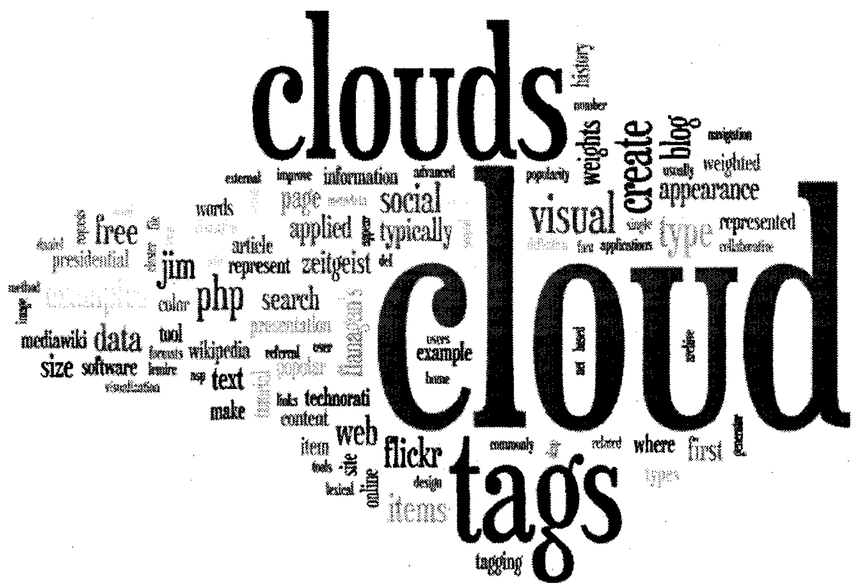

Figure 4.1: Wikipedia Tag Cloud Entry Tag Cloud (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

In addition, Jill has quite a lengthy blogroll containing 134 blogs. As defined in Chapter 1, a blogroll is a list of links that blog writers post in a sidebar of their blog. The links direct readers to other blogs that deal with similar topics. She claims that her blogroll is composed of the blogs that she reads and that are written by people who either work in corporate training or whose content is applicable to it.

Jill allows her readers to subscribe to her blog either through a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed or though email.

Jill's blog has the "Share and enjoy" social media cross-referencing bar that permits readers to index and comment about her blog or blog entries on social bookmarking sites, such as Delicious, a service that allows users to tag, save, manage and share Web pages from a centralized source and share with their community.

Jill's blog posts also generate a large number of comments. Out of her 47 blog posts, 42 posts had comments; the average number of comments per blog is 7.5. She responds on half of the comments, using the responses to generate discussions with readers. An example of this type of discussion is the following dialogue in the comments area of a blog post on Web 2.0 technologies:

Commenter 1 says:

> In all honesty, I created a mini-wiki that my S.O. and I used when planning for our enormous elaborate wedding (21 guests, 30-minute ceremony).

Jill responds:

You are a geek. And I mean that in a most admirable way.

Then commenter 2 writes:

I must be a geek too but even worse I'm an HR geek! We should form a Society for Geeks (wonder what that would be called?) and do geek stuff together.....

Jill responds:

[Commenter 2], I think we are doing geek stuff together...we call ourselves bloggers :)

A sidebar on the blog displays the last five most recent comments.

Jill's Perspectives on Her Blog

Jill blogs as part of her job, as do most of her co-workers. The original idea of employee blogs came from one of her coworkers, in response to concerns that the company was a closed entity:

> Well, part of the company's strategy was that we wanted to be more outward-facing, we wanted to be able to join some conversations, I think it was the belief of some that, I don't want to say stuck up, but that we were off doing our own thing and really weren't part of the 'big education conversation' or that we really didn't put ourselves out there at all. So it was really about a strategy to get a more public

> face, to be out there a little more. You know 'Who's behind [my current employer]', that kind of thing.

After a group discussion, writing blogs seemed to them like a "no-brainer". Jill and 5 of her co-workers started blogs. Jill remarked that her coworkers and her realised that that they often wrote papers and reports taking about the importance of blogging but weren't actually doing it themselves.

After that conversation, writing a blog actually became part of Jill's job description. She says she was enthusiastic about the new assignment, and set up her colleagues on WordPress and gave blogging a try. Though many of her colleagues also blog, Jill believes she is the most avid blogger in her organization, and therefore believes she is more widely read than her colleagues: in February, she was rated in the top 50 Analysts blogs by Technorati, an Internet search engine devoted to indexing, searching and ranking blogs:

> It's hard to believe but I probably have more blog posts than other people, so perhaps I'm more read for that.

Jill explains that she likes to write, so that is part of what inspires her to blog. She sees blogging as a way of sharing her daily thoughts and communicating with others about them.

Initially, Jill was actually surprised when she noticed that other people were reading her blog and commenting on it: "You kind of think that you're just going to write and post something, and it's just kind of something you write, and your always a little bit amazed when someone reads it or comments on it." Jill believes that her blog is a collaborative activity because she exchanges with other people working in the training and development field. In the beginning, for her, blogging was more of an exercise in writing and reflection. She didn't really consider the collaboration aspect of blogging. She has since found that collaboration with others working in the training and development field helps her work through her thoughts and helps her see issues from other perspectives.

When her colleagues and her started blogging, their goal was to user their blogs to present the research they were working on and give facts to people. Essentially, the blog was an information distribution vehicle. But for Jill, blogging morphed into a much more personal experience with a lot more "I"s and "me"s in her writing. It became more of a "how does my experiences in daily life relate to corporate training". Jill shares that people seem interested in reading that for some reason, but giggles when she claims that she has no idea why.

Sometimes Jill will read something that she finds interesting and will refer to it or link to it, and write up her take on it. Early on, she blogged about how other industries struggle with change:

> Sometimes I'll read something that I find interesting, and so I refer to it or link to it, and just my take on it. It could be something like I think early on, and what I'm still interested in, is how other industries struggle with change. So like newspapers,

> you know, writing, how are they adapting to changes now, where people contribute to news or become journalists on their own with that working through a paper, and how does that you know apply to our field, you know how do we do that, where users start generating their own content you know how do we deal with that? So I look for those things, so something that I read that I might find interesting, or something that happened in my life personally.

In addition, Jill will blog about things happening in her personal life and relate it back to her industry: "When I was doing blended learning research, a lot of what I was working on was blended learning, it was just on my mind." Sometimes the posts are even more intertwined with her personal life. She once blogged about how her group of hockey moms played an end-season game against their eight year old children and how the moms were defeated. She reflected on how the moms could have been better prepared for the challenge, such as having had more ice time, some training, some coaching, etc.

According to Jill, it was easier in the beginning to come up with topics. When she first began, there were so many things she wanted to write about. She explains that she now goes through cycles that ebb and flow:

> You almost get to some little cycles where you know your almost struggling to figure out what you want to write about and then again you'll have this burst of you know a whole bunch of things, and I just put them all in drafts and write about them later.

Jill shares that now, blogging is never really a "from scratch" process anymore, but rather is an expansion on ideas she has jotted down and saved. Sometimes these ideas are only one or two sentences or even a link that she has jotted some thoughts on. She keeps a repository of potential subjects to blog on in draft form in her blogging application. She also admits that sometimes, when looking through the saved ideas, she might delete some because she realises that, in the end, she doesn't really want to write about it.

This is a contrast from when Jill first started, where she felt she was spending way too much time writing her blog posts. She believes she's become much more efficient and actually that having a readership has helped her understand about the balance between posting just enough but not too much. So rather than having these lengthy posts, sometimes she'll just have a simple video, something funny, something very short. However, at other times, there's something that for her warrants a longer post because she has a lot to say on a subject. In these cases, she'll set aside a block of time and work on two or three of these posts at once, rather than a little bit everyday. Jill finds it is better to work on the longer posts, spend more time drafting and polishing them in a set time but not publish them all at once, rather over the course of a few weeks.

As for verifying her sources, Jill claims to make a distinction between links to research and her opinion:

> Sometimes I'll have actually, you know, references like I would when I was writing if I'm trying to if I'm referencing some research, or if I need to point to

some research to kind of say "well here's why I think that way". And, sometimes I'll just write, you know as if this just my opinion and it's really not based on any research, so you kind of underscore it that way, so this is really just my opinion you know and it may or may not be true.

In terms of once the blog post has been made, Jill admits to finding little errors which she notices in hindsight. However, she mentions that at one point, some of her blog posts were to be featured in her company newsletter and an editor contacted her with some suggestions to polish the text. Jill looked into the implications of going back and modifying posts:

> I actually looked into that a little bit and it's really not a good thing to change a blog once it's published because someone may have commented on something and you don't want to you know, change that, you could make them look silly. So, I don't change anything that would change what I said but I will make little grammar changes, so right before I publish, I do check it and if I do notice something after it's published, I'll go in and edit, but if it's just a minor edit, you know spelling or grammar.

Jill actually tries to have a certain amount of rigor for spelling and grammar though she admits she might use some slang or reduce certain concepts to acronyms or initials which makes her blog post writings much more informal. However, she also believes that spelling and grammar errors may irk readers and take value away from the blog post.

Jill explains that she began developing relationships via her blog through her blogroll where she listed other blogs that were related to the topics she was writing about. In her blogroll are people involved in education, whether they corporate, consultants, K-12 or University, essentially all blogs she tends to read. She explains that once she linked to those bloggers, they tended to link back to her the same way:

> So you're linking to that person, and then they tend to link to you the same way. Or you're just posting in response to someone else's post, maybe it's something just want to comment on their blog, but it's something that triggers something. So you write about it, so you're linking to other bloggers too. So that I think is where the relationships begin and there, there is a set group of people that historically comment on my blog, so a handful of people that I expect will write something, it's not just random people, sometimes some newer people, but it tends to be the same kind of people I think a lot of people just read and don't comment.

Nonetheless, Jill has noticed that more often than not, the people who comment are regular contributors. She remarks also that more often than not, those regular contributors also have blogs and are on her blogroll. In the case where she reads a comment and discovers that the individual is a blogger, she will in turn add their blog to her blogroll. She also believes that if she comments on someone's blog, that they are more likely to in turn comment on hers, which creates some kind of a support.

Jill also notices that when someone comments on her blog, and that in turn she responds, that it can sometimes become a discussion: "sometimes actually two people are, you know, having a discussion and I'm not even involved in it." She also adds that she treats different types of comments differently: "A lot of times it may be a one line comment that doesn't warrant a response. There have been times that there's been communication back and forth."

Jill believes she is witnessing and participating to the development of a community. She sees people referring to themselves as edubloggers or E.D.U-bloggers. "I'm an edublogger" Jill confirmed. As for her impression of what an edublogger is, she had a vague idea of the origin: "I have no idea where it came from, but you know, I think it was just a differentiator. You know there's political bloggers; you know various tracks of whatever. You know what I'm saying? Just, I think it just got tacked on that way."

Moreover, Jill admits that at first the community factor she discovered in the blogosphere surprised her:

> I think that maybe one of the things that surprised me the most, is that to see this group of people really kicks around some concepts and comes up with some very innovative and, you know, diverse opinions on various things. So definitely a community. A supportive community.

Jill definitely considers that blogging is for her a form of professional development. She admits that initially, when she looked at blogs from an outsider's perspective, she found it strange to observe a group of people quoting each other and linking to one another. Her impressions have evolved from what she initially thought blogging was and how she feels about it since she's been blogging:

> I initially thought all these people just quoting each other and linking to each other, you know it seemed very egotistical, and you know, talking about themselves, and then something happens when you actually get involved in that conversation and, I guess you know, publish and that it's not like that at all, and, I'm kind of amazed, and it's just weird anyway, I can't really explain other than that, I thought it was, I thought it was all just a bunch of people blowing hot air (laughs) and writing about myself, and it's not. It's very, just very different as you're putting yourself out there and you know giving your opinion for the world to see, and it's more about your own growth

In fact, Jill explains that it reminded her quite a bit of the discussion forums she used to participate while she was doing her Master's degree at an online University.

In terms of other professional development, Jill is also working towards here PhD in Instructional Design, Development and Evaluation, focussing on the research associated with evaluating tools and technology, mostly Web 2.0 tools.

Jill isn't one to attend conferences much. She goes to her local ASTD chapter occasionally in order to see what is happening elsewhere in her field. But larger conferences require time to travel and that is something that is lacking in her life right now.

CASE 3 – KATE

About Kate and Her Blog

Kate spent seventeen years as a classroom based trainer running mainly information technology (IT) software training courses before she made a move to her current role, which is a learning consultant in the United Kingdom. Kate actually discovered her natural knack for training in the late 1980s when she became the interpreter between IT trainers and their students. At the time, she began to take an interest in computers and thought it might be useful to take benefit from some of the open courses her spouse's employer was offering. Her immediate impression was that the courses were poorly structured as the subject matter experts, who were highly skilled in IT, were not aware of computer novices' learning processes. Kate remarked that this was quite common around 1988 as IT programs were, in her words, "dire and rigid". In that initial course, Kate spent most of her time explaining what the trainer had said to the rest of the class, as she had enough of a start that the content made sense to her but none of the other students. News of Kate's intervention got back to the company and, shortly afterwards, she was hired to deliver the courses. Though she did teach some soft skills courses, Kate joined the ranks of corporate trainer just as IT training started to boom and quickly, she developed an expertise in this field. However, with time, she yearned to look at new content and today, she considers herself to be content neutral, which means that she applied her skills as a trainer to any content. She also focussed on organizing information in learner-centered way. Eventually she eventually began working as an in-house corporate trainer for a large consulting company. Now she herself works as a consultant and designs blended learning solutions. She's also currently earning her Master's degree in Education.

Kate started to blog in July 2005. She was actually introduced to the concept one week after starting her position with her current employer. Kate states that her blog is a catch-all for things that have caught her eye, links to helpful information and the odd soapbox moment—a soapbox being a raised platform on which one stands to make an impromptu speech. In Kate's case, the platform is virtual. Kate really blogs about what is going on in her life and relates it back to how she learns from her experiences. Sometimes it is direct, like when she talks about projects she's working on at her job. But sometimes the learning happens during travelling, family activities or interacting with people in general.

Kate is the sole contributor to her blog. Her blog is hosted on the BlogSpot network, a company that is owned by Google and that connects her to a larger network of bloggers. Also, BlogSpot has a "Next Blog" feature which means that randomly, someone could discover Kate's blog when surfing through various blogs.

Following Kate's Blog

Between January 1, and April 30, 2008, Kate published 67 posts to her blog.

Two thirds of Kate's posts range from 500 to a 1,500 and one third range between 100 and 500. Of the blog posts analyzed in this study, all have text and 45 (67%) have media elements. Kate used images 6 times to support her text, 1 of them being a comic strip she was commenting on. In one of her posts she incorporates screenshot to illustrate search results she obtained when trying to trackback links to her blog. Kate also uses personal photographs in her 7 of her blog posts. These photographs include images of her family and people she's met and she posts these images when she talks about their subjects. She also at times posts images of spaces in her house or objects that belong to her. Though the images and post are of a personal nature, Kate relates them back to learning. For example, in one post she talks about jewellery that she received from a parent when she was a child and how important it was to her. She displays a photograph of the bracelet and explains that though its monetary value was relatively low, because it was personalized for her, the value was extremely high. She followed her story with an analogy to learning technology where she wrote: "The slickest learning resources in the world are unlikely to mean as much as an individualised, customised learning provision". Kate also displays videos in her posts, explaining why she thinks it's important for her to share the videos with her readers and often commenting on the content. On videos in general, Kate wrote in one post: "YouTube can be a very useful tool for getting a message across in 3 minutes that would take you half an hour to explain."

Generally, Kate talks about what she's feeling in relation to something. There are neither "how-to" type tutorials nor research reports. If she reports, it is her own account or her own experience. Kate can also get political on her blog, quick to point out injustices or lack of equity:

I hate it when people treat me like dirt because I'm foreign. I have lost count of the number of times I have been told, "*&^% off back to wherever it is you came from!" often by "service" staff when I have challenged them on a point which, from my position as customer, I feel entitled to do... within reason. I hate the bandying of epithets and the denigrating attachment of stereotypical prejudice.

Kate generally has a formal writing style, usually free of colloquialisms. She writes in the first person:

Recently, I was given a psychometric test. Yes, yes, I know! I'm not a fan of them either. I don't like the idea of pigeonholing people. I believe we are too complex and too able to change in response to the situation in which we find ourselves to be categorised. My own view is that there are about 6 billion personality styles, learning styles or whatever.

Kate talks about her blog writing as something personal, like a diary:

I don't write my blog as an academic exercise. My blog is very personal, it's very heart on the sleeve, it's very me and out of confidence. People get to know me as a person and similarly the way they comment on it, and the way we comment, and respond and to each other has become a relationship in that sense, in that there's a give and take.

Kate has, at times, addressed her readers in her posts: "Here's a situation for you to think about" or "You are perfectly welcome to suggest a less cheesy caption!" and in once instance even asks her readers a question: "What stirs your blood? What is it that makes you want to stand up and cheer?"

When appropriate, Kate will reference her sources with a link to the original source. She will do this by adding a hyperlink to the Web page or Blog Website that she is writing about. There are block quotes from other sources in only 3 of her posts.

Posts are tagged with labels; however there is no directory of labels anywhere on the site. If a reader wished to read all Kate's post that are tagged with a specific label, they first must locate a post that is tagged that label and then click on the label which is hyperlinked to all her blog posts tagged with that label. For example, Kate has "blogging" as one of her tags, but only 2 posts in the 4-month period were tagged with the label "blogging". She also has "Technology" as a label but this is only used 4 times. Some posts don't have labels at all and 9 have the label "miscellaneous".

However, Kate does have a blog archive sorted by date and each month has the number of posts for the month in parentheses. The blog archive is located in a sidebar and expands to show the titles of each post for each month.

Kate doesn't have a blogroll (a list of links that blog writers posts on the sidebar of their blog to other blogs that might deal with similar topics or interests, with the intent of promoting other blogs, forming a sense of blogger community).

Kate allows her readers to subscribe to her blog through a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) Atom feeds.

In addition, Kate has her Delicious bookmarks displayed on her blog. Delicious is a service that allows users to tag, save, manage and share Web pages from a centralized source and share with their community.

Kate receives comments on a third of her posts. When she responds to comments, she usually thanks commenters for their contributions. In a particular post, Kate was distraught at finding out that her blog content was being reposted elsewhere and that other content was incorrectly attributed to her. For this post, she received and responded to the following comments:

Commenter 1 wrote:

These are pseudo-blogs that aggregate posts from others in order to increase their rankings so that they can sell advertising. They use bots and scripts to generate what look like real blog posts; but they're just spam. I have been linked to many of these sites and they seem to be on the rise. The only thing you can do is ignore them.

Kate responded:

Thanks, [Commenter 1]. I suspected as much. What a pain.

Commenter 2 wrote:

I think it's called "scraping"...

Commenter 3 wrote:

It is scraping. They picked up one of your actual posts earlier, which is why your name is there. The script used here does a crappy job of matching names with the right post; that's why your post is attributed to someone else. Theoretically, you could try to report them and give them a DMCA takedown notice, or whatever the equivalent is in the UK. [Commenter 1]'s approach of simply ignoring them is probably the best answer though. You could spend lots of time getting these taken down, but more would simply spring up.

Kate responded:

[Commenter 3]: gross name... totally appropriate!

Kate averaged 2 comments per post over the 4-month period of the study. Half of the comments were her responses to those commenting on her site.

Kate's Perspectives on Her Blog

One of Kate's co-workers, whom she describes as an early adopter, conducted a workshop on blogging during a team day. A team day is a meeting where peers exchange best practices related to their field. She shares that her colleague referred to blogging as his outboard brain, a tool with which he points to resources and links to things that he finds helpful, in essence a space where he can keep things and share things and enter into a conversation. Kate shares how this impacted her:

I was quite fascinated by that idea, and as part of that workshop that he delivered to us, during that team development day, we all set up blogs. Everybody went back and deleted theirs afterwards, but I kept mine going. And in a very short time, I was using my blog very differently from my colleague who had introduced me to the concept.

Kate shares that initially, she actually found it more helpful to comment of other people's blogs and to enter into the conversation that was already going on other people's blog posts. She explains that she wasn't aware of a readership in the beginning:

> In a conversation with [name concealed to protect identity of participant], on one of his blog posts he talked about, why people blog and stuff, he referred to the thymotic urge and I said to me blogging was a little bit like a hairbrush microphone, you know, we sing our hearts out with our hairbrush as a microphone, you know it's not for an audience were pretending there's an audience out there, performing for this imaginary audience and I think half of us would just die of embarrassment if we were to find out that there really was an audience right there in our bedroom. But, to me it was an opportunity of self expression, rather than an opportunity to express myself to the masses, I wasn't really aware of there being any masses.

Today, Kate confides that when she looks back at those first posts, she cringes with embarrassment for the things she said in a public space as some her views have so diametrically changed since she started blogging and, in her opinion, due to her blogging. Today, she claims she still primarily blogs for herself.

Her blogging practices have evolved and are now integrated into her life. Whenever Kate feels really strongly about something, or if something really moves her, she tends to share it on her blog:

> I think that whenever I feel really strongly about something, or something really moves me, on the learning experience of my own I tend to share it on my blog. Especially if it's a learning experience, it's a way of recording a summary so I can come back to it and it will obviously include all the links to the various resources that I've discovered. So in that sense it's almost like a storage space for stuff like that.

Kate admits to having a tendency to soapbox moments that she feels strongly about and considers that if by adding her ineffective voice to the hopeful it can make a difference, than so much the better. An example of this is found in a blog post of hers in March 2008:

> [A]s a third party learning provider, I often find it difficult to draw a line between what is my responsibility and what is not. For example, it is not strictly speaking my responsibility to tell the client that a proposed change measure is doomed to fail. I am simply supposed to build the learning solution to support its implementation.
>
> However, I see myself in the role of trusted adviser and, if I don't give them my perspective, then I feel I have betrayed that trust. Of course, they can choose to ignore my advice/recommendations, but I will build that into my risks and

assumptions because (and this brings me to my second point) I'm blowed (*sic*) if they're going to lay the failure at my team's door. Failed change intiatives (*sic*) or implementations too often get blamed on the training. No amount of beautifully wrought learning solutions is going to turn a sow's ear into a silk purse.

Kate also believes that beyond opinion, she can add a perspective to things, for example:

I have always had a bit of an issue with the "ethnic diversity" forms that one has to fill in so often these days. I struggle with the lack of parity in the terms used: a mix of countries, colours and continents. I mean, we might be black, white, yellow, red, brown or we might be African, American, Asian, etc. or we might be mongoloid, caucasian, negroid... (*sic*) but you can't cherry pick some terms from each group and chuck them together into the pot!

For myself, I don't see why this information is needed (apart - possibly - from a census, but even then I'm not always convinced). I'm in favour of people being taken on merit, which is blind to race, gender, etc.

Nevertheless, we are required to fill these forms in all over the place "for administrative purposes" when we apply for jobs, when we enrol our children at schools, when we sign up at a new medical practice.

In terms of topic selection, Kate explains that how she selects the topics she blogs about varies. However, a common pattern is that they are more reactive than proactive such as blog posts starting with: “I have noticed that my children have a very different attitude towards work with which they feel some sense of connection" or "Yesterday's post from [name concealed to protect identity of participant] (as you may see from my comment) got me to thinking". Kate shares that she benefits a lot from the conversation she has via blogs: "I'll engage in a conversation or I'll notice a conversation is emerging about a specific subject and in response to that conversation my own thoughts will start to coalesce."

At other times, Kate will save ideas in draft form to elaborate on at a later date if she finds the idea still relevant. Kate explains that she doesn't have a set process, nor is does she have a routine for blogging:

> Sometimes a week may go by and I won't blog at all, and then, but I may comment on other peoples blogs, to me it's a conversation. And a conversation doesn't happen… you know, I don't, you don't sort of time yourself and say "ok, twenty seconds have passed I need to say something, because the silence has been going of too long". If it's a proper conversation, the talk flows backwards and forwards, people speak when they need to speak and they speak over each other, and they contradict each other, you know all of those things all the analogies will come to patience and that's how I see it. When I've got something to contribute, I'll contribute.

Because for Kate, blogging is a lot about conversation, it's as much about other people's blogs: "it's not just about my own blog it's about theirs as well. I'm not just monologuing *(sic)* and people reacting to it, it is a whole interactive thing. They also have got their blogs which I will then read, and read back on."

Kate shares that she tends to think in analogies and talk in allegories: "my mind always makes associations between things that are happening now and other things, and it was always my strongest tool as a based trainer, they used to tell me that I talked in parables". According to Kate, this permits her to vulgarize things and make the abstract less abstract. It is her belief that half of everything in life seems to be learned and being the ultimate learning geek, she finds something to learn in everything. An example is a post in which she compares two individuals' relearning things they had not done in a while. First she explains how within a relatively short period of time, she remembered quite quickly how to play squash, a sport she had not played in 20 years but how she forgot how the basic key commands to a software application she taught about 10 years prior. Then she tells the story of travelling with her mother-in-law and comparing the difference between her trying to speak her native language which she barely spoke anymore and riding a bicycle which she hadn't done in a long time. Kate's blogged the following observation: "For me, the common factor is that both the easily remembered skills were psychomotor, while those less easily recalled were more cognitive."

Kate will put links to internet sources when applicable. But if she's simply writing about her own experience or a purely an experimental thing, it would just be a narrative. But if there are statistics, or somebody said something or she's reacting to responding to it, then she'll link to it. Kate explains that this is both the polite and ethical thing to do, and as well it provides her with a sort of validity, reliability, etc. Kate adds however that the reader should evaluate her sources and make their own judgements:

> I think with the whole Web 2.0 phenomenon it is absolutely essential that everybody to take responsibility for a major of criticality. You know when they read something they really need to check it for themselves, not just say "well I read it on the Internet, so it must be true. The news readers have an obligation to verify their stories before they read the news, so your news report is often fairly accurate. But incidentally in all sorts of other programs, documentaries and all sorts of other things, there will be things that you need to check before you quote them, and spout them at somebody else, and I think that Web 2.0 has increased that exponentially, because absolutely anybody can go online and say absolutely anything. And the reader really needs to take responsibility for making sure that something is true before they take it for themselves and make it their own.

However, according to Kate, many don't know how to evaluate Web resources with a critical mind, a constant struggle she has trying to change that with her teenage children. She explains that if you heard information on a credible newscast like the BBC, it carries a credible reputation, because they take the responsibility of making sure that they verify their stories before putting them out there because otherwise, they run the risk of liable and litigation. It is her opinion that while reputable journalistic organizations, are probably fairly reliable in what they present, one cannot go read somebody's report on a blog and attribute the same validity, because it's the blogger's perception or the person may have made that figure up. Of course, it's the blogger's responsibility to quote reliable sources and statistics but the onus is on the reader to verify if the information is true before repeating it. Kate actually adds that it's a joint responsibility: "it's a joint responsibility it isn't a read/write word it's social media, so the onus is on us all readers and writers alike."

Kate explains that when she's blogging, she is aware that she is doing so in a public space, so believes that she conducts herself in a way that's not going to be frightfully embarrassing to her. She is explains that her readership grew two ways. First, when her colleague linked to her blog, some of his readers began to read hers. Also, she attracted more visitors by commenting on other people's blog postings on her own blog, which created a trackback, a feature which enables a blogger to ping another's blogs by placing a reciprocal link in the entry they were referencing. She's still not aware of there being hoards and hoards of people out there who read her blog: "I've never really been driven by the numbers on my blog - just as well really, because they are rather paltry!" However, when she decided that she wanted to focus on the use of social media for her own master's dissertation, she put some metric tools on her blog in the interest of having some quantifiable evidence to provide for her dissertation. To date, she has never clocked over one hundred readers in a day. She attributes the traffic to the fact that she engages in quite a lot of online communities and debates. Also, she adds that the contributions on her blog are not just about her but rather that on her blog there are conversations between her and other people, other people and each other and that this in turn spills over onto their own blogs, and into their own microblogs and then on to their various Facebook pages and whatever else might happen: "I think that trying to cage a conversation is almost like nailing Jell-O to a wall, it can't be contained in one place".

But other than what she can measure with her metric tools, Kate explains that she might have four thousand readers, but she really only knows about the people who comment regularly or the people who engage with her directly. She doesn't know anything about the lurkers who might be regularly reading her blog, but never raise their own voices. She explains that can't have a two-way relationship with them. The relationship exists in the sense she's putting stuff out there and their consuming it, therefore in her opinion, the nature of that relationship it's not real, not even in the 2.0 sense.

In terms of her regular readers and commenters, she's has actually developed relationships to the point that she think that she knows them well as people:

> The relationship exists in the sense I'm putting stuff out there and their consuming it, but that's very much with one point in the nature of that relationship it's not real, it's not a relationship in that sense, not even in the 2.0 sense. In terms so my regular readers my regular commenters, we have actually developed relationships to the point that I think we know each other as people.

Kate insists that she's not for a moment trying to say that the relationships people can have online can replace the relationships that they have with people with skin on. But she thinks that these relationships are authentic as people get to know one another and they form the relationship that they choose to form. But it varies from person to person.

When she met one of her readers for the first time a few months ago he and she arranged to meet for coffee as they happened to be in the same part of the world at the same time: "we actually me face to face and it definitely was a hug sort of moment rather than a handshake moment because we felt like the platform of that relationship existed to that extent".

These relationships also spill over into Facebook and email exchanges. She meets up with them on Elluminate during online conferences and has text message exchanges with them. To Kate, all of this is really closely linked to George Siemens's writings on connectivism, nodes and network that create a sense of community. However, she distinguishes that the community is one thing, and personal relationships might come out of that community and grow. She shares that she genuinely thinks that she has blogging relationships with some people and she has personal relationships with other people who read her blog.

A blogging situation Kate found interesting was when a blogging friend of her and her with witnessed a rather nasty debate developing on a third person's blog. She and a friend had been commenting but at one point, the moved the conversation between the two of them on email to discuss their perception of the debate in private: "we stepped aside to one side if you like, and we had a conversation just between the two of us about what was going on over there. And I think it's much of a reflection of what happens in relationships that are not online to be honest."

As for the notion of community, Kate believes that there it's not just one community of bloggers but rather there are thousands upon thousands of communities of bloggers which are interconnected in various ways. She would say that she belongs to several different online communities and the relationships that exist between the members of those communities differ depend on the nature of the community:

> I think if you say it's a community it's not just one community of bloggers there are thousands upon thousands of communities of bloggers which are interconnected in various ways. So I would say that I belong to several different online communities and the relationships that exist between the members of those communities differ depend on the nature of the community. It's not one community.

Kate explains how blogging ties into her professional development:

> Through blogging I'd say that it has been rather serendipitous in the sense that I will find somebody's article or blog post read it , find it interesting maybe follow through to see how the repartee will go, comment on it, master it engage it, other people in conversation. It's not structured, it's very informal.

She hears about great conferences but travelling internationally for conferences is a huge expense her employer isn't likely to cover. But she also claims she wouldn't be aware of these formal and structured conferences if it wasn't for her participation in the informal and unstructured blogosphere. What Kate explains she likes about the informal space is the fact that it is unstructured and it is much in her hands as it's a learner driven journey. As far as Kate's concerned, her learning is life wide and life long too. In that sense it's her learning journey, she doesn't see it as something that's being owned or driven by her organization she works for:

> It's driven entirely by my own passions, my own interests, my own ambitions, what ever they might be, and because I'm so passionate about learning and because I feel frustrated every time I encounter an obstacle that results from my own ignorance, I am constantly driving and striving to learn more, to know more to improve what I know, to improve my understanding of things, and you know with all the depths and profundity of a pondscape I'm afraid. Because I've hardly got a grasp of one thing and I've moved on to the next thing.

In fact, one of the things she identifying as part of her own dissertation work is that, to commit herself to one area of study with sufficient dedication and time, to know enough to produce a masters dissertation, she realises that she's going to have to relinquish her grip on certain things and let them go, not something she likes doing.

CASE 4 – MARK

About Mark and His Blog

Mark studied hard to become a mechanical engineer only to realise at graduation that in South East Asia, computer engineers were far more in demand. He worked for a while in the automotive manufacturing industry until he eventually decided to look for something that would stimulate him more.

About that time, in 1996, the field of multimedia caught his eye, He enrolled in some classes and soon he was working in the field of animation and graphics for television. A year later, Mark and his colleagues began exploring the possibilities of the Internet and its various applications, experimenting with C and Java programming languages. Eventually, they began developing instructionally oriented applications and were creating educational CD-ROMs for children.

In time, Mark began focussing on adult learning and blended his engineering background with his newly found passion for multimedia production. He developed courses for marine engineers, tackling fairly complex subjects such as navigation and maritime economics, digital machinery, electronics and electromagnetics.

With the goal of further honing his skills, Mark enrolled in a Master's degree in instructional design, which he obtained in 2001. His dissertation focussed on the expansion of eLearning into social networks such as online communities and blogs. Mark shares that, at the time, his professors rejected the idea because they were not convinced that his research had growth potential. However, he held his ground and continued his research. Two of his professors caught on and gave him the theory and the tools to experiment with, which Mark explains gave him the incentive to explore deeper in this direction, moving away from instructional objectives and organizational needs analysis to focus on making things engaging and interesting for the learner. In fact, Mark claims that it is this very perspective that was the seed for this cross-pollination that happened with his blog.

After gaining experience working with eLearning and knowledge management systems, Mark decided to start his own business a little over three years ago, in which he acts as a research and strategy consultant.

Mark started his blog around 1998 with what he explains was only a theoretical understanding of the new medium of blogging. Mark states that today his blog is about exploring news, views and stories around Corporate Learning, Community Building, Instructional Design, Knowledge Management and more.

Mark is the sole contributor on his blog, which is independent and is not associated to a larger network of bloggers, organization or association. He hosts his blog on an independent Website and runs his blog with the ExpressionEngine content management system which has a blog publishing feature.

Following Mark's Blog

From January 1, 2008 to April 30, 2008, Mark posted 33 times to his blog.

Mark's blog posts are relatively short, 20 to 200 words on average. Of the blog posts analyzed in this study, all have text and 1 (3%) has a media element. Mark's blog posts are generally text and link-based. In fact, the link is an important element of Mark's blogging method but he specifies that he quickly discovered that: "the links were not the key. The key was in the package of the file links." Mark was looking to link together trends:

Let's say with branding... Fast Company came up with a nice article, and you would see a trend, like Harvard came up with a similar article on what's happening with online branding and its effects. Then you would have this eLearning article that says eLearning is great for sustaining brands online. So then you would mix these three things up and then you would say hey listen there's something happening in this space and these are the five links that can help you explore this space. So it became more about exploring small spaces.

Mark rarely uses media elements in his posts. As noted a moment ago, only 1 of the blog posts in the 4-month study containing a photograph. In that post, Mark posted a picture of a cluttered notice board and below it wrote:

I took this photo at a clubhouse in [name concealed to protect identity of the study participant]. This noticeboard (*sic*) contains important information such as changes in timing and polices. This arrangement gives me the creeps but I found old members patiently going through the information.

When discussing this very post during his interview, Mark explains the reasoning behind it:

I took a snapshot of this notice board which had almost fifty notices stuck on it. That evoked a really strong image of things being cluttered. You got about thirty to forty notices stuck on it and which one do you focus on? How do you process that kind of information? So I took a snapshot of it and I blogged about it.

As the stated purpose of his blog suggests, Mark explores news, views and stories around Corporate Learning, Community Building, Instructional Design, Knowledge Management and more. He does a lot of referencing to what he finds on the Web and elsewhere. He points his readers to resources, giving them a brief summary, his opinion and a link to further reading. Of all 33 posts analysed in the 4-month period of this study, 31 of them contained a link to a resource. Those posts can be summarized as two-types of posts. There are the posts where he refers to an article by first naming the author, then the topic of the article he his pointing to, and then providing a quote from that article which he finds compelling. Usually he will frame the article without providing his opinion, and prefaces the quote with: "On writing well for the online environment" but in a few instances has framed the article with his opinion on the value of the article: "[name concealed to protect identity of the study participant] nails with this piece". Next, there are the posts where he links to an online resource, simply adding his impression but without a quote. An example of this type of introduction is: "Simple, visual and with a story. Good tutorial on the creative commons license and why its *(sic)* important."

Mark's writing style can be labelled as being corporate. When stating his opinion about something, he doesn't usually use the first person. More often than not, he states his opinion like it were globally accepted: "It seems impossible to teach values and ways of a culture by having a 3 hour training session" or "A research study from the University of [name concealed to protect identity of the study participant] provides the numbers to what many of us already believe and practice: blended learning works." Because of this, it is not as obvious that Mark is stating his opinion or his perspective as it is with the other bloggers participating in this study. Moreover, Mark shares little, if any, of his personal life on his blog.

When pertinent, Mark will quote sources, which happens in 9 of the examined blog posts. Mark uses quotes from the text he's linking to with the purpose of giving the reader a preview of what the article he has linked to will be about.

Mark does not tag his entries by categories. He does however have an archive that sorts posts monthly and returns a table of contents with links to each individual post by title.

Mark does not have a blogroll (a list of links that blog writers posts on the sidebar of their blog to other blogs that might deal with similar topics or interests, with the intent of promoting other blogs, forming a sense of blogger community).

However, Mark's blog can be accessed via Atom syndication and RSS feeds.

In addition, Mark has few of the support features one would find in a blog. However, his advance search page is more complex than the average blog search engine which gives the reader the possibility of searching exact words, a combination of words or phrases in the blog title, the blog entries and/or the blog comments. In addition, the search engine enables the reader to search throughout his whole Website, not just his blog.

As mentioned earlier, Mark does not interact with his readers directly on his blog as he has not activated comments. He explains that his initial experience with comments was quite negative:

> I had comments on for some time, but I got almost about six thousand spams that took me about three months to clean up. So that was a time when software didn't have any protection for spam, so that kind of put me off a long while. I haven't turned on comments since then. But I do get emails.

Mark does explain that he emails he received were more about the articles he wrote on the articles section of his Website, and not for his blog posts: "Because I was writing link-based blogs, it was not written for dialogue. It was basically a pointer, like this persons did this, that person did that, so there's mo room for debate or discussion."

Mark's Perspectives on His Blog

Mark began to explore the writings of David Weinberger and Cory Doctorow in order to get a better idea of what was emerging in the realm of online technologies and communication tools. He discussed his readings and thoughts with colleagues and came to the conclusion that it was time to start his own blog:

> The first one was on Blogger, and I thought simply it was a great way to save my notes. I'm reading all these articles, journals, and I'm reading all these publications and I'm finding it very difficult to crosslink and try to keep a hold on all these ideas that were coming through while doing a masters program, and so I said ok, let me just get a dump on [my blog], and maybe I can go back synthesize everything. And

> that was the real reason why of starting it up, just to explore what's happening out there and just to get an idea on the stuff that's happening on eLearning.

He started to write some articles on subjects related to instruction and blogging as well as one of the first articles to relate knowledge management, eLearning and blogging. When reflecting about those times: "So that was kind of fun you know a fun period, the ideas were there but the fun was in mixing and matching and seeing what comes out."

When Mark first discovered blogs, he discovered "link-type" blogs—blogs post that consist of a list of links to other resources— which he defines as human search engines: "that was the period where you would just point people to really interesting things." At the time, Mark used to post about 5 times a day, 7 days a week. As a pioneer, he often felt the satisfaction of being one of the first to blog on a subject or a trend. But today, things have changed:

> But now … I just turn on my newsreader I've got like seven hundred blogs that I subscribe to and it trickles down and I say let me just search these newsposts about this particular article that I'm supposed to blog about, and I find about twenty or thirty of them. People have already written about it, people are already discussing it. Then I … say maybe I'll just carry it for now and get back to it later.

Because the conversation had already begun, the incentive to write about it was lesser. Mark's standards for blogging about something have gotten higher: "if I don't see something that's really interesting, really my perspective, something you know that I think so unique which identifies with what I'm doing, I won't blog about it."

Something he blogged about recently that he thought was an original contribution that he could add his perspective was the blog post about the cluttered notice board. In Mark's perspective, this was something unique. "That's becoming a pattern for me, to look out for these unique insights, and then write about it."

Mark explains that the focus of his blog has changed because in essence, one's blog is closely connected to who he is. It is a snapshot of what he was learning about and thinking at a certain time in his life:

> And so then the blog kind of follows what is happening with my personal life, so time, attention, writing standards, trying to raise the bar of what you're doing… it kind of reflects on the blog. Before when I was studying, so it meant exploration within exploration. Today it means sophistication so the blog, reflects that kind of stuff.

At this point, Mark has a specific standard for blogging: "I will still address it if I can add my own perspective to it". In one specific post, Mark links to an article about Intranets and the three directions they are going in. He adds his perspective:

> There's no harm in looking in these directions, but I think it matters more if we focus on delivering staff value based on current and future needs and behaviours. At some point, the three types will merge and then there will be just boundaries of relationships and identities.

In his opinion, this is an interesting idea to blog on because it's an ill-structure or ill-defined idea, something to give a prediction on. Otherwise, there is, in Mark's opinion, no potential for a debate: "well defined ideas you can't debate so there's no use talking about it then".

On Mark's Website, there are there are two sections, the articles and the blogs:

> The blogs are spontaneous; you just want to do it. The articles are more thought-out more times spent on it, more research. It's written in a manner that's meant to be comprehensive, I would typically spend almost a week to get an article out, but I would not spend more than a minute to get a blog post out.

Mark claims that he's actually rigorous about improving the quality of his blog content, not so much in a grammatical way but rather in form. One of the key influences on his blogging style was actually blogging itself:

> The writing aspect was not strong for me; I was a little loose in the writing aspect of it, because I never focussed on exactly what the sentence should convey. I never really understood how a simple paragraph can convey meaning ... it was all about getting things done. But after writing about blogging for three or four years, I really understand that writing is essential ... that became an integral part of me.

Mark began focussing on getting his ideas across in a much simpler manner, which he shares was quite a challenge for him.

In addition, Mark finds it important to link back to sources that inspire him, as a form of attribution: “the format of my blog post was the headline and the headline had a link and it goes back to the blog, back to the source from where I got the ideas from”. Because his blogs entries are mostly link-based where he comments on other people’s articles, the form of his blog takes care of the referencing and validation of the source and the onus is on the source to be true: “If your asking me if I verify if the postings or writings are true or not, then no”.

As mentioned earlier, when Mark first activated comments, he got a lot of spam and that put him off comments and he has yet to turn them on. He does however get emails from readers. In fact, when his blogging practice slowed down, he started getting about four to five emails a week from people inquiring why he was blogging less. Another thing that had people writing to him was when stopped his newsletter, which at the time, according to Mark’s account, was being distributed to around six thousand subscribers, because it was getting to be too much. At that time, he was starting his company and had less time to write.

As for his own professional development, Mark explains that he reads three books a month. Because he travels a lot, he reads a lot and always travels with books. But Mark also uses other online resources as sources of information:

> The other thing is like my Netscape wire, which is my newsreader, that’s my core; I mean every morning it’s on. And so I basically scan what’s happening in my field and others and more and more I'm moving to listen to podcast because it

seems more convenient. So quick ideas I glance through net newswire, in-depth ideas I put them on a podcast and take them along.

Mark admits however that if a subject or an idea catches his attention, he's never satisfied with just the blog post. He discusses a specific situation when he read a particular post that caught his attention:

> So I looked around … and read a few posts here and there, some reviews here and there but never got satisfied. So, I went and bought the book and then read it; that's when I really, really realised that my God, you know, I like this guy! He's really a wonderful writer with fantastic ideas … When his second book came out it was better. I think I was the first person to have an advanced booking on Amazon and get it when it came out; and it was a wonderful book. So that was better. So the thing is, the one thing the blogs provides you with is a glimpse to the sources. I think you have to put in the extra effort to understand it really well.

In his opinion, if one doesn't dig deeper, they are left with something he refers to as "browser knowledge":

> It is basically this superficial feeling of having control over the subject you know. But, if you don't go ahead and learn it in a deep and engaged manner this superficial layer kind of blinds you from, from further exploration. You get this arrogance about you which stops you from learning the right things… If you don't have a process which goes from this superficial or the first layer of learning and goes down to a deep layer of learning, you're just stuck with this false feeling of

> knowing things when you don't actually. It's similar to cracking all the levels in flight simulator and feeling confident enough that you can fly a commercial airliner.

As for conferences, Mark explains that he has up and down relationship with them. In the past, he'd been to South East Asian conferences to speak about knowledge management at a time when no one had heard about it:

> Nobody got it … And then subsequent conferences and subsequent yearly stuff came. It became so stereotyped … you'd see the same speakers and they would dish out the same presentation, and basically it was idea dead. No new ideas or nothing. So I stopped going to these conferences.

However, Mark thinks that now things are improving: "because [the presenters] are taking the liberties to explore and expand their thinking and are not shy to say they tried something and failed".

Mark will also hold conferences to get people from all over the world to come to him in South East Asia mainly because it costs less to set up a conference and host it then to travel across the world to go to a conference. Online conferences are an option, but because of the time difference, it often means he has to be awake at three a.m. as most of them are in the US and Canada.

CASE 5 – STUART

About Stuart and His Blog

Stuart claims to have gotten involved in learning field completely by accident. By the time he got to University, Stuart began studying physics but shortly after transferred to philosophy when he discovered he was better at it then physics. He went on to obtain a Bachelor's of Arts and then a Master's degree in Philosophy. He now works as an education researcher in Canada.

During his studies, Stuart took on work as a teaching assistant which in turn lead him to a position as a tutor for a University specializing in Distance Learning, teaching philosophy by telephone. In graduate school, one of his philosophy professors conducted one of his classes partially online and partially in class so that gave him exposure to possibilities.

Always working side-by-side with an interest in computers, he also did work with a local branch of Texas Instruments, a computer company, in 1980. In fact, he leveraged his interests and natural talents and wrote his honours thesis on his personal computer.

As he continued to tutor for the University specializing in Distance Learning, he and a number of colleagues created a MAUD or Multi-Academic User Domain. This MAUD was based on Multi-User Dungeon technologies, which are online services that support multiple interacting users at the same time.

In 1995, his experience got him hired on as a Distance Education in New Instructional Media Design Specialist at the local community college. It is around that time that he began to participate in online discussion lists and he set up his Website, and began writing papers including the future of online learning. His position at the college involved not only pioneering a computer-based learning program, it also involved moving the college itself to the online environment. He created their Website, delivered Internet training courses to staff, wrote proof of concepts, and eventually built a Learning Management System for them because at the time none existed. Stuart explained that because often times there were no models on which to base himself, his approach has always been a theoretically based approach where he looked at the capacities of the technology at the time and then looked at what he was attempting to do and then devised the best approach for that particular situation.

Stuart's efforts paid off as he caught the attention of the largest University in his province and he was offered a position as an Information Architect. Parallel to this, he built an online community for municipal workers in the province, elected officials and town managers.

And that experience, in-turn, got Stuart hired-on with as an eLearning Research Officer with his current employer. Now Stuart works in research and shares his findings in his writings.

Stuart started a newsletter of sorts with dated entries around 1995. He developed his own software so that he could post these entries and send them via email. Eventually, as blogs began to emerge, he realised there were many similarities between what he was doing and what was considered blogging. Stuart states that it is his contribution to the growing world of email newsletters. In 2005, Stuart started a second personal writing blog using the Blogger application which he created to express a different set of ideas.

Stuart is the sole contributor on his blog, though during the month of July 2008, while Stuart was on vacation, he had 3 guest bloggers on his blog. His blog is independent and is not associated to a larger network of bloggers, organization or association and runs on a system he designed himself.

Following Stuart's Blog

From January 1, 2008 to April 30, 2008, Stuart posted 64 times to his professional blog and because his blog aggregates his daily posts into a daily newsletter, it would be most accurate to say that he produced blogs 64 days or every weekday and each day approximately 8 posts for a total of approximately 500 posts. This is why Stuart often refers to his blog as a newsletter:

> The newsletter I still consider to be a newsletter although, you know I can see why people would consider it to be a blog. It is composed as dated entries. So I'd say yeah sort of, it's as much a blog as anything's a blog. ... It has been recognised by other people as a blog and a few years ago won an award as best individual blog, so I guess in a sense it is a blog.

Because this study did not require me to analyse such a high number of posts, 30 random posts containing a total of 245 smaller posts were analysed for the content.

Stuart's post range on average from 15 to 300 words and are mostly text and link-based. Of the blog posts analyzed in this study, all have text and 10 (33%) of them have media. In fact, Stuart might provide several links within one blog post. An example of this is when he is covering a current issue; he will link several perspectives and opinions on the given topic (words are underlined in the following quote to indicate where each individual and distinct link is located):

> This all (to me) seems to suggest that the judge is buying into the "it's a very narrow invention" interpretation of the patent. Good coverage in the [name 1 concealed to protect identity of the study participant] article. [Name 2 concealed] has also <u>posted a statement</u>. [Name 3 concealed] also <u>links</u> to a <u>[name 1 concealed] article</u> covering the other edupatent suit highlighted by <u>[name 4 concealed]</u> (and covered <u>here</u>) a few days ago. [Name 4 concealed] also <u>comments</u> on the injunction. [Name 5 concealed] has also posted a <u>community letter</u> on the court case and injunction, soft-pedaling the impact. Not so soft-spoken is [name 6 concealed], who <u>slams the injunction</u> and [name 5 concealed]'s commentary.

Stuart uses little media in his posts. There are 8 photographs, 7 of locations he visited and 1 headshot of an individual he was referring too. There is also a post where he posted a screenshot of a technological problem. As for diagrams, in one instance he posts a diagram that he found on another site and frames the diagram and link to the post with "Article with a pretty good diagram on the changing synamics *(sic)* of online applications and services." In another instance, he posts a diagram he created himself where he illustrates and idea for an information system.

Stuart often writes from the first person perspective and occasionally from the all encompassing first person plural perspective. His writing are also opinion-based. However, Stuart does write in a formal manner and uses expert terminology.

He also tags all of his posts by topic, each with about three to five topics on average. The topics however are not listed anywhere on the site in a directory. A reader must click on a topic which is tagged in a post to see all other posts related to that topic. Stuart does offer two options with his topics however. The first is that a reader can subscribe to posts on a specific topic Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds. The second feature is that when a reader clicks on a topic, there is a sidebar which presents the Wikipedia entry of that specific topic.

Stuart does not have a blogroll (a list of links that blog writers posts on the sidebar of their blog to other blogs that might deal with similar topics or interests, with the intent of promoting other blogs, forming a sense of blogger community).

It is possible to subscribe to Stuart's blog via email via Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, either to the whole blog or to individual topics. It is also possible to receive an email newsletter containing all of Stuart's posts of the day.

In addition, Stuart has a mobile version of his blog site for readers via the MoFuse platform. MoFuse gives content publishers, like bloggers, the ability to publish their content to the mobile Web.

Also, Stuart's search page is has advanced features such as search by post, author, publication, event or topic. Also, search results can be returned in HTML (acronym for HyperText Markup Language) format, HTML being the set of markup symbols or codes inserted in a file intended for display on a World Wide Web browser page, or in RSS (acronym for Really Simple Syndication) format.

Moreover, Stuart blog posts generate a large number of comments. He's actually even made a special place where he highlights the last 20 comments in a discussion area.

Stuart's Perspectives on His Blog

When asked if he considered this tool a blog, Stuart explains that it really depends on how you look at it and what you count for a prototype for a blog. From day one there were dated entries. And eventually, by 1998, those entries were articles.

But at the origin, Stuart's Website did much of what a blog did, however he had never heard the word blog:

> Actually, I have an entry; I'll have to figure it out. All my posts and all of my content of my Website are indexed in a topic-based system, it's an automatic topic based system, one of my topics a very early topic is Web logs, two separate words. So I would have created that topic when I heard about Web logs and so if I looked it up I could probably find it, because each entry has a time stamped key, I could probably find out when I created that entry. But I'd have to look it up.

After using the topic search option on Stuart's Website, I was not able to locate the entry. Searching for the words "Web logs" only returned the 10 latest posts which were written in the last 2 months. However, when doing a general search of the words "Web logs" (that is using the simple search button feature and not the advanced topic-search feature), a blog post from May 25, 2001 offered a link to a site on Web logging tools, which has since gone offline. In his blog post, Stuart frames the link with the following details: "Useful site with links to tols *(sic)* and information about creating and maintaining Web logs (also known as blogs)."

Stuart explains that he fell into the form of blogging because he feared that what he had written in public forums such as contributions to mailing lists, to discussion boards would one day disappear (which actually happened in the case of the a certain discussion board). He had to come up with a solution:

> So I started taking all of those posts and posting them to my Website, and they'd be dated and that to this day is my articles page on my Website. But also at the same time I was of course developing the Learning Management System and I was using that code and those Perl scripts as well, to power my own Website. So again, by '98, I had a system where I was using it to import my bookmarks; that's the forerunner to my newsletter.

On the one hand, Stuart needed to put his bookmark somewhere because the Netscape bookmarking system wasn't meeting his personal requirements:

> It was the Netscape bookmarking system, it wasn't very useful. And so I built a little database and a little form for entering my bookmark information, and I can enter bookmarks from where ever I was. More importantly access them from where ever I was and share them with other people from the college and so on.

On the other hand, Stuart needed a place to save his electronic articles: “I needed a place to save emails, and all of that”. And then eventually, he wanted to host discussion boards and online communities and other types of dynamic Web applications: “So I built one application to do all of those things. And that’s what my Website became.” When asked if it was the collaborative aspects that motivated him to build his Website, Stuart responded: “No, more accurately would be something like to have a place to put my stuff”. And when asked if he considered the sharing aspect as a fringe benefit, Stuart responded affirmatively and added: “One I’ve taken advantage of over the years I'll admit”. Stuart goes on to explain that his blog is much a personal diary for him:

> This is something that isn't always clear to people, my work online has always been me working with my body of thought, which I hope is useful to other people, so long as it is useful to other people they will continue to pay me. But that’s not the primary motivation for it.

In fact, there is a post in March 2008 where Stuart actually writes the following comment under a link: “This is one of those links I post here for my own future reference.”

Stuart blogs about whatever he’s interested in:

I have a background and a long standing and a life-long interest in what I've decided are in four major areas: philosophy of course, media, including news media and publications and that sort of thing in general, education which I take to include learning, discovery, creativity, and then finally computers, everything from informal logic, to computer logic, to computer programming, to networks. So within those four areas of interest I have various beliefs, views, philosophies, theories, etc, which interact with each other and so the things that I blog about, relate, to extend, support or comment on my beliefs, in those four areas.

An example of Stuart offers his views on the topic of philosophy can be found in the following post which appears on his blog in April 2008:

As a philosopher by both training and inclination, *I* never thought philosophy was out of fashion. Students today are beginning to agree. "I"s *(sic)* a major that helps them become quick learners and gives them strong skills in writing, analysis and critical thinking." And I am evidence, I think, that not all philosophers spend their lives in academic tweed sipping wine and discussing Marx over caviar.

An example of Stuart offers his views on the topic of media, news and publications can be found in the following post which appears on his blog in February 2008:

A huge coalition of Canadian businesses has banded together to oppose the harsh copyright reforms being considered by the government. The CBC calls it "A who's who of powerful companies and business associations." The coalition includes

"Google, Yahoo, Rogers, Telus, the Canadian Alliance of Broadcasters and the Retail Council of Canada." As others have pointed out, this move completely undermines the idea that businesses are in favour of the copyright reforms in Canada.

An example of Stuart offers his views on the topic of education can be found in the following post which appears on his blog in April 2008:

> [Name concealed to protect identity of the study participant] discovers video, and imagines it to be professors recording their own videos. Not that I'm opposed to that, of course. It's just that the use of video in learning is so much more than professors recording video.

An example of Stuart offers his views on the topic of computers and networks can be found in the following post which appears on his blog in February 2008:

> This is an interesting take on the news aggregator. But I wouldn't give up on Digg just yet - it looks like the service is especially adept at picking up 'press release' style news stories, but not much more. Still, there's some good thinking here.

As for the preparation of his blog posts, Stuart has a daily routine. Stuart's daily routine consists of reading his email and reading his RSS feeds. First he'll sort through his email and do a preselection by deleting stuff that isn't of interest to him which leaves him with stuff that is of interest to him. With the RSS feeds, he'll star stuff that is of interest to him to either blog about it right away or put it aside and it will be one of the candidates for a future blog, which leaves him with a dozens of candidates at any given time of things that he can write about. Stuart explains that this is his morning routine from six-thirty to seven-thirty in the morning. Later on in the day, between four and five, when he's getting the newsletter ready for publication, he'll look at his RSS started items or blogged about items and then his email items. Because on his Website, the software he's written has an input form, he'll just fill in the input form, put in the title, the URL, the author, the commentary that he wrote and then he'll submit it. At about five o'clock every day he hits the command that publishes the newsletter, and it compiles the newsletter containing all the posts that he's done that day, and sends out the emails and creates his RSS feeds.

Given the rigour he has with his newsletter type blog, Stuart reports something seemingly contradictory in his interview: "I'm really bad at writing to a schedule or writing on demand, I just don't have the same interest in it."

As for verifying the content in his blog, Stuart doesn't believe that it is applicable to the type of writing that he does:

> The word "verify" suggests some sort of empirical process, but it's not the sort of writing that I do. So I don't write for example the "State of Affairs in US schools today..." or something like that, that would require that someone go out and actually measure the state of affairs in schools today. My approach is much more of a critical theoretical approach, so I draw largely on my own experiences, I draw largely on things that I see online and on the Internet and I infer from what I see. And this is a process, sometimes it's pure deductive reasoning, sometimes it's

inductive, although that's not so common for me. A lot of times it's pattern recognition I see instances of a pattern and I comment on that.

Stuart isn't suggesting that verification isn't necessary because said that way, what he says could be equally true or false, and he doesn't believe that that's the case:

> I do believe that there is a very good likelihood that what I have to say is true and accurate … like for example is when I do predictions, I just do the predictions based of my admittedly unconventional methodology, and then let the world bare them out. And my track records on my predictions are very good. So that's the sort of thing that leads me to believe that I'm on the right track. Similarly when I talk about Network Theory, I don't just make it up off the top of my head, but there is a set of background reading that I've done from Computer Science, and as well as Social Network Theory, so I always have these things, these concepts and ideas that I have in the back of my mind, as I do my writing.

One of the predictions Stuart makes in January 2008 talks about the decline of Microsoft:

> The low cost (and ease of use) of open source software, combined with low funding for education ("about 9% of spending on defense and the war on terror") means that commercial software giants like Microsoft will see a continually declining share of the educational technology market.

This isn't so much Stuart's original prediction. At the end of this statement, there is a link to a one line blog post which directs the reader to another blog post where similar predictions are stated. In fact, the portion of text that Stuart puts between quotation marks was taken from that second source. That second source however does not back up their statistic about the percentage that is being reported.

Stuart explains that he doesn't go out and conduct empirical investigations in order to duplicate or replicate the results so he doesn't need to have that kind of research rigour in his blog. He does claim however that: "however we know about statistics, we know about statistical theory and if what the person is presented is poor research, I'll certainly comment on that."

As for his relationship with his readers, Stuart's initial response to his relationship with his readers is a softly whispered "strained" followed by a laugh. Though he downplays this by saying that he's kidding, Stuart continues to say that it all goes back to the verification thing. In fact, Stuart does have a lot of debates on his site. There have even been instances where the ideas that he suggests have created online debates that spill off his own blog site. In March 2008, Stuart published on his personal writing blog a video of himself talking about what turned out to be a sensitive subject. Some of his readers commented directly on his blog and other bloggers discussed the contents of his video post on their own blogs. Three days later, Stuart addressed the comments on his professional blog:

> I will admit that I am disappointed at the level of discourse that followed my recent video outlining my position. This post, from [name concealed to protect identity of the study participant], is easily the best of the responses, and engages the details of

my argument in a constructive manner. A longer response is warranted, which I will undertake in a few days. The main response seems to be based on the idea that I haven't done any research. There is also quite a bit of attribution of motives ("he's an academic/bureacrat *(sic)* with a vested interest in *pushing* all this newfangled media 'education' stuff," for example). But mostly, the critics misrepresent the position I have taken.

Stuart has a large number of readers and if he says something in any sense obviously wrong, they'll tell him under no uncertain terms. On the subject of his relationship with his readers, Stuart adds:

[Name concealed to protect identity of the study participant] once commented to me that I have very loyal readers, which I find very interesting but, I think that's probably an accurate observation. And so it's nice to have readers, you know and so I'm certainly attentive to them when I write, although it's one of these balance things right. I can't be writing in order to obtain readers and I can't be in order to please readers, because it will change whatever it is I'm writing. So there are there, they're important and I try to take care of them, but at the same time I don't cater to them.

Stuart does engage with his readers in the discussion area. He invites them to comment and he tries to be open.

I allow annoying comments, so, or if you wish you can register so I know who you are. I don't allow spam and offensive or rude or derogatory comments, I'll just delete those without comment, but I try to keep my discussion area as open as possible. I try and let people have the last word which is a little unusual. On a lot of Websites, if you make a comment the comment, the person will try to come back and defend themselves, and that's ok. But I don't think I should always have the last word on my own site, and I'm happy to let the reader have the last word, even if the last word is critical. It's not lack of interest or that I don't have anything to say but, I don't think I should dominate the discussion.

Stuart points out that these discussion happens in the comments area of his blog, but being that he's participating in the blogosphere, people comment on their own blogs as well, and presumably in emails to each other, and on Twitter and wherever.

Other ways Stuart communicates with his readers are through the occasional interview, at conferences and now and then via a steady stream of email.

As for his professional development, Stuart explains:

> This "is" my professional development, this is how I learn. It's both how I learn and how I teach. And it's funny, just on the side people say "how can you be in any position to talk about this stuff, you don't use this stuff in classes you don't even teach classes", and I say "that's my point I don't teach in classes, I don't learn in classes, this is how I teach and learn". And I think it works quite well.

Stuart also participates in several international conferences as both a presenter and as an attendee.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

OVERVIEW

In this chapter, I analyze the data presented in the last chapter, and describe patterns observed among the bloggers. I will first present background information on how I analysed the data. Afterwards, this will be followed by the blog analysis findings and then the interview findings. Finally, I will tie the results together and link them to the literature on blogging with the objective of identifying the key elements of the phenomenon of blogging. At this point, I will revisit the original research questions presented in Chapter 1 of this study and I will present hypotheses about the characteristics or behaviour of bloggers.

CRITERIA FOR THE ANALYSES OF BLOGS

The data from the blog analysis finding has been coded with the purpose of identifying patterns. Each of the blogs were analysed based on the criteria identified in Chapter 3 which were divided into 3 sets: the criteria for documenting the blog's background information, the criteria for analyzing posts from each blog and the criteria for analyzing the potential credibility of the blogs and their entries.

Criteria for Documenting the Blog's Background Information

For each blog, the following background information was noted:

- Stated purpose (if provided)
- Regularity of contributions (based on dates)

- Number of contributors (main contributors and guest contributors)
- Associations to larger blogging networks

Criteria for Analyzing Posts from Each Blog

In Chapter 3, I committed myself to analyze a minimum of 10 posts from each blog. Because of the degree of variety in the blogs, the analysis was extended to all the entries over a 4-month period. For each, I answered the following questions:

- What are their topics?
- What is the average size of blog posts?
- What is the nature of the content, such as an expression of opinion, advice or "how-to," report of research, or comment on material posted elsewhere?
- Are they written in the first person, casual terms or in an academic form?
- What is the extent and nature of citation of sources?
- Are there key words identified, tags or other references to index the blog (category in the main list)?
- Was there a timeline index?
- Are there references to other blogs within the blog posts? Are there references to other blogs in a blogroll sidebar?
- Were there syndication options for their readers?
- Were there any other additional or special features?
- Have others posted comments? What is the nature of those comments? Have the comments been replied to on the blog?

Criteria for Analyzing the Potential Credibility of the Blogs and their Entries

In addition, while compiling the findings, I kept in mind the following criteria for evaluating the credibility of online content which I adapted from The Health Summit Working Group (Rippen, 2000) which I outlined in Chapter 3. These criteria are:

- Credibility: What are the sources cited in the text? What is their currency? How relevant are these sources? What is their utility? What types of sources are they: Peer reviewed? Popular press? Other blogs?
- Content: Is the material known to be accurate and complete? Are disclaimers used to indicate opinions and unsubstantiated facts? Are citations used to support broad claims?
- Disclosure: Is the mission and purpose of the blog transparent? Are the bloggers and/or interested parties clearly identified? Is there a clear distinction of whether the blogger(s) is reporting fact or volunteering opinion?
- Links: Do the blog entries have a permalink, that is their own permanent and distinct Web address for referencing purposes? Are the links framing the blog (e.g.: the blogroll) active and operating properly? Are the links relevant? Do the links lead to credible sources?
- Design: Is the overall site designed with the user in mind? Do the sites visuals overload the user? Is information framing the blog logically organized? Is there an internal search capability? Are the blog entries tagged and stored in categories that are accessible via a menu?

- Interactivity: Do the blog entries provide an opportunity for readers to leave comments? Do the entries have a pingback or trackback feature? Does the blog have an RSS feature so that it might be aggregated to another site? Is there a contact email address to contact the blog owner directly?
- Caveats: (closely related to disclosure) Is the intention of the blog disclosed? Is it indicated whether the blog is informational in nature or is set up for marketing or advertising purposes?

FINDINGS FROM THE ANALYSES OF BLOGS

As reported in table 5.1, the first significant pattern is that all 5 bloggers have a mission statement. However, in each of their statements, it is not clearly stated whether the blogger's posts are to be fact or opinion based. This again is a significant pattern.

Another significant pattern is that in each instance, the bloggers identity is clearly disclosed in a biographical note. Only 4 of 5 of the bloggers display a photograph of themselves which is a weak pattern.

Identification of the blog and the blogger	Instances
blog mission/purpose statement	5
clear statement of fact or opinion in the mission statement	0
biography of the blogger	5
photo of blogger	4

Table 5.1: Identification of the blog and the blogger

In terms of the themes in the mission statement, Table 5.2 shows the two weak patterns: 3 bloggers state that they blog about learning and 4 bloggers left themselves some leeway to discuss other topics by adding "miscellaneous" statement.

Stated purpose	Instances
community building	1
email newsletters	1
information	2
instructional design	1
knowledge management	1
learning	3
links	1
methods	1
miscellaneous stuff	4
news	2
technology	1
tools	1

Table 5.2: Stated purpose

As reported in Table 5.3, there is a wide range in the regularity of contributions and no pattern about regularity can be found. Frequency of blog posts is individual to each blogger.

Regularity of contributions	Bloggers
between 1 and 60 (over a 4-month period)	3
between 61 and 120 (over a 4-month period)	1
over 121 (over a 4-month period)	1

Table 5.3 Regularity of contributions

As indicated in Table 5.4, in all five cases, the blogger was the sole contributor to their blog. As explained Chapter 4, my initial criteria had me searching for a blog with multiple contributors. Jill's blog partially met these requirements as the blogger is part of larger network of bloggers in her organization, each blogging about their field of interest and expertise. Assuming that editorial structure may have an impact on the overall experience, that is a single author would have more liberties with content where as an edited blog would likely have a more rigorous content screening process.

Number of contributors	Bloggers
multiple contributors	0
sole contributor	5

Table 5.4: Number of contributors

Table 5.5 shows that there is quite a bit of variety in the types of blogging systems used. Some have a proprietary blogging system whereas one has developed his own system. However, a weak pattern is that 4 of the 5 bloggers are hosting their blogs on a local server rather than on a blog network such as BlogSpot.

Blogging system used	Hosted on a network	Hosted on a local server
hosted on the BlogSpot network	1	
open-source system WordPress		2
proprietary system		1
self-designed system		1

Table 5.5: Blogging system used

However, as Table 5.6 demonstrates, some of the bloggers are associated to a larger blogging network. One of the blogger's blog was hosted on her employer's site along with a half-dozen co-worker blogs. Two of the bloggers' blogs were hosted on the Blogger's online hosted service which means that they were linked to other blogs, not necessarily in the training and development field however. There is no significant pattern in terms of official associations to larger blogging networks as it is indicated on the blogs.

Associations to larger blogging networks	Blogs
associated to her corporate blogging network	1
independently form a network	3
the larger network of Blogger blogs	1

Table 5.6: Associations to larger blogging networks

Even though all blogs are written by training and development professionals, Table 5.7 shows that there is no significant pattern in terms of topics discussed in the blogs. Each blogger is blogging on subjects and themes that are linked to their own personal interests and/or professional development:

- Jeff is an independent consultant based in the United States of America who blogs about informal learning.

- Jill is a training and development researcher based in the United States of America who blogs about Web based learning.

- Kate is a learning consultant for an organization based in the United Kingdom who blogs about the learner's perspective on learning.

- Mark is an independent consultant based in South East Asia who blogs about the links between trends in training and knowledge management.

- Stuart is an education researcher based in Canada who blogs about what he learns through his research.

Quite often, because the blogs are so personal, they are related to an event in the blogger's life or to an article they read, a film or video they watched or even a conference or event they attended. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the data in Table 5.6 is that there are no rules or boundaries to the topics that can be blogged about but rather that they are largely influenced by the blogger's learning journey. The only significant pattern is that they all have a strong tendency to blog about issues related to learning in general. There is a weak pattern in terms of pointing to resources on the Web or elsewhere.

Topics	Jeff	Jill	Kate	Mark	Stuart
pointing to resources on the Web and elsewhere	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	Strong
issues related to learning in general	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong
practical ways of implementing tools and technology	Weak	Strong		Strong	Strong
projects the blogger is working on	Weak	Weak	Weak		
what is going on in the blogger's life	Weak	Strong	Strong		Weak

Table 5.7: Topics

As show in Table 5.8, there is a weak pattern that all bloggers use text in all of their posts. Only one blogger had 1 post that did not have text, other than the title, to frame the video that he was showing in his post.

Text in the body of the post (excludes title)	Blog posts
100% of posts have text	4
99% or less of posts have text	1

Table 5.8: Text in the body of the post (excludes title)

As Table 5.9 demonstrates, there is no significant pattern in terms of size of post nor is there a common range between the minimum and maximum amount of words.

Bloggers	Average amount of words in posts			
	0-50	50-150	200-500	500+
Jeff	Low end		High end	
Jill		Low end		High end
Kate			Low end	High end
Mark	Low end	High end		
Stuart	Low end		High end	

Table 5.9: Average amount of words in posts

Certain blog posts combine more than one multimedia element, for example, some posts may have a logo and a screenshot, whereas some may have a photo and a video. Table 5.10 indicates the amount of individual multimedia elements used overall as well as the percentage of blog post in which multimedia elements are found. There is recognizable pattern in terms of the amount of multimedia used in the blog.

Bloggers	Blog posts with multimedia elements	
	Amount	Percentage
Jeff	37	90%
Jill	39	83%
Kate	45	67%
Mark	1	3%
Stuart	10	33%

Table 5.10: Blog posts with multimedia elements

In order to better understanding how multimedia is used, the next few tables look at the breakdown of types of multimedia elements into 3 categories:

- Photographs, images and logos – mainly image based.
- Diagrams and screenshots – contain text and image.
- And videos and SlideShare (SlideShare is a free service for sharing presentations and slideshows, mainly produced with Microsoft PowerPoint or Apple Keynote, over the web) – has movement and potentially sound and will contain text and/or narration.

As Table 5.11 demonstrates, there is a strong pattern that all 5 bloggers use photographs, images and logos as media elements in their posts. There is no pattern in the use of diagrams and screenshots and quite a bit of difference in the use of video.

Types of multimedia elements	Photograph, images, logos		Diagrams, screenshots		Video and SlideShare	
	#	%	#	&	#	%
Jeff	25	63%	9	23%	6	15%
Jill	37	80%	6	13%	3	7%
Kate	13	59%	1	5%	8	36%
Mark	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Stuart	10	83%	2	17%	0	0%

Table 5.11: Types of multimedia elements

Table 5.12 looks at the role the media plays in the blogs. At this time, the media is divided in to 2 categories. The first category is media as a supportive image, in other words if the media element was not present in the text, the meaning of the blog post would not be lost. The media elements in these cases give some additional, but not essential, information or might show a visual metaphor. The second category is media as the focus of the content, in other words the media element being used as the discussion piece and without the media element, the message would be incomplete. There is no significant pattern in how photographs, images and logos are being used in blog posts; in fact, there is a great degree of difference. However, there is a significant pattern that when bloggers that use diagrams, screenshots, videos and SlideShare, the media becomes the focus of the content. It also should be noted that the source of the media, especially with regards to photographs, images and logos, is not always referenced.

Use of multimedia	**Photograph, images, logos**		**Diagrams, screenshots**		**Video or SlideShare**	
	Support	Focus	Support	Focus	Support	Focus
Jeff	88%	12%	0%	100%	0%	100%
Jill	62%	38%	0%	100%	0%	100%
Kate	47%	53%	0%	100%	0%	100%
Mark	0%	100%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Stuart	0%	100%	0%	100%	n/a	n/a

Table 5.12: Uses of multimedia elements

As reported in table 5.13, all 5 bloggers write in the first person and none of them write in an academic style. Academic writing is structured research written by scholars for an audience of their peers. Academic writing addresses research questions and reports finding in a factually-based and objectively-presented manner. Academic writing also requires that a literature review—a survey of publications related to the topic, specifically the critical points of current knowledge—is conducted and provided to contextualize the topic or study which is being presented. The bloggers write in a mainly business writing style which is direct and open to opinion-based comments. Occasionally, some bloggers will use an informal writing style containing colloquialisms but there is no significant pattern for this.

In terms of the content, some blog posts are more editorial in fashion. However, there are rarely no statements such as "in my opinion" or "these are my own thoughts" to indicate what is opinion and what is fact. However, occasionally a blogger will, like Jill, start their blog post off with a statement such as: "Warning: this post is full of digressions, contradictions, and tangents. (I'm just saying…)" or like Kate concluding a handful of her posts with "Okay - I'll get off my soapbox now!"

Form of writing	**Jeff**	**Jill**	**Kate**	**Mark**	**Stuart**
uses the first person	x	x	x	x	x
uses business writing style	x	x	x	x	x
at times uses informal writing style containing colloquialisms	x	x			

Table 5.13: Form of writing

As table 5.14 indicates, there is a significant pattern in that all bloggers write about their opinions or feelings towards the subject matter they are discussing. No post analysed is labelled overtly as opinion, but often, the way in which the posts are written, such as in the examples provided in the case studies, imply that they are opinions. However, this is not constant throughout the posts as sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the author's opinion and fact. There is a weak pattern in terms of referencing to other resources or research on the Web. There is also a weak pattern in that three of them relate their own experiences. Also, four of them refer quite a bit to other online resources.

Nature of the content	Jeff	Jill	Kate	Mark	Stuart
information and explanation				x	x
own experience	x	x	x		
relates a lot about self	x	x	x		
own opinion or feelings towards something	x	x	x	x	x
referencing to resources on the Web	x	x		x	x
referencing to research on the Web	x	x		x	x

Table 5.14: Nature of the content

In terms of the credibility of the types of sources cited in the text, there is no consistency. Some are links to journals, some to popular press, some to other websites and some to other blogs. The utility of the links and citations are to support the blogger's opinion, claims or simply give the reader further reading material.

As reported in Table 5.15, there is a significant pattern in that all bloggers quote their sources and provide the link and reference to their sources.

Citation of sources	**Jeff**	**Jill**	**Kate**	**Mark**	**Stuart**
bibliographical notes		x			
links and references to sources	x	x	x	x	x
quotes from sources	x	x	x	x	x

Table 5.15: Citation of sources

As reported in Table 5.16, only four out of the five bloggers index their blog entries with key words or categories. This makes it a weak pattern. Only one provides an index for her tags, which is the form of a tag cloud.

Key words	**Jeff**	**Jill**	**Kate**	**Mark**	**Stuart**
indexes their blog	x	x	x		x
clickable categories to see other related posts	x	x	x		x
tag index		x			

Table 5.16: Key words

There is only a weak pattern of archiving by date as reported in Table 5.17. This might be due to the fact that they are all using different blogging applications which offer different options. However, Jeff and Jill use an identical blogging system, WordPress 2.51 and neither of them use the blog archive sorted by date.

However, WordPress offers the option of providing a blog archive by date. One might assume that it is purely coincidental that Jeff and Jill did not activate this option.

Timeline indexing	**Jeff**	**Jill**	**Kate**	**Mark**	**Stuart**
blog archive sorted by date			x	x	x
most recent posts	x	x			
no timeline indexing	x	x			

Table 5.17: Timeline indexing

Table 5.18 shows that only one of the five bloggers has a blogroll. In Jill's case, all the links framing the blog (e.g.: the blogroll) are active and operating properly.

Though it is a weak pattern, it confirms what Jeff was saying in his interview that blogrolls are becoming obsolete.

Blogroll	**Jeff**	**Jill**	**Kate**	**Mark**	**Stuart**
does not have a blogroll	x		x	x	X
has a blogroll		x			

Table 5.18: Blogroll

All five bloggers allow their readers to subscribe to their blogs one way or another as demonstrated in Table 5.19.

Only 2 of the 5 bloggers allow for subscription to their blogs via an email newsletter. All 5 blogs offer syndication of their blogs either through a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds or an Atom feed.

Syndication allowing readers to subscribe	**Jeff**	**Jill**	**Kate**	**Mark**	**Stuart**
Email		x			x
RSS or Atom Feed	x	x	x	x	x

Table 5.19: Syndication allowing readers to subscribe

Any feature on the blog that isn't part of the standard features found on a blog is considered a special feature. These features are often added in the form of a widget.

> A widget (or control) is an element of a graphical user interface (GUI) that displays an information arrangement changeable by the user, such as a window or a text box. The defining characteristic of a widget is to provide a single interaction point for the direct manipulation of a given kind of data. Widgets are basic visual building blocks which, combined in an application, hold all the data processed by the application and the available interactions on this data. (*GUI Widget,* n.d.)

Table 5.20 shows the lack of significant patterns in special features or widgets.

Special features or widgets	**Jeff**	**Jill**	**Kate**	**Mark**	**Stuart**
advanced search page				x	x
social media cross-referencing		x	x		

suggestion of similar type of posts	x				

Table 5.20: Special features or widgets

As shown in Table 5.21, four out of the five bloggers let readers comment on their blogs and three of them allow for trackbacks. These are weak patterns. The average amount of comments per blog post is a weak pattern as well.

Comments	Jeff	Jill	Kate	Mark	Stuart
has activated comments on their blog	x	x	x		x
lists most recent comments on their blog	x	x		n/a	x
receives comments	x	x	x	n/a	x
receives trackbacks	x	x	x	n/a	
amount of comments for a 4-month period	92	353	131	n/a	54
average amount of comments per blog post	2.24	7.51	1.96	n/a	4.03

Table 5.21: Comments

As stated in Chapter 2, one principle that guides social computing in education is Gordon Pask's Conversation Theory, which states that learning occurs through conversation. That is, through conversation, individuals co-construct understanding on a given subject and, as a result, make knowledge explicit. Boyd (2001) amplifies this: "The primacy of multi-level, externally grounded, conversations to promote agreements (including agreements on where precisely to disagree) which constitute understandings which, in turn, can constitute higher order participants" (p. 563). Simply allowing for comments and/or trackbacks does not assure discussion between the blogger and their reader.

In terms of links, all the blogs entries have a permalink, that is their own permanent and distinct Web address for referencing purposes. Table 5.22 shows the ratio between the comments from visitors, the trackbacks to other sites from visitors and the response from the original blogger.

Only 2 of the bloggers engage in ongoing discussions with their commenters. These 2 bloggers also have regular commenters, that is people who comment at least 3 times a month on the blog.

Blogger	Comments from visitors	Trackbacks to other sites	Responses from Blogger	Regular commenters
Jeff	49%	33%	18%	
Jill	57%	4%	39%	x
Kate	51%	1%	48%	x
Mark	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Stuart	87%	n/a	13%	

Table 5.22: Comments, trackbacks and responses

In light of the information reported in Table 5.22 which indicates that a significant number of comments are generated by the bloggers themselves, Table 5.23 presents the total amount of comments from visitors for a 4-month period and the average comments from visitors per blog post.

Comments and trackbacks from visitors	Jeff	Jill	Kate	Mark	Stuart
amount of comments for a 4-month period	75	215	68	n/a	47
average amount of comments per blog post	1.83	4.57	1.01	n/a	1.57

Table 5.23: Comments and trackbacks from visitors

Because the Technorati Authority and Alexa rankings were collected in order to determine the readership of the blogs, table 5.24 makes a comparison between the average amount of comments on a post and the blog's "link to" popularity as returned by Technorati and Alexa.

There doesn't seem to be any notable pattern between the degree of links to a blog and the amount of comments they receive.

Comments and trackbacks from visitors	Jeff	Jill	Kate	Mark	Stuart
average amount of comments per blog post	1.83	4.57	1.01	n/a	1.57
Technorati Authority	113	53	41	46	706
Alexa report on sites "linking in"	43	149	13	300	899
Alexa report on actual "links to"	408	455	316	690	5835

Table 5.24: Comments and trackbacks from visitors

The next two tables look at the relationships between the bloggers that I have studied. I did not limit myself to the 4-month study period but rather did a search to locate instances of each. The criterion for both tables was at least 1 reference to another blogger to demonstrate that a link has been made.

Table 5.25 reports that there was at least once instance found where a blogger refers to another blogger in the study.

Receiving comments from other bloggers in the study	Jeff	Jill	Kate	Mark	Stuart
Jeff			x	x	x
Jill	x		x		x
Kate	x	x			x
Mark					
Stuart		x	x		

Table 5.25: Receiving comments from other bloggers in the study

Table 5.26 reports that there was at least once instance found where a blogger was referred to by another blogger in the study.

Blogging about other bloggers in the study	Jeff	Jill	Kate	Mark	Stuart
Jeff				x	x
Jill	x		x		x
Kate	x	x			x
Mark					

Stuart	x	x	x	x	

Table 5.26: Blogging about other bloggers in the study

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The perspectives gained by analyzing the blog posts over a 4-month period gave me certain insights into my original research questions, which are:

- Who are the bloggers in the field? That is, what motivates them to blog and what qualifications do they believe they bring to the task?
- What is their purpose in blogging? That is, what do they hope to accomplish? What influence do they hope to achieve, if any?
- What do professionals in the educational technology who choose to blog choose to write about?
- How do they select the content to report? How do they verify the content, if at all?
- What evidence do the bloggers have of their influence?

However, the interviews enabled me to go deeper into attempting to answer these questions and generated additional questions.

In terms of who are they are, all five bloggers have or are working towards a Master's degree. Three of them, Jill, Kate and Mark have graduate studies in Education. Four out of five of them are interested in writing and researching. Three of them have done work in corporate training and consulting.

None of them have profiles where originally, they began their studies with the purpose to work in the training and development industries but rather, as Stuart puts it, "fell into the field completely by accident". Their areas of interest and expertise vary as they mentioned in their interview and this was confirmed in the diversity of the topics they blog about.

Although this is might be coincidence of the process for selecting bloggers, one pattern that emerged is that the three male bloggers discovered blogging on their own at least seven years ago, before the 2001 press blog boom. The two women were introduced to blogs by co-workers within the last few years. The motivations to start blogging however are individual.

In terms of what motivates them to blog and what qualifications do they believe they bring to the task, the answer is not so simple to identify. The bloggers all blog for individual reasons. Their blog can be either a place for personal reflection, a diary, an archive of thoughts, a way to reach out to the world, a way to exchange and build communities or a mix of a few of these. It is at this time impossible to generalise about the motivation of bloggers. For example, Jill claims is all about sharing her ideas:

> I think that when we all started, we were trying to, like you know… "here's the research I'm working on" and just trying to just trying to give some facts people would find interesting and stuff, and it more morphed into blogging is much more personal there's a lot more "I" and "Me", in that kind of writing, and so became more of a "how does my experiences in daily life relate to corporate training", so it

kind of went in that direction too. People seem interested in reading that for some reason, I have no idea why …

In fact, there is no evidence of why one blog is read more than another. Stuart and Jeff seem to have more years of blogging experience and yet, Jill has at least 2.5 times more comments on her blog posts than both of them. It would be tempting to say that this is due to the fact that she interacts with her visitors, but by that rationale, Kate is the one that interacts with her visitors the most and of the 4 bloggers who have comments activate, she is the one with the lowest amount of respondents.

When asked if part of his inspiration was to somehow have a medium to diffuse information throughout the community, Stuart answered: "No, more accurately would be something like to have a place to put my stuff."

Just as the motivations to blog are different, so are the inspirations. Seasoned blogger Mark used to blog quite rigorously: "I used to do five posts in a day, including Saturdays and Sundays, for almost like maybe two years, and it would be religious". Now, he has a different mindset for blogging: "if I don't see something that's really interesting, really my perspective, something you know that I think so unique which identifies with what I'm doing, I won't blog about it". On the other hand, Kate has a more unstructured approach: "I don't have a set process. I'm not one of these people who sits down at six o'clock each evening and produces a blog post. I don't see it as that level of commitment." Kate explains her inspiration for blogging: "I think that whenever I feel really strongly about something, or something really moves me, on the learning experience of my own I tend to share it on my blog."

The common denominator is just like what was explained in the last quote by Kate, that they feel they need to write what they are thinking or feeling, their opinion or reflections. Jeff explains that blogging is part of his learning process:

> I've written about blogging as a way of learning and I think it's very much... it forces one to consider what's important, to draw conclusions, to sort of shape up thinking and for me it creates an ongoing resource I can look back in, I mean if I'm looking for something I'll often just look in my blog.

The way that bloggers select topics is individual; no patterns emerged in the data. Stuart is quite structured when it comes to picking his topics; he bases it on his specific four major areas: philosophy, media, education and computers. Jeff on the other hand has a less structured approach: "What ever comes to mind" summarized the extent of his blog topics. He followed that statement with "Sometimes it's just for a personal account. Often it's tied somehow to learning, because life is for learning."

Although the process of preparing blog entries varies among participants, some patterns emerged. Mark and Jill explain that for their longer posts, they will write drafts. Mark points out the following:

> If you notice on [my blog] there are two points to it, ones the articles ones the blog, the blogs are spontaneous, you just want to do it. The articles are more thought-out

more times spent on it, more research. It's written in a manner that's meant to be comprehensive, I would typically spend almost a week to get an article out, but I would not spend more than a minute to get a blog post out.

Jill account of how she prepares her blog is similar:

I struggled a little bit when I first started, I was spending way too much time on it, writing, so I've become much more efficient where, you know, I think part of having readership is posting enough but not too much. So rather than having these lengthy posts sometimes I'll just have some simple video, something funny, that's very short, so I'll those type of things. But, then other times when there's something that warrants a longer post or if I have more to say on, and those I tend to set aside a block of time, and work on two or three of those at once, rather than a little bit everyday. I find it's better to say I'm going to take a morning and work on some of these. And, I won't publish them all at once I may publish them over the course of two weeks, but, I've written all at once.

Jeff tends to repost some articles he's published in magazines and journals and it is likely, given the nature of writing for such mediums, that a draft was involved. However, he claims to have a spontaneous nature to his blogging process:

[My personal blog] is entirely spontaneous. I don't write something and copy it to the blog, I just write it. And similar things go on with the [my professional blog], but there, often I'll have notes, something you know that I've just written for myself that I sort of pull out and just stuff into the blog.

Mark claims that writing blogs has improved his writing style and explains his process as the following:

> This was one of the key influences for me. The writing aspect was not strong for me, I was a little loose in the writing aspect of it, because I never focussed on exactly on what the sentence should convey, never really understood how a simple paragraph can convey meaning you know nothing was never there it was all about getting things done. But after writing about blogging for three or four years, so I try to really understand that writing is essential, important that became an integral part of me and so every blog post was written in a manner, you know I'm going to experiment with something today and make it more tight, or can I get my idea across in a much more simple manner, so that became much more a challenge for me.

Mark seems to make short blog posts and reserves his longer posts for articles. The other bloggers however seem to have a span of short posts and longer "article" type posts within their blog as demonstrated earlier in Table 5.8 which indicated the average amount of words in posts.

In terms of how they view their own contribution, all of the bloggers are clear in their interviews about the fact that they are stating their opinion on their blogs. Jill explains that her posts are much opinion-based: "sometimes I'll just write, you know as if this just my opinion and it's really not based on any research, so you kind of underscore it that way, so this is really just my opinion you know, and it may or may not be true."

When asked if she explicitly states that it's her opinion, Jill answered: "I try to yeah. I think just writing from the first person does that automatically." Kate differentiates an opinion from a perspective: "it's not just an opinion in a sense, I mean yes, I will express my opinion, but sometimes I feel I can add a perspective to things." Stuart on the other hand seems to let the reader be the judge:

> What I say could be equally true or false, and I don't believe that that's the case. I do believe that there is a very good likelihood that what I have to say is true and accurate, but you know, a lot of, like for example is when I do predictions, I just do the predictions based of my admittedly unconventional methodology, and then let the world bare them out".

Jeff comments that he doesn't even feel the need to verify facts:

> I don't think of it as sort of fact checking and that sort of stuff. I write about what I believe in. And I'll recognise sources. I some times say, this next part is speculation, or my best guess but, that's the way it comes out. It isn't some thing I go back and try to police.

On the other hand, the fact that Jeff has several years of experience in the field of training and development and is a keynote presenter at international conferences indicates that some people regard him as an expert. Stuart who is also regarded as an expert by the same criteria as Jeff explains that his readers will negotiate his text with him: "I've got a large number of readers and if I say something in any sense obviously wrong, they'll tell me under no uncertain terms." The question that remains is what percentage of his readers have the knowledge to make find the errors in his posts and what percentage will take his word as truth?

They don't have much information on how the reader is interpreting their blog posts. They do not know for certain if their readers are interpreting their opinions as opinions, if they can distinguish an opinion that is given by an individual who might appear to be an expert in a field and what is considered to be a research-based expert opinion.

Furthermore, none of the bloggers explicitly state that the content that they link to on their blog is not verified. A significant pattern is that they all quote, reference and link to their sources, except for in some cases photographic images. This indicates to me that the bloggers I have surveyed have the desire to act as responsible Internet citizens in that way. They might not have all the facts however. However, merely reporting the link doesn't mean that the link or the quote is verified. Can readers make the logical link that just because an expert links to a source to provide his or her opinion, it doesn't make that source valid? Such an assumption can have serious implications for the reader and the blogger alike. Some bloggers, have, in some cases, limited formal education about education and training, and do not verify their facts and assume that readers know that the blog is nothing but opinion. There is a need for this type of disclaimer in the blog. Those points should not be accepted at face value—there are some huge assumptions there, and the likelihood for falsehoods being reported is high. To give you an example—academics in informal learning would beg to differ with the blogger who writes about this topic that he fully understands the topic. Mark states this point clearly during his interview:

> But if you don't go ahead and go deep your left with very superficial layer of confidence... so this is interesting I was trying to get a word maybe I'm getting it now talking to you, I'm trying to call it "browser knowledge" which is basically this superficial feeling of having control over the subject you know. But, if you don't go ahead and learn it in a deep and engaged manner this superficial layer kind of blinds you from, from further exploration. You get this arrogance about you which stops you from learning the right things. So I've come across a lot of people, the first thing they tell you is "I blog", that doesn't mean anything you know really, but over here the connotation is that "Hey listen, I blog so that's why… so I'm smart". So yeah you have to dig through that, the wrong impression I think in blogs that are creating, their full of browser knowledge, or maybe the blog knowledge. It's kind of misleading.

Kate explains that social media changes the rules of the game: "it's a joint responsibility it isn't a read/write word its social media, so the onus is on us all readers and writers alike". If what Kate claims is true, that in the realm of Web 2.0 and social media, that there is a joint responsibility for ensuring the credibility of information, can we assume that the readers are aware of their responsibility, given that there are generally no disclaimers whatsoever?

Nonetheless, they all seem to have some kind of relationship with their readers. However, the closeness of the relationships varies. Both female bloggers talk about a sense of community. Jill claims she knew from the beginning that there was the potential for exchange, and yet it still took her by surprise:

> It was more like you know, just putting what I'm thinking about on a daily bases out there, and communicating with others about it. Which I think was the big you know I guess "oh my gosh I didn't know it would happen this way", you kind of think that your just going to write and post something, and it's just kind of something you write, and your always a little bit amazed when someone reads it or comments on it. So I didn't expect to feel like I was collaborating with others, even though, I knew. It was more to me a writing and reflecting exercise, and I didn't really consider the collaboration piece of it and how that would help me understand things and help me work through some things that I was working on, and see things from a different perspective.

Kate seems to have completely embraced the collaboration aspect of blogging and considers her commenting on other people's blogs as part of her blogging process:

> Sometimes a week may go by and I won't blog at all, and then, but I may comment on other peoples blogs, to me it's a conversation. And a conversation doesn't happen… you know, I don't, you don't sort of time yourself and say "ok, twenty seconds have passed I need to say something, because the silence has been going of too long". If it's a proper conversation, the talk flows backwards and forwards,

people speak when they need to speak and they speak over each other, and they contradict each other, you know all of those things all the analogies will come to patience and that's how I see it. When I've got something to contribute, I'll contribute. And it's also part of my own learning process, by putting my half formed thoughts out there I... I hesitate to use the word invite, because it's not quite as strong as inviting, but I'll lay myself open to being shot down in flames or to have somebody come and say I see it slightly differently in fact I've posted about this before in my blog and read this post and that's how the conversation then sort of ripples out. But it is a conversation.

This is confirmed by the blog analysis results reported in tables 5.23 through 5.24 which demonstrate that Jill and Kate are much more active in the comments section of their blogs. Stuart and Jeff are much less active in the comments area and Mark doesn't have comments activated, though he claims to exchange with commenters through email.

All bloggers state that blogging is one of their forms of professional development.

In addition to blogging, Kate and Jill are both enrolled in graduate programs and may attend the odd conference. Stuart, Jeff and Mark attend and speak at quite a few conferences.

Mark however is the only one who states that he reads books as a form of professional development: "I read three books a month."

That said, all 5 bloggers consider that blogging is one of the significant ways they ensure that they stay current in their field. When referring to his blogging work, Stuart exclaims: “This ‘is’ my professional development, this is how I learn. It’s both how I learn and how I teach.”

IDENTIFYING RELATIONSHIPS AND CONSEQUENCES

Firstly, eight categories were devised based on the significant themes that occurred during the blog content and interview analysis. These categories are:

- Origin of blogging for the blogger
- Motivation to blog today / Purpose
- Qualification to Blog / Blog about a Topic
- Influence the blogger hopes to achieve
- Topic / Content selection
- Use of text and media
- Content verification
- Evidence of influence

In order to identify the regularly occurring relationship among the identified categories, Wilson Scott’s (2004) Conditional Relationship Guide was used. The Conditional Relationship Guide was designed to ask and answer each relational question about the category of the phenomena of blogging:

- What is [the category]? (Using a participant’s words helps avoid bias.)
- When does [the category] occur? (Using “during…” helps form the answer.)

- Where does [the category] occur? (Using "in…" helps form the answer.)
- Why does [the category] occur? (Using "because…" helps form the answer.)
- How does [the category] occur? (Using "by…" helps form the answer.)
- With what Consequence does [the category] occur or is [the category] understood?

In explaining the application of this guide, Wilson Scott (2004) writes:

> The "When, Where, and Why" questions identify conditions and the structure or frame. The fifth question, asking "How," identifies actions and interactions among the categories, the idea of dynamic process over time. It is this latter question that provides the depth that leads us to the participants' mode of understanding the consequences. (p.116)

The data analysis and findings reported in earlier in this chapter are summarized in the following table based on the Wilson Scott's Conditional Relationship Guide model.

Categories	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequences
Origin of blogging for the blogger	To document ideas, resources and links To share ideas / perspective To promote oneself, one's ideas	Between 1995 and 2007 While researching on the Web During a co-worker workshop	Own Website / system Own Website / blogging software Blogging network	Exploration Blogs getting attention Medium attractive / interactive Opportunity to archive information	Opportunities to document, share and promote content and ideas. Openness to explore, innovate, experiment with software and the Web	Exploration Experimentation Innovation

Motivation to blog today / Purpose	To document ideas, resources, links To share ideas / perspective To promote oneself, one's ideas	They feel the need They have a question / want feedback They have information to share / store	Intrinsically – self motivated Extrinsically – motivated by feedback / business development	Have something to say Feel they can contribute Need to archive information	Share and promote and exchange on content and ideas Manage content (archiving and indexing) Need to explore, innovate, experiment Need for feedback	Sharing Feedback Promotion Content management
Qualification to Blog / Blog about a Topic	Varying areas of expertise in educational technology / training and development	Overtime – life long learning	In their mission statements / profiles In the Web measurement tool ranking results they obtain	Graduate level education Work-experience Life long and informal learning	Self-qualified as bloggers on a subject Maintaining and posting regularly to a blog	*As a content expert:* Work-experience Formal graduate education Informal *As a blogger:* Earned by blogging regularly
Influence the blogger hopes to achieve	Readership Referencing from peers (blogroll or trackbacks) Referencing from Web authorities – search engine ranking	Gradually, over time	In the blogosphere (the community of bloggers) For some, increased credibility	This is how they get noticed This is how they develop business	Generating new ideas, conversations and contacts Recognition for their contribution	Readers References Recognition Credibility

Topic / Content selection	Based on area of expertise	Reacting to something / someone Have a question / require feedback Need to share or vent	*Realm:* Personal life Professional life *Subjects:* Learning, training and learning related issues New developments in field of expertise General current events, usually related back to learning	They have areas of expertise they feel qualified to write about	Reacting with an opinion on area of expertise Reflection on topics related to their area of expertise (requires more elaboration)	Personal / professional realms blurred Reaction / Reflection Expertise Sharing opinion / perception Need to dialogue / for feedback
Use of text and media	Text Photos Images Logos Diagrams Screenshots Videos SlideShare	Varies from 3% to 90% of the posts depending on the blogger	Embedded the blog posts themselves Source not always referenced	Text: to relate information or contextualize media To add information to the post Not always clear	Illustrative uses of media (mainly photos, images and logos) not always justified Informative uses adds information to the post	Illustration Information Communication
Content verification	Basic spelling and grammar check Opinion based posts No need for fact checking References (links) to original sources	Before posting	In the blog writing software	Proper spelling and grammar is important Onus is on the author of the content they reference to	They check for form but not necessarily content	Opinions References Links Desire for a certain non-quantified degree of polished form / writing

Evidence of influence	Comments Trackbacks Search engine rankings Reference to them within their community edublogger community	Comments to blog posts Trackback to their blog post Feedback by email or in person	On their blogs – comments On other's blogs – trackbacks On search engine sites in search results	They have a certain readership status Their ideas are worth commenting on, debating People write about them	Quantitative – number of comments or trackbacks Quantitative – number of links back reported by search engines No qualitative – rankings about appreciation of contribution.	Quantitative Reference within the edublogger community

Table 5.27 Conditional Relationship Guide

From the majority of the data reported earlier in this chapter and juxtaposed in table 5.26, there are both significant and weak patterns. These interesting recurring patterns that are observed in the data that might be used to generate these hypotheses or models:

Origin of Blogging for the Blogger

The bloggers analyzed in this study initially found opportunities to document, share and promote content and ideas with their blogs. The degree of sharing and promoting varied for each blogger. What was required of all bloggers, at the onset of their blogging journey, was an openness to explore, innovate and experiment with software and the Web.

Motivation to Blog Today and Purpose

Today, the motivations to continue blogging have not changed considerably from the initial reasons to start blogging. The blog remains an opportunity to document, share, promote and exchange on content and ideas. The bloggers continue to be motivated by their need to explore, innovate and experiment. While some bloggers seem to have an explicit need for feedback and sharing, others stick with their original need to manage their content by archiving and indexing it in blog format. Though some bloggers are more explicit about the promotional benefits of blogging, all the bloggers studied benefit from it at least in the sense that it grows their readership.

Qualification to Blog about Topics

Because of the nature of the medium, anyone can start a blog on any subject. The way in which the bloggers qualify as bloggers is by maintaining and posting regularly to a blog. That is the only qualification to be a blogger.

However, the bloggers qualifications as content experts on the topics they write about are not as clearly outlined. Bloggers self-qualify as there is no authority to grant them qualifications. Qualifications are based on the work-experience, formal education at the graduate level and informal education, often related to an area of interest. The exception might be Jill as she blogs under the header of her employer but since she has no editor or reviewer and is free to blog about what she wants to, there is little to no influence other than the fact that her blog is attached to a corporate name. It should be mentioned that the self-qualification is supported and sustained by a certain readership.

However, none of the bloggers are internal trainers—all work in the consultant sector or are in a research organization (private or public). Their audience, however, seems to be internal trainers. For example, in 4 out of the 5 blogs, there are links to resources and tools which might be useful for internal corporate trainer or instructional designers.

None of the bloggers studied have PhDs, yet many want to be seen as, or perceived themselves to be, experts There is no data to validate or invalidate their expert status—the only thing that can be garnered from the interview is their own *emic* perspective; that is, what they say about themselves and the permission they give themselves to analyse and give their opinions about certain issues within their area of knowledge.

As for professional development, none of the bloggers studied mentions partaking of workplace training courses. One candidate is completing a master's degree and another, a doctoral degree, but these degrees are formal education conducted by universities, which is very different from workplace training.

Though some participate in conferences, they speak more about their experiences holding conferences or speaking at them rather than about participating in them to learn. In these cases, then conferences serve marketing purposes first, not professional development purposes.

Influence the Blogger Hopes to Achieve

Though they do not state it explicitly in their interviews nor in any statement of purpose on their blogs, the bloggers commitment to blogging as indicated by their behaviours—posting regularly, participating to the dialogue via comments, investing time in reading and researching—might suggest that they are looking to generate new ideas, conversations and contacts. The fact that they report having an awareness of how many people read their blog, some having detailed statistics and some posting ranking badges on their site, suggests that they enjoy a certain amount of recognition for their contribution. If one equates popularity—being favored and admired by and within a determined group of people— with credibility—as one might in a political election—the bloggers might assume that their degree of credibility might appear to rise with their degree of popularity.

Topic and Content Selection

The bloggers seem to have two general methods for selecting what to write about. They are either reacting with an opinion on area of expertise or reflecting on topics related to their area of expertise, which often requires more elaboration. At times the topic is personal and others personal. The degree of each varies depending on the blogger.

In general, bloggers share their opinion or perception about something. They base this opinion or perception on their area of expertise. Sometimes, they solicit other's opinions, perception through dialogue and feedback. What is evident from the data is that the bloggers tend to write opinion based and personal posts; at least two-thirds of the posts have an opinion statement in them.

Use of Text and Media

Bloggers use text and media in different ways and with varying purposes. The justification for the use of media with the purpose of illustrating (mainly photos, images and logos) is not always explicit. The readers will have to draw their own conclusion as to whether or not the image brings something to the blog post. Furthermore, the sources of these media elements are not always referenced.

However, the use of diagrams, screenshots, videos and SlideShare are always contextualized with text explaining the content in the media element as well as how the content adds more information to the blog post. The sources of these media elements are always referenced.

The bloggers that chose to incorporate diagrams, screenshots, videos and SlideShare are leveraging the multimedia aspect of the Web in order to convey information. The same cannot be said about the use of pictures, images and logos.

Content Verification

When asked about how they verify the content of their posts, the bloggers in this study put more emphasis on the form of their blog posts—spelling and grammar—than the content—fact checking.

The need for a certain non-quantified and non-qualified degree of polishing of the writing is related by some bloggers in their interviews. In some cases, this can be attributed to the bloggers desire to be perceived as professional and/or a good writer.

The rationale for lenient fact-checking on their behalf was based on the principle that they are merely stating their opinion about a given subject in their blogs, providing a reference or a link to other sources they are commenting. They all concluded that fact checking isn't a necessary part of the process. However, nowhere on their blog do they state this. They expect that the onus is first on the author of the source to be valid. The onus is next on the reader to evaluate the source being referred to.

Although they invest a lot of time in blogging, they do not necessarily devote a great deal of time verifying the information they post—nor do they feel the need to.

Evidence of Influence

The evidence of a blogger's influence is mainly suggestive, that is the number of comments or trackbacks that each post receives as well as the amount of times someone else links back to their site.

There is however no information on the lurkers—visitors that read their blogs but that do not leave a digital trace such a comment or a trackback.

There are no qualitative rankings about either the appreciation of the blogger's posts—other than the occasional "Great post!" in the comments area. There is also no data on the impact that these bloggers have on their readers.

Another aspect of their influence is how they are perceived by other members of the edublogger community, in this study represented narrowly by the other bloggers who participated in this study. There is evidence that bloggers with comments enabled on their posts open up an area for discussion and referencing. Those that chose to participate in the discussion tend to be become part of a community of bloggers. On the other hand, those with their comments disabled, like Mark, tend to be outskirts of the blogger community and has less opportunities to join in the discussion.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

OVERVIEW

In this final chapter, I will present my conclusions and recommendations for further research based on the blog analysis and interview findings presented in Chapter 5.

First this chapter go over the key findings and define what it means to be a blogger and what kind of practices they have. In the following section, I will present the questions emerging from the findings which will generate recommendations for future research. Finally, I will provide a summary.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A BLOGGER IN THE FIELD OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

This study analyzed what it means to be a blogger in the field of training and development, the credibility of blogs intended for the training community, as the credibility is reported and identified by the bloggers themselves. The term edublogger—a person with a stake in education who writes a blog about education-related topics—was uncovered. In order to differentiate the bloggers in the field of training and development with bloggers in other fields, the term edublogger will be used from this point forward.

As a reminder, the research questions listed in Chapter 1 are:

- Who are the bloggers in the field? That is, what motivates them to blog and what qualifications do they believe they bring to the task?

- What is their purpose in blogging? That is, what do they hope to accomplish? What influence do they hope to achieve, if any?
- What do professionals in the educational technology who choose to blog choose to write about?
- How do they select the content to report? How do they verify the content, if at all?
- What evidence do the bloggers have of their influence?

A Portrait of an Edublogger

Edubloggers share. Though they may say that their initial motivation for blogging is to keep a record of their thoughts or to store and index their ideas and links, the simple fact that they do all this in a public forum rather than behind a password protected site indicates that they want to share. They acknowledge benefiting from the public exchange.

Edubloggers explore. Whether they started blogging in the late 1990s or as recently as year or two ago, bloggers must go through a journey of exploration and discovery. A consistent and significant pattern is that none of the bloggers selected in this study seemed set out from the start for a career in training and development but rather migrated towards one. This might suggest that in order to make the transition that the bloggers that participated in this study were self-directed learners sought who sought out information in order to adapt to their new career. However, the data gathered in the study in no way can support this supposition.

Edubloggers self-promote. If the purpose of blogging is to connect with others; there is a need to attract others to their blog. However, there is no lack of competition in the blogosphere. In order to demonstrate their seriousness and devotion to their blogging practice, bloggers blog regularly, feeding content and ideas to their readers. They also write their blog posts with a certain amount of authority on the topics they choose to blog about. Whether or not they are truly experts is not the issue. The fact that they have a captive audience is.

Edubloggers develop. They learn through blogging. Though they may have other professional development activities, bloggers consider blogging to be one of their main ways to develop professionally.

Edubloggers perceive. Bloggers offer their perceptions and opinions. The topics they offer their perceptions and opinions on are the areas of technology, practices, policies, theories, issues, trends, news, etc. Whether it is sharing a half-formed reflection or a more detailed essay, bloggers post them to the blogosphere and wait for feedback on their perceptions.

Edubloggers discuss. Whether it is through documenting and cross-linking their reflections or through the conversations they are having in the blogosphere, bloggers have the potential to generate new ideas, conversations and contacts. Though they may not say it explicitly, the contacts are as important as the content.

Edubloggers juxtapose. They explore mixing text and media, at times juxtaposing them, linking to other resources, comparing ideas with the purpose of discovery and learning.

Edubloggers reference. They don't take on responsibility for other people's statements or fact-checking when they refer to it. Though they will use their best judgment in what they refer to, the responsibility to decide whether the content is valid or not is up to the reader. Bloggers claim they are giving their opinion, not presenting facts.

Edubloggers quantify. They know how many comments and track backs they have and how many people link back to their site. They might, if they have the proper measuring tools on their blog, know how many visitors they get.

Edubloggers support one another. They comment on and refer to each other's blogs. There is a sense of a community of bloggers that support one another, the edublogger community.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Throughout my analysis, many questions emerged as did ideas for further research. As the medium of blogging emerges and takes on further popularity and new dimensions, a vast amount of areas are open for exploration. However, before presenting my emerging questions and recommendation for further study, I will outline the limitations of this study.

As this is a qualitative study, the first limitation is that none of data findings can generate a pattern which can be generalised to the community of bloggers. With well over 100 million blogs on the Internet, this study had a relatively minute sample of bloggers. Rather, this study's purpose was to generate hypotheses about bloggers which can be tested on much larger samples in a quantitative or mixed methods study. Only then will a study perhaps confirm, alter or negate the portrait of an edublogger that has been painted in this study.

In addition, throughout the study, new Web tools gained popularity. These tools could have helped quantify and perhaps even qualify the popularity of the bloggers to be selected. Some measurement tools were added in the analysis phase; others were not selected as they would have significantly changed the scope of the study and the methodology. Those tools will be described in the following section.

EMERGING QUESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

There are six sets of questions that emerged in the following areas: blogger evolution and self-directed learning, gender and social media, reader participation and contribution, qualitative assessment of blog content, responsibility to verify facts and finally value judgments about media and copyright. These questions generate recommendations for future study.

Blogger Evolution and Self-Directed Learning

The first set of questions relates to how bloggers evolve, hone their blogging skills and grow their readership base. This study has shown that blogger motivation has remained relatively constant. If the motivations for blogging do not change, how does the way in which a blogger blogs evolve over time. In this study, Mark shared how blogging made him a stronger writer, how he learned to write in a more concise and clear manner. More clarity might very well attract more readers. Are there any other techniques seasoned bloggers use to develop their readership? How do they learn these techniques? Though observing successful bloggers? Does it take a self-directed learner to become a successful blogger?

A study on how exactly a blogger hones their skill would be helpful. Also, given that the bloggers that were selected for this study were not initially gearing towards a career in training and development, but rather learned a lot of their trade through on-the-job training, conferences and accessing various resources, a future study investigating the correlation between self-directed learners and bloggers would be warranted.

Gender and Social Media

The second set of questions relates to gender and how it influences the uses and adoption of social media. In this qualitative study, the samples are too small to suggest a pattern. The gender issue and adoption could easily be a coincidence of how participants were recruited for this study. That being said, that the female bloggers seemed more concerned about community does seem to be a pattern of interest. They also interacted more with the readers that left comments on their blogs. Media and gender studies have often suggested that women and men communicate and use media differently. A Business Week article, published a month after the data gathering portion of this study was conducted, reported on a large study of gender and social media uses:

> It's no shock that men and women act differently online, just as they do in everyday life. The Web is an extremely social medium, and Web 2.0 is all about being social. Traditionally, men are the early adopters of new technologies. But

> when it comes to social media, women are at the forefront. At Rapleaf, we conducted a study of 13.2 million people and how they're using social media. While the trends indicate both sexes are using social media in huge numbers, our findings show that women far outpace the men. (Hoffman, 2008)

Why are women at the forefront of social media? Is it really all about being social? Are women engaging their readers in discussion more than the men? Is it really a gender issue?

There is definitely some research needed in the area of social media and gender in order to see how this difference is truly manifested with the use of social media. This study could also be extended to look at cultural issues and practices and see if they affect the conversation.

Reader Participation and Contribution

The third set of questions relates to how and when readers choose to post comments. Granted, sometimes the comments feature is not activated on blogs. But when they are, what elements have to be in place for a reader to want to contribute? Does there have to be a question in a blog post that addresses the reader? Does a reader need to feel that their opinion is solicited? Or that their feedback will be appreciated? Do they need to feel comfortable with the subject matter? That they can contribute something different? What makes someone read a blogger's posts regularly and link to them but not comment on them? Intimidation?

Further research on the practices of blog readers is required to answer questions related to how, when and why they decide to participate to the conversation in the blogosphere.

Qualitative Assessment of Blog Content

The fourth set of questions relates to the assessment of blog content and what is emerging on the Web in terms of quality assessment tools. This study was not able to present any data that could suggest how authority and credibility could be granted, other then by popularity. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, tools that gather opinions on the quality of content have been emerging on the Web. An example of such a tool is Digg, a social media application that enables Internet readers to share the content they discover from anywhere on the Web with others. The way Digg works is that readers submit or "Digg" their appreciation of a Web resource. Other members of the Digg community will have access to the review and will either ignore it or "Digg" it themselves. When a resource receives a substantial amount of "Diggs", it gets promoted to front page status. Digg explains its vision in the "about" section on the Digg Website:

> And it doesn't stop there. Because Digg is all about sharing and discovery, there's a conversation that happens around the content. We're here to promote that conversation and provide tools for our community to discuss the topics that they're passionate about. By looking at information through the lens of the collective community on Digg, you'll always find something interesting and unique. We're

committed to giving every piece of content on the web an equal shot at being the next big thing. (Digg / About Us, n.d.)

It would be interesting to find out how will tools like Digg affect the way content will be perceived on the Web? Even if the tools for critical analysis are available, will readers have the necessary critical analysis and thinking skills to utilize them properly?

Further research on the impact of tools that enable the qualitative assessment of Web content by the Web community would be helpful.

Responsibility to Verify Facts

The fifth set of questions relates to responsibility. Given that the bloggers are acting as reference agents, whose responsibility is it to verify the validity of the information? Do the bloggers need to be more explicit that they aren't verifying their facts? Do they need to be more explicit that they are only stating their opinion? Or should they on the other hand be held accountable for the facts they republish? If not, how they ensure that readers aware that it is their responsibility to double check facts? What is worrisome is the transition from a spoon-fed model of education to a self-discovery and self-directed model without reconfiguring the approach to learning. Are individuals applying fact-checking rigour to the content they access? What criteria are they using? What do they consider to be expert knowledge? Are they simply looking for other sources to confirm what they've found or are they actually analysing the source of the information? Are they aware that information, correct and otherwise, spreads like memes on Web?

All these questions could be considered in a future study on users and their assessment of Web content.

Value Judgments about Media and Copyright

The sixth set of questions relates to copyright and information is perceived. This study showed that efforts were made to ensure that links to text and informative multimedia elements were referenced but not illustrative media. Is this a common occurrence or an isolated incident, a coincidence occurring in a qualitative study with a small sample? Is there a value judgment made about the value or copyright of illustration versus media that contains information?

Further study is recommended to see why and how Web users make distinctions on the value of media sources.

IN SUMMARY

From the individual analyses, a draft for the portrait of a blogger in the field of training and development has emerged. This qualitative study has but scratched the surface of what it means to be an edublogger, what the motivations, challenges, rewards and benefits are. From the individual case analyses, the experiences of bloggers reveal the importance of motivation to blog as well as the sense of feedback and interaction. Each edublogger had a very different vision of why they blogged. However, in juxtaposing the five cases, common themes and practices emerged as well as substantial set of emerging questions which hopefully will be addressed in future research.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Specifically, the purpose of this interview is to learn your motivation for blogging, how you choose topics for blogging, how you vet the content that you publish, and your reactions to the blogging process (including a self-assessment of the authority of your blog). The following is a proposed interview guide to be followed.

1. Describe your professional background—your work in training, how you came into that work, and what you consider to be your area(s) of expertise?
2. Why did you start your blog?
3. What inspires you to blog?
4. How do you choose topics to blog about?
5. What is your process for preparing a blog posting, drafting it, and posting it?
6. How do you verify the content in your blog?
7. Describe your relationship with your readers.
8. How do you ensure your own professional development?

The interview should span from 45-60 minutes and will be recorded.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE AUTHORITY AND CREDIBILITY OF BLOGS IN TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Kristina Schneider of the Department of Education of Concordia University.
Email: k_schnei@education.concordia.ca, telephone: 514-966-6795.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to understand the phenomenon of blogging for the purpose of providing training and development professionals with professional development opportunities—It is intended to describe how bloggers write their blogs, what they blog about, how they interact with their target audience, and how they might gain a status of authority and credibility (if at all), rather than confirm a hypothesis about the phenomenon of blogging..

B. PROCEDURES

This study involves uses mixed methods to generate insights into blogs for professional development of trainers from a number of perspectives. First, it uses artifact analysis to assess the content of the blogs. Second, it uses interviews to identify the intentions and motivations of the bloggers. I will analyze both types of data to generate conclusions about blogging for professional development of trainers. The process of collecting data using two methods and from 5 blogs each ensures that the data is triangulated.

Artifact analysis

- Noting background information (stated purpose, regularity of contributions, number of contributors, associations to larger blogging networks)
- Detailed content analysis of 10 posts over 3 months (topics, average size of blog posts, nature of the content, written in first person or in an academic form, extent and nature of citation of sources, presence of posted comment and if they are replied to)
- Assessment of blogs using criteria for evaluating the credibility of online content

Interviews

Interviews will be conducted in person when possible. When geography and finances prevent that, interviews will be conducted by phone. In addition to rigorous note taking, interviews will be digitally recorded with the participants' permission.

Interview transcripts and recordings as well as the results of my artifact analysis will be stored on my personal computer. To protect these transcripts and recordings from unauthorized access, the computer is password-protected and protected by a firewall.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

Risks

Participants will be offered as much anonymity as possible. Identifying information will be removed and, if segments of blogs are directly quoted, the participant will be made aware. However, it may be possible for a determined reader of the study to perform a search of the Internet and find out whom the original author is.

Benefits

Participants will be contributing to a much needed study on the authority and credibility of blogs as well as the motivations for professionals to blog about their area of expertise. I also intend to link the current phenomenon of blogging to a longer history of efforts to create professional communities online.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity).
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) ______________________________

SIGNATURE ______________________________

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca.

APPENDIX C: FRAME INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of the frame interview is to bring to light the subjectivities of the researcher.

Time frame: 30 minutes

Please ask the researcher the following questions:

1. What is your personal experience with blogs?
2. What is your personal opinion of blogs?
3. How do you think bloggers choose topics to write about? How much research do they perform? How widely are their blogs read?
4. Has your personal use of blogs influenced your perspective of them?

The format of this interview is semi-structured. As a result, please probe to explore or clarify. You are not limited to the above four questions; however, each of these four questions must be asked.

Please take notes, while you are audiotaping the interview.

APPENDIX D: FRAME INTERVIEW FINDINGS BY SHERYL GULOY

Kristina Schneider's experience with Web logs, or blogs, has become the impetus for her qualitative research into blog use in professional development. This frame interview has been conducted with the view that becoming aware of one's subjectivities with regard to a particular topic is essential in enhancing the findings of the research that one is conducting. While qualitative research is inherently biased, it is the researcher's subjectivities that facilitate the way in which a large amount of data is sorted and developed into a coherent perspective on a particular area of research. Hence, these subjectivities, once acknowledged, become assets since various approaches to analyzing the data can be explored in light of the researcher's own biases.

Kristina, who admittedly refers to herself as somewhat of a "technofreak", began chatting on the Internet in 1995. She first became acquainted with live journaling, in 2001, when a friend of hers pointed out that "everybody cool has a live journal." Thus, Kristina's first foray into what would eventually evolve into the world of blogging began.

Live journaling, which would eventually become known as blogging, was originally a social endeavour for Kristina. This involved the creation of her own Web page in which she posted commentaries about topics of interest to her, such as independent films. This was done in the hopes that she would connect and share her opinions on these subjects with other persons on the Internet. Kristina not only desired to express her opinions, but to dialogue with others. She sought discussion, not simply from a social point-of-view, but as a method by which to learn and share knowledge with other bloggers.

As the blogging community grew, a new demographic of youths began to set up their own live journals; Kristina found the topics of the blogs more mundane. At the same time, she began her Master's degree in educational technology. It was at this point that her blogging activities dipped as she decided to redirect her energies into her education and more pressing issues.

Kristina's interests in blogs remain, however, and she has continued to use them as a tool by which to keep herself current on the opinions of subject matter experts and professionals, within the field of educational technology. In January of 2006, Kristina once again became an active blogger. Specifically, she is using her blog as a vehicle for sharing information about educational technology with others, such as her clients in the e-learning field. In addition, she hopes to use her blog as a way to increase her visibility as an educational technologist and e-learning specialist.

It is her belief in the intuitiveness of blogging software, as well as the technology's potential to easily connect persons with similar interests, which has led her to investigate the use of blogs in professional development. In fact, Kristina counts blogs as one of the ways by which she has stayed abreast of developments within chosen field. More importantly, she views blogs as her preferred method of professional development for its just-in-time appeal.

Within the context of this frame interview, Kristina's subjectivities with respect to blogging have been summarized in Table 1. In conclusion, these are the perspectives that create the lens by which her findings will be uncovered as well as contrasted.

Subjectivities	**Qualities**
Learner-centered discovery	Kristina has a preference for individualized and targeted learning within an exploratory framework.
Just-in-time learning	Kristina has a preference for a controlled, but continuous flow of information that is self-paced and ad-hoc.
Technology-oriented	Technology has become integrated into Kristina's lifestyle and workspace.
Blogging is instrumental	Blogging is instrumental and not an end-in-itself (i.e., blogs could be used to meet social, educational, or marketing ends).
Community of learners	Blogging becomes interesting when dialogue emerges among a group of individuals; thus, it contributes to developing a community in which knowledge is shared and created.
Perceived authority	Authority need not necessarily be "right", but it must be recognized. Authority is partly determined by how well one's opinions are "appreciated". Authority is tied to readership.

Table: Kristina Schneider's Subjectivities Uncovered via a Frame Interview

APPENDIX E: THESIS AUDIT PROTOCOL

To assure that the biases identified in the frame interview have not affected the analysis of the results, and that the conclusions are supported by the data, they have been audited by another qualitative researcher.

The bloggers identities will not be revealed to the third-party researcher performing the audit nor will she have access to original interview transcripts.

The audit consists of reading the case studies and the results section of the study and determining:

- if the data seems complete in the case studies
- if the conclusions seem to be based on the data

The third-party researcher will then submit an overall assessment and any specific comments. This assessment could be a paragraph to a few pages long, depending on the number of comments.

APPENDIX F: THESIS AUDIT BY MARCI ARAKI

The following is a data audit performed by Marci Araki on July 6, 2008. Since this audit, changes were made based on Marci's recommendations (see notes in parentheses - KS). In addition, changes were made based on Dr Saul Carliner's recommendations and a new draft was produced.

Overall, the conclusions and recommendations for further research are grounded in the data presented in the case studies and findings. The blog analysis findings presented in the tables in Chapter 5 accurately represent the data presented in the case studies, citing both number of sources and references. Strong patterns, those with five sources or more, and weak patterns, those with three to four sources, are consistently noted.

In the Chapter 5: Findings, there are two sections that could be strengthened by providing more detail from the data.

A2. Analysis of blog entries

b) Size of post and use of text and multimedia

The categories "a lot of images", "occasional image", and "occasional video" could be stated as numerical values, similar to how the size of posts are stated in terms of number of words. (Marci's recommendations were followed in the final version - KS)

d) Form of writing

The categories "partially academic" and "refined, yet not academic" are similar, but the difference between the two categories cannot be determined without reading the blog posts themselves. As "refined" is a value-laden term, concrete examples in the form of quotes would strengthen the representation of the data. (Marci's recommendations were followed in the final version - KS)

In the Interview Findings section, Kristina accurately represents the patterns that emerged from the data and does not present conclusions that the data does not support. This is clear in Q2 "Original Motivations to Blog", Q4 "Blog Topic Selection Process", and Q5 "Blog Preparation, Drafting, and Posting Process".

Q3 "Inspiration to Blog" contains an incomplete phrase "The more seasoned bloggers." Given the richness of the data presented in the case studies, I assume that further synthesis and analysis is planned. (This error was corrected - KS)

The conclusions and recommendations for further research as presented in Chapter 6 point out gender differences that emerge between the three male bloggers and two female bloggers, yet Kristina accurately notes that the small sample size does not support any generalizations based on the data. She states that, based on these findings, further research in this area is necessary.