

A case study of blogging as a web-based learning tool: The experience of six graduate students
in a traditional educational setting

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the narratives of six graduate students who experienced blogging as a learning tool in a graduate seminar on adult education at an English language university in Montreal. The main research question was: What are the experiences of blogging as a learning tool by graduate students in a traditional education setting? All six participants volunteered to be interviewed a few months after the end of the course. They were all female, white between 25 and 59 years of age, four married and two single. Five of the interviews took place face to face in person and one interview was conducted on Skype. Six major themes were identified and summarized under the following headings: Challenges of the course blog experience, running the blog experience, the impact of blogging on learning, Moodle versus Blogger, the impact of blogging on the traditional educational system, and the participants' evaluation of the experience. The results, summarized in a table at the end of Chapter 3, resonate well in relation to the existing body of the literature on the topic and point towards further research projects.

This case study adds rich data about the experience of learners with educational blogging to the existing literature with regard to implementing blogs in traditional classrooms in higher education. This thesis may also be of use for educators interested in integrating technology in traditional classrooms in order to promote an active and useful learning experience for students.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my precious, little Miriam. I would like you to believe that even though you may not be able to control the challenges that come your way, you are definitely able to achieve anything you set your mind to. I believe in you, Miriam, and will always be proud of you my super girl. No matter what life throws your way, no matter how slowly you go, just believe in yourself, persevere and you will accomplish your goals.

My work is also dedicated to my beloved parents whose love and moral support have always been ongoing unconditionally despite the long distance. Thank you for believing in me and for instilling in me that passion for lifelong learning. I hope that I will always make you proud.

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Chapter 1: Introduction, Research Questions, and Literature Review

Introduction

It was January 2012 when I first encountered a traditional university course in which new technologies were integrated. We were assigned technology related tasks to help us create our own learning environment through the use of Cloud software. Nevertheless, it was a course whose objectives were educational and technology was just a medium. It was in that course that I first used Weblog software. All the students had to read the assigned academic topic and sometimes look for further reliable resources before participating in the online classroom blog to share their perspectives, experiences and their researched sources. Every week taking turns, one of the students had to initiate and lead the blog discussion then present a new aspect of the topic using Power Point to continue the discussion in the class meeting.

My experience with blogging was totally new and enriching. Having to post my reflections, questions, and answers made me realize that in that way, not only I got to read every detail of the assigned academic topics but also try to look for more resources. There were times when I thought it was not beneficial, receiving no response for my questions when I was really looking for an answer or perceiving that we were just completing our assignment by posting “knowledge” or information about the topic without interacting with each other. However, I could not deny the rich source of information found in my classmates’ reflections and the sense of competition and motivation that blogging aroused in me sometimes by looking forward to my classmates’ response to my ideas or sometimes discussing our ideas outside the classroom or even during the break. In all I believe that the outcomes of my learning from such an experience definitely exceeded my expectations and that is why I got interested in this research project.

Background of the Problem

With the growing increase in the use of Web 2.0 technologies, social networking has become a part of our daily life. More and more people are using social networking tools not only for communicating with each other but also for sharing information and knowledge. Although Facebook is used most frequently, blogging is also gaining popularity. In 2006, a report by Lenhart and Fox (as cited in Blue & Tirotta, 2011) sampling adults of ages 18 and up, revealed that approximately 8% of American adults maintain a blog, 39% read blogs, and 57% of bloggers are between 18 and 30 years old. Despite this constant increase in the use of the new Internet technologies, learning that occurs outside a formal educational environment is still neglected and mostly avoided by the educational institutes. However, educators have perceived new potentials for learning and teaching in the use of Internet tools in higher education. Among these potentials is promoting interactive learning by increasing an active construction of knowledge through learners' interaction and collaboration. Blogging has recently been suggested to be "the most educational friendly of the new interactive tools" (Bartholomew, Jones, & Glassman, 2012, p. 19).

Rationale for the Study

Although blogging has a beneficial impact on education and is slowly yet increasingly used in traditional learning, there is a discrepancy in the studies that investigated its use for educational purposes. While some findings indicate the benefit of blogging in enhancing education by promoting interaction among learners and facilitating collaborative knowledge construction, others reveal insufficient communication between learners.

Research Questions

This research project is a case study of a graduate seminar in adult education at the MA level (Magisteriate level). The main research question is: What are the experiences of blogging as a learning tool by graduate students in a traditional education setting?

The related sub-questions that were addressed by this study are as follows:

1. What kind of challenges did the students face with the course blog experience?
2. How did the students run the blog?
3. What was the impact of blogging on the student's learning?
4. How did the participants perceive the impact of blogging on the traditional educational system?
5. How did they evaluate their experience with the course blog?
6. What are the benefits and challenges of integrating blogging in a traditional educational course?

Literature Review

In this section I will present two sets of Literature Review as opposed to one. The first is a general literature review and the second is a more targeted and focused review based on the main results of the research project after the analysis of the emerging themes. This procedure was adopted to help me summarize the results of my case study in the context of the existing literature related to the main themes extracted from the analysis of the data obtained through interview with participants in the course blog related to the seminar from where they were recruited.

Literature Review: Set 1

In this section, I review the literature on leaning theories, the shift in learning paradigms, media literacy and information literacy, the transformation in knowledge status, the use of Web 2.0 tools for online communication and collaboration, the use of blogs in education, blogging for online interaction and collaboration, interaction on a blog, and the gaps found in the literature.

Learning theories. According to the results of a 2003 study by Boud and Middleton, Web 2.0 tools such as blogs can change the manner in which learning occurs by changing the focus from formal teaching towards peer-to-peer and informal learning (as cited in Garcia et al., 2015). According to Garcia et al. (2015), this has led to new forms of pedagogy and learning theories.

Connectivism learning theory. According to Garcia, Elbeltagi, Brown, and Dungay (2015), connectivism provides “a theoretical model for the way in which teaching and learning may change as a result of the use of blogs by learners” as it is a learning theory that “seeks to take into account the manner in which society is changing as a result of the availability of Web 2.0” (p. 878). Boitshwarelo describes connectivism as “a new way of considering learning within the digital age” (as cited in Garcia et al., 2015, p. 881).

As learning now occurs in various ways, the roles of both teacher and students in a connectivist learning model are important (Garcia et al., 2015). In connectivism, new technologies can affect teaching and learning in two ways. First, Web 2.0 tools affect the manner in which learning occurs, resulting in a two-way collaborative process and a less linear experience (Garcia et al., 2015). Second, it results in a growth in knowledge which can be measured in months or years as opposed to centuries (Garcia et al., 2015). Moreover, knowledge is becoming distributed, interconnected, and personal (Garcia et al., 2015). Thus learners are

expected to be hybrid learners able to adapt to a lifelong continual process (Garcia et al., 2015). Connectivism stresses the importance of learners connecting with others thus enabling the flow of information and knowledge between learners and their learning community (Garcia et al., 2015). In fact, people cannot acquire and experience all knowledge independently, so they have to obtain knowledge by connecting with others (Garcia et al., 2015).

Garcia et al. tested the learning theory of connectivism for using the collective blog model from the perspectives of staff and students. They found that the creation of a blog network only occurred fully when students were actively engaged and willing to learn (as cited in Liu, 2016). According to Verhagen, “connectivism should be considered to be a pedagogy rather than a learning theory due to it being based at a curriculum level rather than an institutional level” (as cited in Garcia et al., 2015, p. 880).

Constructivist and social learning theory. There have been shifts in learning theories that supported the use of blogs in education towards the constructivist theory in which learners actively construct knowledge and thus actively participate on their own learning (Wang, Lin & Liao, 2012). Based upon the social constructivist Vygotskian learning theory that emphasizes the effects of social interaction, language and culture on learning, Herrington and Oliver affirmed that the educational use of blogs can improve the learner-to-learner interaction (as cited in Wang & Liao, 2012). Also inspired by the theory of Vygotsky, in which learning can be derived from discussions with other persons who have similar or different perspectives based on their own experiences, Coutinho maintained that blogging enables the social construction of knowledge (as cited in Wang & Liao, 2012).

According to Lave and Wenger’s social theory of learning, social participation is at the center of the learning process. They identified learning environments where individuals share

common practice and activities as “Communities of Practice” or (CoP) (as cited in Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013, p. 232). Furthermore, they adapted the learning theory of situated cognition in which thought or knowledge is adapted or situated to the environment. For them learning occurs during participation in communities of practice (as cited in Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013). Novakovich and Cramer Long (2013) maintained that blogs are an interactive communication technology and a social network platform allowing for the formation of “Communities of Practice” (p. 232).

Shifts in Learning Paradigms

With the increased popularity of the social networking phenomenon among young adults, educators are concerned about how it can be used to facilitate learning. Now that society is connected by the Internet, physical distance no longer stands in the face of discourse and interaction. Buckley and Williams (2010) discussed new theories of learning that emerged to reflect the potential of the digitally connected society. The connectivist theory of Siemens (2004, in Buckley & Williams 2010) reflected the contribution of individuals to a social network of knowledge sharing and learning. In resonance with Vygotsky's social constructivist approach and Siemen's connectivist approach, O'Reilly (as cited in Buckley, & Williams, 2010) explored the "harnessing of collective intelligence" which he explained by the use of Web 2.0 technology.

Torres-Coronas, Monclus-Guitart, Rodriguez-Merayo, Vidal-Blasco, and Simon-Olmos (2010) explained how the new technologies paved the way for a new learning paradigm. After the behavioral theories that focused on the behavioral outcomes of learning, and the cognitive theories by which the learner is perceived as processing information, came the constructivist theories to perceive the learner as constructing information. According to Jonassen (as cited in Holton, 2010), knowledge from the constructivist perspective is subjective and can be interpreted

and constructed by the learner, in contrast to the objectivist conception of learning that assumes knowledge to be transferred from technology or the teacher to the learner. Thus the constructivist learning environment requires knowledge and information from the learners in order to be effective (Holton, 2010). Then with the emergence of technology, social constructivism emerged referring to learning co-construction by which new knowledge is constructed through active participation in a community (Torres-Coronas et al., 2010).

Brown (2006) pointed out navigationism as the most recent learning paradigm shift, by which the new focus is on knowledge navigation. According to him, this navigationist learning paradigm requires the connectivist learning skills that were highlighted in Siemen's principles of the connectivist theory in 2004. For Brown, "Connectivism is part and parcel of navigationism" (as cited in Torres-Coronas et al., 2010, p. 212).

Media Literacy and Information Literacy

Sharma (2012) described media literacy as the 21st century approach to education. According to Aqili and Nasiri (2010), mass media changed social communication which used to occur only as face-to-face messages using verbal and non-verbal symbols. Today, people are analyzing and interpreting messages from mass media. For them, media literacy offers not only a new way to teach but also a new way to learn. They perceived new challenges to lie in misinformation and copyright issues, and stressed the need to promote media literacy in learners so that they become able to consume information critically and contribute to public discourse in an effective way. Similarly, Alton Grizzle (as cited in Sharma, 2012) stated that we should introduce the new forms of literacy into the educational system, for it to be a part of the emerging information and knowledge societies and for learners to be literate in this media-saturated world. Hobbs (2011) also indicated the need for school librarians and teachers to move

forward and bring digital and media literacy to all citizens to meet the wide range of knowledge and skills required in an increasingly mediated society. She further emphasized the importance for school leaders to recognize that purchasing the latest digital technology does not necessarily lead to improving learning nor acquiring digital and media literacy. Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack (as cited in Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton, & Nierlich, 2008) noted that the essential new literacies for using the Internet can be implemented by focusing on teaching students the strategies to identify problems, locate online resources, share ideas, and critically evaluate information.

New types of literacies are emerging over time. Lippincott (as cited in Godwin, 2007) identified how difficult it is to separate media literacy from information literacy. CILIP defines information literacy as "knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner" (as cited in Godwin, 2007). Godwin (2007) indicated the increasing importance of information literacy because of the needs of what he called the "Google generation" that are reinforced by the Web 2.0 phenomenon. He called the teachers to help create information literate citizens by using the new Web 2.0 tools in order to connect with the new generation and enhance the delivery of the information literacy message.

With the rise of the Web 2.0 phenomenon, there has been a flow of information. Godwin (2007) pointed out the usefulness of tools such as blogs and wikis as important sources for current information. While wikis can be used to build up resource lists, blogs can be used to discuss the use of resources. He emphasized the use of blogs as primary sources as they are becoming a valid source to get the most recent opinions about topics. For him, "the *blogosphere* is now a kind of global brain and a vital part of online culture" (Godwin, 2007, p. 105).

A Transformation of Knowledge Status

Kop (2006) explained how the theory of knowledge underwent a change from the days of Plato when it was an absolute knowledge reached through reason and intelligence, until the digital age when knowledge is attained through understanding and wisdom by connecting and communicating with others. Rorty (as cited in Kop, 2006, p. 51) suggested that "knowledge is socio-culturally situated and mediated by language" thus implying the importance of communication in forming meaning constructed by participants from different ethnicity and cultures, and justifying the recent shift to the learner-centered approach in terms of knowledge acquisition. Moreover, Kop (2006) pointed out the key in the constructivist and socio-cultural theories to be the active participation of learners in a collaborative learning process rather their passive knowledge reception from the teacher. She maintained that online activities facilitate active participation into online collaboration. More recently, Rahman (2010) called for a re-examination of the concept of knowledge due to the transformation of information society into knowledge societies. He also called for a collective process of knowledge, a collaborative learning network by which there are no boundaries for learning.

While Rahman (2010) highlighted the supportive impact of technology mediated learning in the traditional forms of education that accompanied the constant growth of interactive and collaborative learning, Kop (2006) noted the challenge to be incorporating learning tools in formal educational settings and finding the best way to adjust to a more open learning environment. Therefore, as Greener and Perriton (as cited in Kop, 2006) indicated, some academics showed reservations about the networked alternatives while others were enthusiastic about the role of online tools in promoting collaborative development of knowledge.

Most studies that examined the use of blogs or wikis to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration were not convergent. Cheng and Chau (2011) conducted a study to address this

concern and found that both tools facilitate knowledge construction, that blogs promoted knowledge construction at a higher collaborative level than wikis, and that blogs' users created more online messages than wiki users. Their findings provided evidence in favor of blogging as a learning tool for knowledge co-construction, and if wikis are to be used, students then should be supported and guided to promote peer discussion.

Social software is rapidly becoming popular because it is perceived as offering a collaborative framework for creating knowledge. Nevertheless, Kop (2006) indicated that this can be seen at the same time as their downfall because there is a concern over its consideration as a reliable resource because of the inability to verify its content. For instance, Downes (as cited in Kop, 2006) analyzed student Weblogs at Harvard University and found biased opinions without any control or filtration.

Blue and Tirota (2011) pointed out a limited experience of students and educators with online technologies since many Internet resources are being blocked in educational institutes in order to protect education communities from potential harm of web resources. They conducted a study on the use of blogs, wikis, Google Docs and interactive white boards in pre-service teacher preparation university courses. They also highlighted the benefits and drawbacks of each tool for both learners and faculty. Their findings suggested the need to consider institutional decisions to make sure that learners engage and be supported in teacher preparation courses. They encouraged university faculty to increase their self-efficacy, and highlighted the need for both faculty and pre-service students to be comfortable using constant changing technologies and resources in their classes.

According to Gulati, Selwyn and Gorard (as cited in Kop, 2006), formal learning within educational institutes need to be complemented with informal learning in order for online

learning to be effective, and this occurs when learners connect learning to their context. Thus, by providing the chance for the learners to direct their learning by communicating in an informal way, creativity and knowledge construction could be promoted (Kop, 2006).

Web 2.0 Tools for Online Communication and Collaboration

The new technologies brought a change to the way tools are used to improve education. Technology is changing fast in this digital age, and tools such as cloud computing are often used to facilitate learners' interaction and collaboration. Kop (2006) examined the changing nature of communication in online learning and investigated the role of online tools such as wikis and blogs in the online knowledge creation process. She stated that lecturers in adult education have seen in the use of blogs and wikis a chance to enhance the traditional learning environment by promoting communication, reflection, and knowledge construction. She pointed out the difference between the use of commercial virtual learning in educational context and the natural learning and knowledge creation through the use of Information Communication Technology that occurs outside formal education. Kop highlighted the need for traditional higher education to adjust to the pace of emerging technologies and the Net Generation learners by incorporating online co-operative knowledge development tools such as wikis and blogs. She stated the difference in nature between learners' interaction in face-to-face learning environment and online interactions, which in turn influence the depth and quality of knowledge creation. For that, she recommended further exploration of different teaching and learning strategies when introducing the new technologies in adult education. She also suggested future research to investigate the development and depth of online communication in a learning environment, and the impact it would have on the quality of both knowledge and learning experience.

The Use of Blogs in Education

Stevenson and Hedberg (2011) indicated that a successful use of Web 2.0 tools in education is not that simple considering their characteristics, potentials and limitations. They further maintained that Web 2.0 technology will nonetheless continue to hold a significant potential of promoting disruptive pedagogies and transformed, autonomous learning. Celsi and Wolfenbarger explained the shifts from Wave 1 technology which focused on using technology behind the scenes of teaching such as the use of Excel to calculate grades, to Wave 2 which focused on replacing teaching methods with technology use such as PowerPoint presentations instead of lecture notes, to Wave 3 technology use which challenges the conception of traditional classrooms and transforms the classroom into a learner-centered and interactive teaching experience (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Boyd (2013) further maintained that the Wave 3 suggests that the approaches to teaching and learning should change so that the whole class should become interactive and learner-centered, no matter what assignments are given. She stated that “blogs are a good example of this sort of interactive, learner-centered approach because they can shift the class to learner-centered knowledge construction, create a broader, authentic audience for student work, encourage student ownership for texts, and promote critical (analysis, evaluation, and synthesis) thinking” (p.86).

One author, Kelly, defines a blog as a web-based technology that enables users to “deploy” text and other media directly to the web (as cited in Tekinarslan, 2012, p. 72). Sim and Hew (2010) provide the definition of a blog as “a space where discourse can occur between learners, between learners and instructors, as well as between learners and the larger Internet community” (p. 151).

According to Statista, “Blogs are well established as a tool for communication, with the estimated number of blogs exceeding 171 million, and this number is growing daily” (as cited in

Duarte, 2015, p. 104). Blogs are popular because they can be easily created and used. They are also easy to personalize and update (Nackerud & Scaletta, 2008).

Sawmiller (2010) pointed out that blogging is so popular that it has its own jargon. He further explained that

A blog is the Web site with information and links, a blogger is one who maintains the blog, the blogosphere is the entire networked, interlinked community of blogs and bloggers, and blogging is the act of creating or sustaining a blog! (p. 44-45).

Researchers identified different types of blogs: the teacher's blog used to publish announcements, links and materials; the classroom blog created with the help of all students; and the individual or student's blog used as a student's portfolio or for collaborative tasks (Neira-Piñero, 2015).

Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) also distinguished between three types of class-based blogs: "instructor-created blogs," "student-created blogs," and "instructor-and-student-managed blogs." For them the most effective type of these three types of blogs is the "instructor-and-student-managed blogs," especially when they aim to engage students in the course content.

Liu (2006) recommended video-based blogging courses that train students to demonstrate their knowledge in the subject matter with visual and sound effects rather than textual blogging, such as practicing oral presentation skills. She investigated the effects of blending a class video blog into face-to-face instruction over a year on optimizing the development of undergraduate students' performance outcomes in speech proficiency and skills.

According to Deng and Yuen (2011), there is a growing interest in the educational benefits and applications of the bog technology which they described as "a dominant online publishing paradigm" (p. 441).

Blogging for Online Interaction and Collaboration

Kop (2006) stated that communicating with others lies at the heart of the blog. Conversational exchange occurs on a blog, and this makes blogging a socially interactive tool whose nature resembles that of a community (Savolainen, 2010). Thus, blogging resembles the traditional academic communication in a way that makes it easier for teachers and learners, who are not of the Net Generation, to use it as a communicative tool (Bartholomew, Jones, & Glassman, 2012).

Ellison and Wu (as cited in Blue, & Tirota, 2011) conducted a study on college students and found that class blogging in a learning management system promoted meaningful engagement and interactivity among learners. Blue and Tirota (2011) noted that it is good to start with class blogging in a learning management system especially for learners who are not comfortable with public blogging. In addition, active exchange on academic topics and an extension of face-to-face class discussions prepare learners for responsible thinking that includes sharing resources and reflection upon academic topics (Blue, & Tirota, 2011).

Moreover, Yang and Chang (2012) indicated that blogging can be used to transform personal learning to collaborative learning because peer learning is a form of cooperative learning that fosters student-student interaction. They conducted a quantitative survey study to investigate the use of blogs for promoting interaction between students and for promoting attitude changes towards learning motivation, peer-learning, and academic achievement. Their findings revealed that learners' engagement in the blogs was associated with positive attitudes towards online peer interaction and academic achievement, as well as a positive motivation to learn from their peers. They suggested that attitudes towards peer interaction and peer-learning motivation improve when the students use the blog comments features, and when they are encouraged to read and comment on each other's work.

Another study was conducted by Savolainen (2010) to investigate and analyze the way blogging was used as an interactive informal online forum on slimming issues, in which people could seek and share information. The findings indicated that blogging helped build supportive communities of interest. Results showed that the blogs promoted sharing information and opinions, whereas articulating information needs and seeking information were proved to be rarely used.

Interaction on a Blog

Due to the interactivity in online learning environment, learners today are able to interact not only with the learning materials but also with each other. Abu Bakar analyzed the learning process that occurs in blogging by using the online interaction concept that was discussed by Mayes and Fowler in 1999 (as cited in Abu Bakar, 2009). According to this concept, there are three levels of interactions in e-learning: interaction with concepts, interaction with tasks, and interaction with people (Abu Bakar, 2009). For Abu Bakar (2009), the first level (i.e. conceptualization), involves understanding the concept of online learning and it is important because the amount of learning that occurs is determined by accepting or rejecting this type of environment. The importance of the second level, i.e. constructions, lies in the constructivist view that perceives the development of learning as the learners actively construct their understanding of a task through participation. According to Mayes and Fowler (as cited in Abu Bakar, 2009), the third level, (i.e. dialogue), is important in education because a social context is needed for the learning process to succeed. Abu Bakar (2009) indicated that learners interact with each other through their discussion on the blogs, thus creating an e-social learning environment.

Gaps in the Literature

As Rahman (2010) stated, learning is considered as a “potential tool to empower a community” (p. 81). Recently, there has been a growing increase in the use of Web 2.0 technologies not only as resource of information but also as an instrument for communication (Kop, 2006). Despite this constant increase in the use of the new technologies, educational institutes are not sufficiently noticing the ways in which learners use technology outside an education environment (Kop, 2006). They perceive this way of learning as chaotic. However, recent researchers argued that the new Internet technologies can be used to connect and complement formal learning with informal learning in order for students to relate what they learn within the educational institutes to their own context, and thus encourage self-directed knowledge creation (Kop, 2006). So the new technologies carry new potentials for learning and teaching if they are effectively used (Griffith, 2010). Moreover, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the instructional process can be determined by the educator in blended learning , thus providing a “healthy digital ecosystem” for adult learners that emphasizes learning rather than technology in order to “achieve the best possible learning experienced and outcomes” that cannot be attained in virtual learning (Finger, Sun, & Jamieson-Proctor, 2010, p.6).

According to Fernando, Thomas, and Wing (as cited in Blue, & Tirota, 2011) more and more university professors are using Web 2.0 resources to improve education. In fact many researchers agreed that Internet tools are needed in higher education for promoting a collective learning experience for the 21st century learners (Bartholomew, Jones, & Glassman, 2012). Lai-Chen, L., and Ching-Long, Y. (2008) stated that learning is perceived by students to be most effective when they actively construct knowledge during group social interaction and collaboration. Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) noted a new type of interactive

technology, offered by Web 2.0 to be changing the focus and approach of formal education in totally new and different ways. They suggested blogging as “the most educational friendly of the new interactive tools” (p. 19). Course blogging may diminish the passive learning perceived in traditional educational settings by enabling students to participate in their own education. Ray and Hocutt (as cited in Blue, & Tirotta, 2011) noted that blogging enables students to discuss, reflect, and engage in an experience that allows them to articulate their ideas and perspectives to others. Bartholomew et al. (2012) pointed out the difference between academic communication and interactive blogging in the sense that a successful blog is a “living, growing organism”; it is “interactive and breaks down walls not only with teacher and topics but also others who are participating in the experience” (p. 25).

Nevertheless, Kirkup (2010) indicated that “blogging has been less enthusiastically embraced as offering alternatives for scholars and researchers” (p. 75). Since it is a relatively new phenomenon, not so many studies reviewed the use of blogs in sufficient detail (Savolainen, 2011). And despite the potential benefits of Web 2.0 tools for collaborative learning, there is still inconsistent empirical evidence about blogging as a tool that facilitates collaborative knowledge construction (Cheng, & Chau, 2011). After all researches and surveys, there is still a lack of a cohesive knowledge base to assess the quality and effectiveness of blogging that would guide practice and education (Yang, & Chang, 2012). However, although blogs did not originate in education, Yang and Chang (2012) indicated that they have been increasingly used to complement traditional classroom lectures in higher education. In fact, there has been a slow shift in education towards the use of Web 2.0 but only a limited research that investigated the use of tools such as blogs and wikis for educational purposes. Cheng and Chau (2011) stated that findings of the studies that focused on using blogs or wikis to promote knowledge sharing and

collaboration were not convergent. Moreover, other studies researched practical problems related to the use of blogs and noted “minimal interaction between learners, low participation level, and failure to conform to course requirements” (Cheng, & Chau, 2011, p. 72). In short, studies on the use of blogs in the educational context showed inconsistent findings: some pointed at their benefit in promoting collaborative learning, while others indicated insufficient communication between learners. This study will help fill the gap in the literature by providing insight into the use of blogging as a web-based learning tool in a traditional educational setting.

Literature Review: Set II

After analyzing the data collected through the interviews with the participants of this research project, I went back to compile a literature review on the themes related to the ones emerging from analyzing the data collected. I reviewed the literature for the specific themes I had identified in my analysis in order to discuss the findings in context of the existing literature to point to similarities and divergences in findings. The themes identified were grouped under the following headings:

1. Challenges of the use of blogs in a traditional educational setting: a) Technology b) Time constraints and difficulties with the blog content c) Required skills for blogging.
2. Participation and the effect of blogging : a) Motivations for blogging b) The effect of blogging on the students’ engagement c) The effect of grading on the student participation
3. Role of teacher
4. The impact of blogging on learning a) comments b) Educational affordances and pedagogical benefits of blogging c) Blogging for improving learning outcomes d) The

use of blogs in history classes e) Type of learning on the blog f) The impact of blogging on the student interaction g) The impact of blogging on the students' collaboration

5. Moodle versus Blogger

6. Limitations of the use of blogs

7. The students' evaluation of the experience

8. The impact of blogging on the traditional educational system: a) Pedagogy and the use of blogs b) Blog learning vs. class learning c) Incorporating blogs in higher education d) Recommendations for blogging

Challenges of the Use of Blogs in a Traditional Educational Setting

Technology. A study conducted by Wang and Hsua on pre-service teachers at a university in the USA found that unfamiliarity or confusion with the technology was a barrier to blogging (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). Moreover, in a study conducted by Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012) students who experienced a student-centered blog felt confident participating because they were already skilled enough with technology, but they did not perceive blogging as contributing to their technological skills. In contrast, those who experienced a course-centered blog did not have technological skills but they were required to blog and reported that blogging improved their skills. The experience discussed in the study conducted by Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012) occurred in a traditional classroom setting where the “use of blogs is a supplementary activity, making the experience one that combines attributes of both traditional and long-distance education” (p. 398). Halic et al. (2010) conducted a study that included 67 undergraduate students in a nutrition course that aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using blogs on enhancing students’ perceived learning in a large lecture class. Their findings also supported the idea that students’ technical competence at the beginning of the course affected their perceptions of learning. They suggested that teachers provide technical instructions and guidance for any new tool at the beginning of the course so that students gain confidence with it.

On the other hand, despite the fact that blog activities in the study conducted by Stiler and Philleo required some technical skills from the students, the level of their technical ability did not affect their engagement. Thus they indicated that blogs can be used to expand in-class discussions for pre-service teacher education courses without worrying about the students’ level

of technical skills (as cited in Cakir, 2013). Thus blogging provides a platform for students to reflect and share their thoughts about the studies subject matter without having to learn complex technical knowledge (Cakir, 2013).

Time constraints and difficulties with the blog content. Online communicative setting has the advantage of involving no time pressure on students and no interruptions from their teachers or classmates (Ming Huei, 2015). The findings of Cakir (2013) showed that time spent on blog activities did not affect the student engagement, and suggested that teachers can implement blogs in their classes without being concerned about the student's engagement with completing them.

On the other hand, Freeman and Brett (2012) observed that the reflective effort of students decreased when they wrote multiple posts in one day to catch up in order to meet a course requirement. Xie et al. examined the effect of blogging on students' reflective thinking. Their findings reported the effect of time on the level of student reflection: as time elapsed, the reflective thinking scores of those who continued blogging, with or without feedback, increased (as cited in Halic et al., 2010).

According to the study conducted by Freeman et al., negative perceptions of blogs included time constraints, and concern about the public nature of a blog; that is, people who might read it (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). Hain and Davidson found in their study that a major problem was that students often posted on the publication deadline leaving little time for other students to comment. However, they found that the use of a feed reader or RSS positively affected the students' interactions (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). The findings of Manfra and Lee (2012) revealed that one student reported her preference for sitting up in a class and just

listen instead of speaking up. She did not feel comfortable knowing that others could see what she writes on the blog.

From their review of other research studies, Sim and Hew (2010) categorized negative perceptions toward blogging as personal or environmental factors that included the dislike for writing, concerns of privacy, time constraints, and unfamiliarity with technology. Other students felt discomfort about peer feedback, both as a sender and as a receiver (Ellison & Wu, 2008). A study conducted by Xie and Sharma revealed that participants had privacy concerns about blogging (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). A survey conducted by Davi et al. found that female students tended to feel more intimidated by the use of blogs than their male counterparts (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). The fact that student reflections are available for the entire class or even the world could produce anxiety among some students, just like speaking in front of a class might. However, it also enables those who take time to gather their thoughts before coming up with an argument (Walatka, 2012). The reason why students worried about making spelling mistakes might be explained by the fact that participation was for a grade (Alqudsi-ghabra & Al-Bahrani, 2012).

According to a study constructed by Glass and Spiegelman that included forty to sixty college students of Math and Computer Science in the USA, the teachers found that some students did not properly validate their sources (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). In the study investigated by Tekinarslan (2012), two students mentioned that the features of copy and paste in blogs may not only affect the students' creativity but may also initiate plagiarism when creating the content. Yang and Chang (2012) pointed out that social learning could be open to "potential plagiarism under the disguise of peer learning" (p. 134). They recommended further research about the implication of using blogs to address plagiarism.

Some studies perceived blogging as a promising approach to facilitate teaching and learning (Ming Huei, 2015). However other studies pointed out the increased work-load on blog teachers (Ming Huei, 2015). The results of the study conducted by Neira-Piñero (2015) revealed that the use of blogs demands a high workload for teachers if applied to large group of students. Teachers need to spend extra time and effort to provide students with support for managing electronic content and for technical and knowledge development (Ming Huei, 2015). And other studies revealed low blogging frequency (Ming Huei, 2015).

Boyd (2013) pointed out that students can get confused about what to expect from blogging and that they are not familiar with writing in the informal style in an academic context. She added that it can be difficult for them to blog about their personal interests and experiences with the course context since they are not often asked to do that. And she recommended that learners should be encouraged and that blogs work best when students are used to blogging on an ongoing basis instead of receiving help just at the beginning and then be left on their own. However, Boyd (2013) specified that students need to get familiar with blogging in academia by being offered some guidance on how to use blogs in an educational environment. Nevertheless, she stated the need for finding the exact balance of guidance when introducing blogs in education because too much guidance can be constraining for students whereas too little guidance can be frustrating.

Required skills for blogging. Boyd (2013) indicated that blogs require literacy skills that are different from the traditional skills of an essay, and new attitudes which require learner-centered practices instead of teacher-dominated ones.

According to Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, and Conole (2009) students need to develop

certain skills so that they can blog effectively. Burgess argued that students need critical creative and network literacies to become active participant in knowledge construction (as cited in Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, & Conole, 2009).

Participation and the Effect of Grading

Motivations for blogging. What was found in the literature to be motivating students for course blogging? Analysis of interviews with students Conducted by Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, and Conole (2009) revealed six factors the students considered when they were blogging: “perceptions of, and need for, an audience; perceptions of, and need for, community; the utility of, and need for comments; presentational style of the blog content; overarching factors related to the technological context; and the pedagogical context of the course” (p.31). However, it is important to note that those students were provided with their own blog, use of which was not mandatory.

For Duarte (2015) the big challenge with educational blogs is to motivate students to regularly participate. His results showed that students preferred not to participate in blogs mostly because they found it not worth the effort or they were not sure they could contribute with something valuable. Duarte (2015) analyzed the main causes behind this behavior and found that students did not have the confidence to produce a convincing comment, and were afraid of what their peers might think or feel. He concluded that the students’ natural need for self-expression and belonging to a community and desire to interact and share with others were not sufficient motivators for using blogs.

The effect of blogging on the students’ engagement. A study conducted Miceli et al. found that blogs played an important role in promoting participation and interaction among language learners, which nurtured a sense of class community (as cited in Liu, 2016). When

employing personal blogs to promote critical reflections of inservice teachers in a graduate course, findings showed that “blogs positively contributed to students’ emotional closeness with peers and that peer relationship became intense after the online interaction and knowledge construction” (Liu, 2016, p. 45). Yet, another study reported that student teachers had “a lower level of knowledge construction in that they mostly posted descriptive rather than critical reflection entries on a class blog, despite their active engagement in online interaction and discussion” (Liu, 2016, p. 45). Cakir (2013) conducted a study (survey) about the use of blogs as a discussion tool for first-year pre-service teacher education students (in elementary school mathematics department). Results showed that factors affecting their engagement with the blog use included: motivation, reasons to use blog in the course, and level of challenge. Moreover, he found that gender and technical ability of students did not impact their engagement. The findings of Cakir (2013) revealed that gender was not an issue in student engagement with the blog activities, and that both genders were equally engaged despite the fact that females tend to be less engaged or successful with the computer related work in schools. He also noted that gender differentiation does not need to be an issue when implementing blog activities in the classroom. He concluded that blogs can be used to expand in-class discussions equally well for all students. However he emphasized that the results of this study cannot be generalized and that further experimental studies need to be conducted with increased sample size. On the other hand, Homik and Melis reported that “students engaged in only a minimal level of blogging in order to meet assessment requirements” (as cited in Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, and Conole, 2008, p. 32). In order to integrate the use of blogs effectively and efficiently in teacher education, factors affecting student participation and engagement in coursework need to be further investigated (Cakir, 2013).

Yang and Chang (2012) conducted a quantitative survey study involving 154 undergraduate and graduate students majoring in electronics. 68% of those students participated in isolated blogs used as a supplement to traditional classroom lectures, and the remainder participated in interactive blogs designed to improve peer learning experiences. Results revealed that both groups showed positive motivation to learn from peers, and that student engagement in dialogues in the form of blog comments was associated with positive attitudes towards online peer interaction and academic achievements.

The level of challenge with the learning activities has a positive impact on student engagement (Cakir, 2013). Cakir (2013) confirmed that students who perceived the activities as difficult to complete and meet the teachers' expectations were more engaged with the blog activity in the course. He concluded that blog activities should be challenging for students in order to improve their engagement, and suggested activities that can be intellectually challenging to students without harming their engagement with the coursework. Moreover he recommended teachers to orient the students about how to use the blog activity and explain its benefits to their coursework.

The effect of grading on the student participation. Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) pointed out that "A course blog thrives best when participants work towards assignments that provide reinforcement through commentary and grades" (p. 24). Administering a survey to 135 undergraduate and graduate students, Duarte (2015) found that the participation level can be increased by means of the grading system as students were not very motivated to voluntarily participate on an active regular basis. Duarte (2015) found in his study that the problem of low levels of participation included both students and teachers. He pointed out the importance of the teacher's participation for the success of blogging and recommended the need for teachers to

clarify the value of blogging for students and develop a beneficial purpose for them, using the grading system. He also mentioned that the studies of Schroeder et al. in 2010 showed that participation can be increased by means of the grading system. Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012) conducted a study about the use of blogs in higher education at Kuwait University. They investigated two blogging experiences: a course-centered blog and a student-centered blog. Students were motivated by their interest in the student-centered blog whereas they mainly participated in the course-centered blog because participation was a graded course-requirement. They wondered if students could be committed to writing by means other than the grade award, and recommended further studies to explore whether participation would continue when the course ends. The results of Cakir's findings (2013) revealed that at the beginning of the course students were blogging because it was a class requirement but through the end of the course the majority were blogging in order to compare and share their knowledge with their classmates. Students were also highly satisfied with the blog activity in the course. According to some studies, those who use blogs for the purposes of sharing knowledge with their network benefit more than others (Cakir, 2013).

According to Boyd (2013), one of the challenges that face teachers is that they try to create a learner-centered pedagogy and want student to willingly participate in the blog, so they create assignments to encourage students to blog about their interest yet their students realize they are required to complete those assignments so they pretend to participate. She stated that "No matter their best intentions, teachers still control the academic situation" (p. 101). Boyd (2013) affirmed that students can control their learning and be "intrinsically motivated to blog in class rather than seeing blogs as assignments to be completed for a grade" when teachers implement technologies that are interesting for students (p. 88). Chu et al. (2012) conducted a

study to examine the behavior, perceptions, and processes of blogging as computer-based support for learning among 53 undergraduate information management interns and 28 undergraduate interns in the University of Hong Kong. Their findings showed the students' engagement in regular blogging and frequently reading others' blogs regardless of whether it was graded or not. Dredger et al. suggested that teachers ask their students what motivates them in order to create blog assignments that are interesting to them and help them interact actively in blogging and write for their own purposes rather than just for completing an assignment (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Assignments that require students to blog with required structure and content and grading rubric would only be in conflict with the nature of blogs which most students understand, that blogs are personal and experimental writing spaces (Nackerud & Scaletta, 2008). Kerawalla et al. pointed out the importance for students to have internal motivation in order to engage in blogging for a reason other than to achieve a good grade (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Research showed that teachers need to draw on student motivations and interests that go beyond that of the course content or requirement in order to make these motivations a central part of the course (Boyd, 2013).

According to the Self-Determination Theory, Sim and Hew (2010) believed that students who blog as a response to external factors such as the fear of bad grade or promise of good grade would be extrinsically motivated. On the other hand, students who choose the blog as a response to internal factors such as desire to learn would be intrinsically motivated. For them it was clear from previous studies that teachers use extrinsic motivators to get the students to blog. However they also advocated the fact that making blogging a compulsory part of the course requirement might be "the necessary evil" to make sure students use blogs in the first place (p. 157).

Role of teacher. Duarte (2015) pointed out the important role of teachers in developing a beneficial purpose for students to participate in the blog. He emphasized the importance of the teacher's effort for the success of any technology means to become an effective learning tool. He also added that the teacher's participation is nevertheless crucial to the success of any pedagogical strategy, including blogging. According to Halic et al. (2010), the level of perceived learning can be enhanced through the sense of community and the interaction of both students and teacher via the blog. Freeman and Brett (2012) also recommended the importance of regular teacher engagement within the student blogs to facilitate the process by encouraging and directing it.

In the constructivist learning environment, the role of the teacher is to monitor, guide, and give prompt feedback to students (Cakir, 2013). Blogs can facilitate prompt feedback to students, which is an important element in any learning environment (Cakir, 2013). He further added that teachers can monitor the students' interaction and discussion on the blog in order to provide them with feedback throughout the learning process. By this, the teacher is no longer the primary knowledge source in the classroom but rather a learning partner guiding students in their learning process.

In a collaborative learning environment, students are the center of learning as they are active agents constructing knowledge and the role of teachers is mainly to monitor, facilitate, and create a safe online learning environment by providing encouraging comments and timely feedback (Wang, Lin, & Liao, 2012). This way, students will feel more motivated to engage in the blogging process. They also suggested teachers to provide clear descriptions and grading rubrics "help students get organized with their collaboration" (p. 204). According to Chu et al. (2012) the role of facilitators needs to be investigated further. They believed that "An optimal

amount of facilitatory support may be helpful, but too much guidance may also be detrimental to independent learning” (p. 999). According to Bartholomew, Jones and Glassman (2012), educating a new generation of “digital natives” can pose a challenge for the teachers’ role as “expert” (p. 20). Bartholomew, Jones & Glassman (2012) indicated that it is hard for teachers to know how to use, implement and maintain course blogs effectively as an educational force in the classroom. They further pointed out the importance of developing blog management strategies.

Teachers can “make use of the blogosphere by encouraging students to find other blogs by experts in the field and become part of a public conversation” (Nackerud & Scaletta, 2008, p. 76). In addition, blogs help improve teaching because they can inform teachers of the students’ understanding of the key concepts and thus give them the opportunities to intervene if they want (Dos & Demir, 2013).

When reading the students’ blogs, teachers receive a type of formative evaluation. Blogging enables teachers to understand their students’ struggles with the course material. Thus teachers can help students overcome barriers to learning by providing ongoing feedback and redesigning learning activities (Blau et al., 2013). In the study conducted by Dos and Demir (2013), student mentioned in their blogs the subject, the teaching style, their feelings, and expectations about the course, which helps teachers receive their students’ feedback so that they can review their lessons and provides an insight for them into how their students can learn more effectively. They indicated that their study proved that blogs can be used as a feedback instrument which allows teachers to review their students’ reactions and redesign their courses if necessary.

Boyd (2013) indicated the need for teachers to be bloggers and have their own blogs so that they can teach their students to be effective learners and use blogs critically. She explained

that teachers should show they are sustainable bloggers by participating in the students' blogs, and have their own blogs outside the class which they give access to the students too. Teachers can have the literacy skills to help students who need guidance and engage with students who are experts with blogging. For Boyd (2013) by having a blog themselves, teachers have both credibility and authority. Teachers learn from students as much as they learn from them as part of a community of bloggers. Boyd (2013) stated that "the classroom is a two-way learning environment" so "if teachers want their students to be intrinsically motivated to write blogs, teachers themselves must model that behavior by being interested bloggers themselves" (Boyd, 2013, p. 108).

The Impact of Blogging on Learning

Comments. Every blog has a *comment* feature which enables readers to post feedback to the blog author. Herring et al. supported the existence of interconnection and conversation in blogs and indicated that the conversational nature of blogging is created by the interconnectivity of comments on blogs (as cited in Nackerud & Scaletta, 2008).

According to Sawmiller (2010), the feature which enables commenting on a blog allows for collaboration. In their study of undergraduate interns who used blogs, Chu, Chan, and Tiwari (2012) found that commenting and information sharing were the top two perceived values of blogging. Yang and Chang (2012) indicated that comments are "a trace for blog authors to recognize that they have gotten their messages across to those who already made comments and perhaps to many more who only read" (p. 133). Comments seemed to help promote online peer discussion, interaction, and sharing culture (Yang and Chang, 2012).

Hall and Davison investigated hundreds of blog comments in an interactive learning environment and observed accentuated critical reflection (as cited in Yang and Chang, 2012).

Yang and Chang (2012) pointed out that creating comments is a process which involves reflecting on prior readings of original posts and on other prior knowledge acquired to date. They added that “composing comments involves stepping back, reflecting, and analyzing, which enables individuals to become more thoughtful and mindful of their work” (p. 127).

Educational affordances and pedagogical benefits of blogging. According to the theorists Ferdig and Trammel, there are four pedagogic benefits of blogging: helping students become experts in the subject matter, increasing their interest in and ownership of learning, providing the chance for students to participate and become a member of a community of practice, exposing them to diverse perspectives (as cited in Alqudsi-ghabra & Al-Bahrani, 2012).

The study of Deng and Yuen (2011) confirmed that there were explicit and implicit benefits to the use of both course-centered and student-centered blogs. On the implicit level, blogging improved the students’ skills, offered the opportunity for networking, promoted cooperation and trust, helped cross gender lines, and fostered freedom of expression. On the explicit level, it enhanced their technical, language, and writing skills, reduced fear and anxiety with social media use, and offered a reward in the form of a grade (Alqudsi-ghabra & Al-Bahrani, 2012).

According to Deci and Ryan, the Self-Determination theory argues that every person has three main psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Park stated that blogs can achieve autonomy because students can maintain their own voice in the blog, competence because students receive feedback on their ideas to determine their values, and relatedness because they provide a space for students to engage with their peers (as cited in Boyd, 2013).

The benefits of blogging tend to center on two pedagogical uses: reflective and interactive (Deng & Yuen, 2011). According to Deng and Yuen (2011), the activities of writing, reading, and commenting on blogs offer educational affordances for students: writing a blog entry promotes self-expression, reading a blog promotes social connection, and commenting facilitates social interaction.

The functions of blogs vary: They can be used as online personal journals, can facilitate communication and interaction, and can be used as interactive and knowledge-exchange tool where students can be engaged in collaborative writing (Young et al., 2011).

Boyd (2013) stated that the two most significant benefits for the uses of blogs described in current research were reflective learning and social communication. Being part of a community motivates the students to post in their blogs (Boyd, 2013). In addition, the research of Deng and Yuen (2011) showed that blogging helped the students feel more connected to each other and encouraged them to be more active participants not only on the blog but also in class. Park suggested that the feeling of competence is increased when students feel their ideas are important to others (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Ellison and Wu also added that knowing that they are writing for an audience can encourage students to focus on writing better (as cited in Boyd, 2013).

Sawmiller (2010) states that: “One way to connect to the real world is to have a real-world audience” (p. 46). Blog writing and commenting can help students to be exposed to different points of view, which promotes critical thinking and analytical skills as students can reach an audience other than the instructor (Boyd, 2013). “[...] blogging provides immediate, *click-to-publish* results”, by which a student work can be available for peers to review or for others to comment and post feedback (Sawmiller, 2010, p. 44). “[...] bloggers can achieve a

multi-modal expression by integrating pictures, audio, or even video clips into their blog space” (Deng & Yuen, 2011, p. 442).

Blogging promotes prior communication among students which gives them confidence and provides raw material for class discussion (Walatka, 2012). Blogging gives students their own space to engage in questions and ideas, facilitate dialogue through commenting, and “provides a foundation from which in-class discussions and assimilation can begin” (Walatka, 2012, p. 382).

Blogs can promote the acquisition of reflective skills (Dos & Demir, 2013). The study conducted by Den and Yuen (2011) indicated that academic blogs helped student teachers externalize their feelings and struggles, document their experiences, and share their thoughts. Students can also demonstrate their projects on blogs or reflect on their own thoughts (Young et al., 2011). Young, Gyeong Mi, and Lee (2011) conducted a study to explore blogging as a space where learners can benefit informally. They found that blogging can help the processes of knowledge acquisition and reflection because it enables students to easily access unlimited resources, and that blogging makes informal learning more enriching and fulfilling for adults because they learn more effectively if learning can be self-directed, practical, and reflection-oriented. When teachers integrate student reflections as fundamental part of the in-class time, the students’ contributions become “the core material from which the class builds” (Walatka, 2012, p. 381).

Blogs can be used in the classroom to improve the students’ motivation, challenge their critical thinking skills, and extend the classroom walls (Sawmiller, 2010). The advantages of educational blogs include information sharing among classmates or online learning community, providing and receiving feedback through the comments, potentials for corporation and

communication among students, and “easy to use features without sophisticated technical skills” (Tekinarslan, 2012, p. 81).

Some studies found that the use of blogs in education promotes critical thinking and reflection skills, which are also necessary for problem solving skills (Cakir, 2013). Student blogging helps create a dynamic classroom and enhance the classroom discussion at a minimum, because students would have already started to think about the material or do something about it in their posts or responses to others (Walatka, 2012). The results of the study conducted by Neira-Piñeiro (2015) showed that the creation of a literature blog enhanced the participants’ communicative skills, literary competence, didactic training, increased motivation, encouraged independent learning and shared knowledge building by means of peer interaction.

Young et al. (2011) argued that blogs can be used effectively for education and learning. Teachers and students can communicate on a blog to discuss issues that were raised in class and for that blogging can be used as an effective instructional tool (Young et al., 2011). Furthermore, student teachers can use blogging for their own professional development (Young et al., 2011). Blogs can help teachers with good practice of students engaging activities centered on principles of student engagement such as active learning, interaction and collaboration, and prompt feedback (Cakir, 2013).

Blogging for improving learning outcomes. The main objective behind any educational change in school education is to improve student learning outcomes (Liu, 2006). Downes defines Web 2.0 as “an attitude, not a technology” (as cited in Boyd, 2013, p. 88). Kang, Bonk, and Kim explain that such an attitude enables the learner to control their own learning (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Boyd (2013) added that blogs, one of the Web 2.0 tools, provide a different way of

approaching not only writing but also education, and require students to take ownership of their ideas and control their learning.

Through the use of technology, the focus of learning shifts from passively assimilating information to actively constructing and sharing knowledge (Blau et al., 2013). Blogging was considered by some researchers as a “potential transformational technology for teaching and learning” (Yang & Chang, 2012, p. 127).

Boyd (2013) affirmed that blogging enables students to be exposed to different perspectives, which help them rethink their position and construct new knowledge. She explained how posting their thoughts and refining them through interaction with their peers help students build their own knowledge rather than use the blogs to communicate already formed answers, and help them “see how knowledge is not a fixed entity but is constructed through ongoing negotiations within discourse communities” (p. 95). Gallagher claims that a key feature of blogs is “the rhetoric of the provisional”, to question rather than provide answers (as cited in Boyd, 2013, p. 95). Thus engaging in conversations around ideas help students see that knowledge construction is an ongoing and ever-changing process and that leaning can become a “co-emergent process based on engagement with multiple perspectives” (Boyd, 2013, p. 95). Dos and Demir (2013) indicated how in their study students redefined the concepts they learnt in the lesson, in their own words. They also provided their own examples about the subject, and reflected their development in the blogs, thus they constructed their own knowledge which, they believed, shows the constructivist nature of the blogs. Tekinarslan (2012) investigated the effects of educational blogging on the perceptions of undergraduate students in Science and Technology Education program toward Web 2.0 as a learning tool. Their finding revealed that blogging not only facilitated the students’ learning but also improved their knowledge in the field of Science

and Technology. They conducted that blogging can be considered as a convenient activity tool to improve the students' perceptions toward Web as a learning tool and improve their knowledge in the field.

Hungerford-Kresser et al. (2014) described blogs as “a place where students' perspectives can be challenged and extended through discussion and additional class readings and activities” (p. 335). When they analyzed the students' responses on the blogs they found that blogging can facilitate learning and extend students' thinking by facilitating discussions that lead to deeper understanding for students. In addition, they indicated that blogging enables students to share and seek various perspectives. For them it is important that students “learn to access and critically interrogate their own social constructions” (p. 338).

Some studies found that blending blogs with face-to-face instruction promoted reflective thinking and a better understanding of the subject matter (Liu, 2016). Similarly other studies found that using blogs in teacher education enhanced preservice teachers' professional development and field practice (Liu, 2016). Class blogging helped students develop their expressions of thoughts, learn and share their peers' knowledge, and boost their understanding of what they learned in class (Liu, 2016).

The incorporation of class blogs into face-to-face language instruction helped Spanish learners to collaborate with their peers, cultivate learner autonomy, and develop metacognition (Liu, 2016). Another study also found that blog discussions contributed to learners' business English vocabulary learning and created cooperative learning opportunities (Liu, 2016).

Novakovich and Cramer Long (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study on two sections of university level technical writing courses in order to determine the differences in learning outcomes between students using traditional writing methods and students using blogs to

generate articles. The results of the study revealed that a community of practice that occurs in the form of a course blog and that web-mediated writing proved to be useful in generating more effective learning outcomes. The researchers recommended the incorporation of blogging technologies to establish effective and engaging communities of practice thus enabling learners to practice knowing. They also examined blog comments and their relationship to learning outcomes. Results showed that providing feedback had a greater impact on learning outcomes than receiving feedback.

The use of blogs in history classes. A historical instruction that is more cognitively challenging and discipline-based can be provided for students when teachers combine digital technologies with appropriate pedagogical frameworks (Manfra & Lee, 2012). Manfra and Lee (2012) conducted a study about the use of blogs as an educational tool in the U.S. history classroom to engage students in doing history. Their findings indicated that the blogging activities were restricted by the limits of students' literacy and historical skills, and the limits of social networks in those classes. Overall, the study conducted by Manfra and Lee (2012) found that blogging contributed to the student learning in the U.S. history classroom in terms of certain historical thinking activities and the level of the student's engagement. However, it revealed the issue of factual errors and historical misconceptions that some students posted. They suggested the teacher to address it through direct support and formative assessment thus highlighting the important role of teacher as a facilitator. The results of this study also suggested that blogging had a positive impact on students as they elaborated on their historical understanding and worked with culturally relevant resources. Despite the fact that it was not across their experiences, they were able to make historical arguments supported with evidence from primary and secondary sources.

Type of learning on the blog. Young et al. (2011) conducted a study to investigate the role of blogging in adult informal learning practice through the perceptions of individual adult bloggers. Their findings showed that blogging has characteristics similar to adult informal learning such as self-directed, self-regulated, and learner-centered learning. Participants did not perceive blogging as an activity to create membership in communities or build new fields of knowledge. The results indicated that the reason behind that was that individual bloggers were interested in fulfilling their own intellectual desires and needs rather than participating in collective activities and building collective knowledge. However, participants agreed that blogging would create ideal learning environment especially for adult learners who want to learn informally.

Blogging can be a constructive tool as it fosters critical thinking skills, collaboration, and differentiated instruction by using multiple learning styles (Sawmiller, 2010). According to Sawmiller (2010) critical thinking will not happen just because students are given writing assignments. She emphasized the role of blogging in promoting critical thinking as students are required to read information, filter and restructure it in order to determine a meaningful way to write about it.

According to Yang and Chang (2012), “peer learning is a form of cooperative learning that enhances the value of student-student interaction” (p. 127). They further indicated that “blogs may have the potential to transform personal learning to collaborative learning” (p. 127). Teachers can use blogs in the classroom to meet their students’ different learning styles. Visual, verbal, auditory, kinesthetic, social, logical, or solitary learners can be assigned the following according to their style: posting graphs or real world pictures, creating a podcast and uploading

it, conducting or experiment at home and posting the findings, making the project a group experience, write about an evidence, and reflecting through a journal (Sawmiller, 2010).

Some studies suggested that the use of blogs could increase student interactions (through) by means of written language, learning motivations towards writing and consequently their writing performance (Ming Huei, 2015). Chen and Brown suggested that student bloggers' writing performance was affected by the awareness of audience and ownership (as cited in Ming Huei, 2015). A study conducted by Zeng and Harris with 20 undergraduate students found that blogging helped them learn in class and increased the intellectual exchange between students (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). Participants thought that blogs could be used as a medium for reflective thinking and writing. The finding of Kitchakarn showed that a blog-enhanced learning environment helped language learners improve their writing competence as it made learning relaxing and increased their motivation to write more freely (as cited in Liu, 2016). On the other hand, Ming Huei (2015) conducted a 16-week experiment involving 18 university-level Taiwanese EFL student writers taking an English minor course. The results suggested that implementing learner-centered blogging into EFL writing instruction promoted writing skills, motivation, and self-efficacy. However, the perception of the blogging experience by the students was mixed, because their enthusiasm and belief in the effectiveness of the experience did not translate into much actual blogging activity. They suggested further investigation before blogging can be embraced in practical pedagogy in ESL/EFL writing classrooms.

Chu et al. (2012) positively rated the use of blogging for "information sharing, knowledge construction, problem solving and learning about others' internship experiences" (p. 997). Participants also suggested blogging to be used for future interns. Students reported that blogging helped increased knowledge about their fields of practice, and that they learned from

reading about their peers' experiences (Chu et al., 2012). Hungerford-Kresser, Wiggins, and Amaro-Jimenez (2014) conducted a study to identify the ways that pre-service teachers made use of blogs to complement their in-class (face-to-face) learning. Their findings revealed that students used blogs effectively and that valuable learning took place. Hungerford-Kresser et al. (2014) found that blogs helped their pre-service teachers participants extend their learning with topics related to culture and race by connecting between course content and future practice and allowing them to "further dissect their personal perceptions by connecting their readings" (p. 335).

The qualitative results of Tekinarslan (2012) revealed students' perceptions about blogs as convenient tools to share information in multimedia format, providing time and flexibility to share and search information outside of the class.

In the study conducted by Tekinarslan (2012), students explained that they learned about new information in their field of study, science and technology, when they searched and read information to be used or published on their blogs. They also explained that blogging gave them the chance to repeat and improve their prior learning in the subject matter when they wrote and edited their blog contents and that their knowledge in the field increased when they read their classmates' blogs.

Novakovich and Cramer Long (2013) pointed out that online publishing motivates students to improve their performance, increase the level of their engagement, and enhance their attention to collaboration, self-regulation, and overall performance.

A study conducted by Ellison and Wu (2008) surveyed 52 undergraduate students and found that reading their peers' blogs helped students understand the course concepts. The

integration of electronic writing into the classroom helps students improve their understanding of the material (Sawmiller, 2010).

A survey done by Williams and Jacobs found that blogging was perceived by most students to contribute positively to their learning by enabling them to read, exchange views with their teacher and peers, and access information beyond the classroom (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010).

Pre-service teachers at a university in the USA, interviewed by Wang and Hsua, thought that blogging enabled them to interact with others and express their feelings outside the class (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010).

Xie and Sharma interviewed 9 doctoral students of instructional systems design and found that blogs supported their learning by providing different viewpoints, provided a space for them to reflect through commentary, and pushed them to think more critically about the material (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). Participants also found blogging fun and interesting (Sim & Hew, 2010).

Reflection is an important aspect of self-directed learning (Robertson, 2011). “Social media, and blogging in particular, is a viable choice to lead to reflective and interactive thinking, which is prerequisite to higher-order thinking” (Alqudsi-ghabra & Al-Bahrani, 2012, p. 396). “Blogging can be a medium for reflective writing, which in turn can promote learning” states Boud (as cited in Robertson, 2011, p. 1631). According to Deng and Yuen’s framework for the educational affordances of blogs, “self-reflection is supported by blog writing, reflection is triggered by blog reading and reflective dialogue by commenting on a blog” (as cited in Robertson, 2011, p. 1632).

The pedagogical benefits of blogs are centered on two areas: blogs as reflective devices and as interactive devices (Duarte, 2015). Many students find learning to be the most effective “when they actively construct knowledge through group social interaction and collaboration” (Duarte, 2015, p. 105). Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012) indicated that blogging not only encourages individual and group reflection on learning experiences but also enables collaborative creation of content. They described it as an authentic learning experience because bloggers experience the feeling of owning their own learning when they actively collaborate to create their spaces. Dos and Demir (2013) also described the blog as a constructive repository of students’ reflections, serving as a platform where they can discuss their own learning strategies.

Deng and Yuen (2011) conducted an empirical study involving student teachers to explore to what extent blogs can support self-expression, self-reflection, social interaction, and reflective dialogue. Their results confirmed that blogs helped participants to project their feelings, document their experiences, and share their thoughts. The study of Deng and Yuen (2011) involved a framework for the educational affordance of blogs that was structured around 3 types of blogging behaviors: blog writing, reading, and commenting (p. 449, 450). They pointed out the importance of blog reading as a dimension of academic blogs and which presents the link between posting and responding. Before engaging in any dialogue, students need to read and reflect (Deng & Yuen, 2011).

Dos and Demir (2013) conducted a study analyzing the content of undergraduate students’ blogs in order to investigate blog entries and reflective level of the participants’ writings within the educational settings. Their findings revealed that students mostly wrote at the descriptive reflection level: they focused in their writings on the course subject, teaching method, learning at the lesson, and personal thoughts. They also revealed that blogs in their study

provided a space for students to reflect on the learning theme, explain ideas, and provide information about their own learning and expectations. They concluded that their study proved that blogs could be used as a learning and feedback instrument.

Harland and Wondra coded the depth of preservice teachers' reflection on clinical experiences in two groups. Participants who used blogs showed higher levels of reflection in their writing than those who used paper-based reflective reports (as cited in Liu, 2016).

In the study of Halic et al., students reported that blogging enhanced learning because it increased their reflection on course-related concepts, and facilitated sharing perspectives on the course material among peers (as cited in Blau et al., 2013). Their findings revealed that blogging enhanced group learning by enhancing the (their) sense of community. However, many of them did not value their peers' comments neither the interactive potential of blogging.

A study conducted by Xie and Sharma, who interviewed 9 doctoral students, found that blogging supported the student learning by providing different viewpoints from both the teacher and their peers, thus allowing them to better reflect on their learning (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010).

Another study conducted by Zeng and Harris, who surveyed twenty undergraduate students, found that most students perceived blogs as a medium for reflective thinking and writing, helping them learn in class, and increase the intellectual exchange with their peers (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010).

After analyzing around 1000 messages, the study conducted by Yang provided empirical evidence for blogs as a vehicle for facilitating reflection and the development of a community of practice among student teachers (as cited in Deng & Yuen, 2011).

The impact of blogging on the student interaction. Duffy and Cunningham state, that “According to the social constructivist theory of learning, truth or knowledge is reached by community, through discussing and reaching a social consensus” (as cited in Cakir, 2013, p. 245). Social interactions are crucial for the process of learning because students can advance through their zone of proximal development (ZPD) by learning a lot more through interacting with more skilled or experienced people than they can learn all by themselves (Blau et al., 2013). The students’ interaction with their peers in learning situations results in higher-quality comprehension as they get exposed to inconsistent knowledge and explore opposing perceptions and ideas (Yang & Chang, 2012). From the social modelling perspective, peer level of competence in a task is affected by student-to-student interaction (Yang & Chang, 2012). From the same perspective, Yang and Chang (2012) maintained that the use of blogs provides opportunities for students to view blogs created by others, and encourages comments after examining their viewpoints, which should improve their knowledge levels in course subjects and may consequently improve their academic achievements.

Blogging enables social interaction through commenting and linking to other websites or blogs. These two mechanisms create a space for collaborative and cooperative learning (Deng & Yuen, 2011). According to Burgess, the comment box is a typical interactive feature of a blog (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Halic et al. affirmed that the interactive feature is essential to explore the blog’s social nature (as cited in Duarte, 2015).

Students need to interact and collaborate with peers so that they engage in their learning process (Cakir, 2013). The intensity of their interaction indicates their engagement with the coursework (Cakir, 2013). Moreover, the students’ engagement contributes to their satisfaction

and learning (Cakir, 2013). Therefore blogs can be used as an online platform for student interaction and as an interaction monitoring tool for teachers (Cakir, 2013).

The findings of the content analysis of blogs by Hall and Davison in 2007 revealed that the interactive use of blogs with students in educational settings resulted in a significant degree of online peer interaction among learners (as cited in Yang & Chang, 2012). Yang and Chang (2012) observed that a significant number of students made efforts to make their blogs look stylish and personal, and noted that those were signs of student motivation and engagement in online interaction with peers. Blau, Mor, and Neuthal (2013) investigated student interactions of 56 graduate students in a blog-based learning community in a university course (who wrote individual blogs and weekly group summaries using a wiki environment). Their findings revealed that choosing the right type of post content has a significant impact on increasing peer interaction in a blog environment: sharing experiences instead of just providing information, calling for feedback, and providing the blogger's own comments.

On the other hand, Divitini, Haugalokken, and Morken found that blogging did not promote productive students' interaction when they conducted a study on higher education students who only posted nine entries in a one-year course (as cited in Cakir, 2013). And Duarte (2015) pointed out that the presence of peer-to-peer applications that are more advanced and powerful than blogs for students to interact with each other, and suggested Facebook to be the fastest way to forward a message to students.

The impact of blogging on the students' collaboration. Collaboration is defined as the process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own... Collaboration can occur by mail, over the phone lines, and

in person. But the true medium of collaboration is other people (Rhoades et al., 2009, p. 25).

Pooranachandran and Balasubramanian (2011) defined *Collaboration* as “working in a group of two or more to achieve a common goal” (p. 723). For them, collaboration is measured by three ingredients: interdependence, achievement through synthesis of information and contribution from all members, and independence from the class instructor who might otherwise control the process tightly.

Grell and Rau state: “Teachers initiate the collaborative learning process by setting the rules” (as cited in Boyd, 2013, p. 101). Rhoades et al. (2009) pointed out that educators are focusing on collaboration as a product instead of a process. They further illustrated that people have surely been collaborating but they wondered if the level of collaboration can be increased to add further knowledge in academia.

One of the benefits of collaborating using Web 2.0 services is that students can access and contribute equally through asynchronous or non-simultaneous communication that is convenient to everyone and efficient in time as they do not need to assemble in order to work together (Collaboration 2.0., 2009).

Building on social constructivist theory, collaborative learning involves motivational factors linked to levels of social cohesion and its impact on the cognitive process (Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013). Novakovich and Cramer Long (2013) further maintained that “writing instruction combines the cognitive process of knowledge construction when creating content, scaffolding, through the generation of multiple drafts, and social interaction in the form of peer review” (p. 232). They suggested enhancing social interaction by introducing a social learning space that expands the boundaries of the traditional writing classroom to a larger and more

visible online community, which “ultimately enhances social cohesion and peer interactions through a web-mediated writing environment” (p. 232).

According to Ahmad and Lutters, a blog is interactive in the sense that readers can respond to each other with comments which promotes a collaborative learning environment because students can thus participate in a network of interactions instead of just writing their thoughts on a topic to the teacher (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Blogging supports collaboration by enabling students to work together and collaborate on projects (Sawmiller, 2010). Blogs can be used for promoting “collaborative knowledge construction through knowledge sharing, social networking, group work, and community knowledge stock” (Deng & Yuen, 2011, p. 442).

Petersen et al. also argued that blogging can facilitate interactions and better collaboration among students (as cited in Blau et al., 2013). However, Blau et al. (2013) explained that those authors used the term *collaboration* referring to sharing knowledge, whereas according to McInnerney and Robert the term collaboration referred to “working towards a common goal, while each individual is contributing to the whole” (as cited in Blau et al., 2013, p. 244). Moreover, other authors pointed out that other technologies, such as wikis, provide a space for collaborative activities (Blau et al., 2013). Bower, Hedberg and Kuswara indicated that blogs are most effective when a course blog is created, which allows students to collaborate and “formulate expertise in a shared field of knowledge” and are best used “when concepts and issues are being explained” and when immediate feedback is required (as cited in Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013, p. 232).

Conclusion

According to Coutinho most students perceived their experiences with the use of blogs as positive but some of them were not convinced of its pedagogical benefits (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010).

Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) indicated that a course blog at its most basic level offers students the chance to develop their own voice while commentary reinforces self-reflection and continued participation. At its best, a course blog promotes democratic education “where students merge into a non-hierarchical problem-solving community based on mutual respect and common reflection” (Bartholomew, Jones, & Glassman, 2012, p. 19).

The survey of Scaletta in 2006 suggested that the real benefits of blogging are gained slowly over years and that the outcomes cannot be measured after a semester: The learning process is slow as students are able to find their voice and become more comfortable with public writing (as cited in Nackerud & Scaletta, 2008). Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) added that such mature blogging can be achieved when students participate in real-world networks which may be more motivating, and where they can meet more experienced and knowledgeable bloggers, the type which teachers like to see their students replicate. In fact this leads to question whether blogs are valued for their content or for their connections to a larger social network; in other words, the social interaction between author and readers (Nackerud & Scaletta, 2008). On the other hand, Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) suggested that private blogging may not make use of the real-world connections but is still beneficial in a more closed discussion for class activities. And they gave an example of student teachers who may benefit more from sharing experiences with each other than seeking out a public platform.

Moodle versus Blogger

Boyd (2013) made a distinction between blogs and discussion boards that are often used in education. Students own their blogs, can customize them, and direct the conversation whereas teachers take more control over posting the topics on a discussion board, monitor the discussion, and set its parameters (Boyd, 2013). Moreover, discussion boards are basically text-based, whereas blogs have a feature which enables students to use multi-modal methods to present their results in different forms of media other than a text, which is an important skill in digital literacies (Boyd, 2013).

According to Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) an Open Access blogging program, like Blogger, can be more problematic but is more genuine and successful in the classroom. They indicated that it promotes the idea of greater ownership since it promotes the idea of belonging to the students rather than the teacher or school, thus giving more responsibility for students as an educative force and being more reflective of what they will experience after school.

Limitations of the Use of Blogs

Manfra and Lee (2012) revealed some limitations for the blogging tool when they conducted a study about the use of blogs in the U.S. history classroom. They found that it did not automatically create authentic conversation and elaborated communication between the students, for e.g. when students sometimes posted a brief comment stating they agree with their classmates without further elaboration. Nevertheless, they indicated that limitations of the use of blogs in their findings pointed to the important role of the teacher as facilitator in a Web 2.0 environment

in addressing and redirecting students to make better use of the social networking features of the tool.

Blogging platforms, such as Blogger, lack the social networking capabilities which the participatory platforms, such as Myspace, possess. Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) pointed out that students might prefer social blogging and that participatory models of blogging platforms support a richer discussion among bloggers and their readers.

Based on their use of blogs in undergraduate courses, Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) noted that at the beginning of a blog that requires student to post one comment and one link per week, there was the problem of students posting one or two sentences or offering links that have little or nothing to do with the topic. However, they described the problem as self-correcting as students took their posts more seriously as the courses progressed. They also noted there was less repetition from class lectures and discussion on the blogs, and that the blog posts became longer.

Boyd (2013) identified the lack of students' comments or feedback on blogs as one of the biggest limits of blogging. Kerawalla et al. found minimal communication between students in the courses they studied (as cited in Boyd, 2013, p. 100). And other researchers indicated that students considered reading their peers' posts to be more beneficial than writing their own posts, reading comments to their posts, or commenting on their peers' posts (Boyd, 2013). From the studies of Dang and Yuen and Ellison and Wu, Boyd (2013) pointed out the following reasons behind the problem of the lack of comments: Students do not want to critique their peers' ideas, students do not find commenting or receiving feedback as valuable, the original writer rarely responds to the others' comments (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Boyd (2013) further explained that blogging has its own social norms, and recommend teachers to clarify those norms to students.

For her, learning how to blog includes learning the norms associated with blogging such as having what she described as healthy debate about some issue rather than agreeing to each other's ideas. Thus students need to develop a new attitude toward thinking and learning (Boyd, 2013).

The Student's Evaluation of the Experience

Findings of Halic et al. (2010) showed that the majority of students had a positive experience with the blog-supported learning environment and declared that the blog has the potential as a discussion medium to share different perspectives and reflect on course-related concepts outside the classroom.

Some of the reasons why students liked blogging included interaction with their peers and the perceived ownership of blogs (Sim & Hew, 2010). The increased level of interactivity on a Web site has a positive effect on the users' perceptions towards the Web site (Tekinarslan, 2012). The ease of use, enjoyment, and knowledge sharing have also been found to be factors related to positive attitude toward blogging (Tekinarslan, 2012).

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Educational System

Pedagogy and the use of blogs. Stevenson and Hedberg (2011) discussed how the effective use of Web 2.0 technologies in education have been perceived both as potentially disruptive and transformative. They explained that they have the potential to be disruptive when new effective and sustainable relationships between the technology and pedagogy are formed “through relationships with teachers and learners to the point where technology-informed pedagogy disrupts traditional education assumptions and conventions” (Stevenson & Hedberg, 2011, p. 323).

Walatka (2012) advocated student blogging for two pedagogical principles. First he argued that students learn from what they do and think, and that blogging is a pragmatic choice to support student engagement and conversation in the classroom enabling students to learn from what they do and think. For him blogging is a pedagogical effective tool that supports teachers by helping students actively engage the course material and move beyond lecturing when used in an intentional and thoughtful way. Second, he argued that “new knowledge is constructed upon existing knowledge” (p. 374). He maintained that blogging provides starting points for in-class discussion as it both enables students to encounter and respond to their peers’ views, and gives the teacher a glimpse into student understanding and viewpoints before class which is necessary for achieving higher learning goals during in-class time. He explained that this pedagogical principle is the focus of a pedagogical approach introduced by Simkins and Maier in 2010. The approach is called “Just-in-Time-Teaching” or (JITT), a method focusing on students’ pre-class work by which they respond to thought-provoking questions which require deeper engagement with the material (as cited in Walatka, 2012, p. 374). Those responses are received by the teacher during the hours leading up to class, which keeps the material fresh for students while providing

enough time for the teacher to “read through and incorporate their responses into the lesson before-hand” (Walatka, 2012, p.374). Walatka (2012) also recommended integrating blogging to make sure that on blogging days the majority of students read before class.

Blog learning versus class learning. Students learn from each other as much as they learn from their teacher or textbook. What matters is to find the right vehicle for facilitating this learning (Yang & Chang, 2012). In higher education, teacher-student and student-student interactions are limited in the traditional model of lectures (Blau et al., 2013). Integrating Web 2.0 tools in academia can promote interaction and collaboration by providing a digital workspace for collaborative activities (Blau et al., 2013). Manfra and Lee (2012) found that blogging allowed for the students to read and respond to their classmates’ comments and that is rarely available in traditional instruction. For Garrison and Akyol the use of Web 2.00 tools such as blogs promotes collaboration that goes beyond simple interaction in the sense that students are engaged in discourse to construct and collaboratively share meaning, and validate understanding. For them such collaboration is difficult to occur in large lecture classes (as cited in Halic et al., 2010). Moreover, Neira-Piñeiro (2015) indicated that blogging surpasses some constraints of traditional assignments such as oral presentations, extends the space and time for learning, the teacher-student interaction and the student-student interaction outside the classroom.

In a traditional classroom-learning environment, learners play a passive role and there is mostly one way communication of course content i.e. from the teacher to the learner. Whereas in a hybrid-learning environment, technology helps learning become a more interactive process not only between teachers and learners but also among learners (Yang & Chang, 2012). In class the teacher is the only person to access student work, whereas on the blog students can learn to appreciate their peers’ work and learn from each other (Yang & Chang, 2012). Blogging

stimulates learning and critical thinking by extending course content discussions outside the classroom (Blau et al., 2013). Blogging expands the classroom walls because teachers can post assignments and communicate with their students (Sawmiller, 2010). According to a survey done by Eric Hobson in 2004, only twenty to thirty percent of students complete reading assignments before class (as cited in Walatka, 2012). Walatka (2012) confirmed that integrating blogging ensures that the majority of students read before class. According to Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) “A blog is different form academic communication because, when working well, it is a living, growing organism...not suited for linear, top down discourse, specific due dates, and grading rubrics” (p. 25). For them a blog is interactive and breaks down walls with the teacher, topics, and other participating students.

Genuine student engagement with the course material rather than teacher presentations alone is necessary for deeper and longer lasting learning (Walatka, 2012). The results of the study conducted by Novakovich and Cramer Long (2013) proved that social media enhanced the learning environment by providing engagement level that is not found in the traditional classroom. They also reported a higher number of articles published by those students who published their work on a course blog and that they also received higher grades.

Oravec indicated that the use of blogs not only encourages students to be more critically analytical in their thinking but also empowers them to express their opinions with solid support because they would have enough time to prepare or reflect on the content they are studying (as cited in Yang & Chang, 2012). In addition, blogging empowers those students who are shy and silent in the classroom where usually only a few dominate the discussion (Yang & Chang, 2012). The blog is to make sure that everyone has a voice, and that everyone is a member of the learning community (Yang & Chang, 2012). The discussion in the classroom is usually teacher-

student centered rather than student-student centered (Yang & Chang, 2012). Celsi and Wolfenbarger also stated that classrooms are often teacher-centered even if technology was introduced, and they suggested that blogs can provide the chance to shift this focus to a more learner-centered one (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Yang and Chang (2012) pointed out that unlike the traditional classroom teacher-student discussion, the blog is a student-student dialogue enabling every student to have a voice as a valued member of the learning community.

Blogging differed from the regular class in that it allowed students to be more independent and to work at their own pace (Manfra & Lee, 2012). Because of the removal of self-consciousness, blogging enables students to interact more freely, which gives way for better assessment and consequently better instruction (Sawmiller, 2010). Ownership encourages the silent student, thus blogging can give a voice to the silent student (Sawmiller, 2010).

Hungerford-Kresser et al. (2014) noted that their participants were vocal in class and on the blogs, but that those who were not comfortable being vocal in large face-to-face meetings were able to express themselves online. They believed that blogs help students discuss a topic they may feel uncomfortable or not prepared to discuss in class, especially if they have little direct knowledge about it. They added that blogging allows for a deeper dialog by extending class discussions.

According to Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) course blogging promotes self-reflection and having a public voice in the education process, which are two aspects of education often missing in college courses that include many students. They added that it can diminish the passive learning often found in traditional educational settings. Reflection or analysis papers turned in during class often give the teachers helpful information too late, because addressing students' misconceptions in the following class is not ideal; whereas blogging enables teachers to

address learning gaps, at the optimal moment, (Walatka, 2012). Halic et al. (2010) found that the majority of their participants reported that blogging helped them reflect about course-related concepts outside of the classroom and share different perspectives on the course material.

Boyd (2013) stated that discussing emotions and personal experiences is considered important in blogging while they are not valued in traditional academic writing. She distinguished between descriptive reflection “when students analyze the connection between their experiences and the course material,” and dialogic reflection “when they analyze the connection between these experiences and others.” She added that “teachers can encourage students to intertextually link to other texts throughout their blogs, thus encouraging them to practice dialogic reflection” (Boyd, 2013, p. 91). Gallagher (2010) differentiated blogging which values the students’ insight and opinion, from traditional academic writing which values predetermined and support-based answers. Blogs can be utilized to accommodate students who are good at writing rather than talking in the classroom. And since writing is a method for discussion that can expand in-class discussions, using blogs would therefore improve the student engagement with in-class discussions and increase their active participation to class activities even when they are outside of the classroom (Cakir, 2013). Moreover, the focus in traditional writing is cognitive rather than social, on the subject matter and not on the audience. Whereas the focus shifts with online publishing to the audience, so the driving force becomes the social rather than the cognitive thereby increasing student engagement (Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013). Dredger et al. (2010) suggested the use of blogs to draw on the writing that students do naturally in order to explore and understand more the course or learning material, rather than simulating discourses imposed by the teacher. They also added that blogs can serve as a bridge between the natural writing and the typical required writing in the classroom (Boyd, 2013). Thus blogs have

social features that can usefully prepare students for the cyber learning skills that they will need in their future careers (Boyd, 2013).

Incorporating blogs in higher education. According to Sweeny, educators need to adapt to the new literacy context (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Teachers may lag behind their students who have mastered the interactive skills of Web 2.0 that is why researchers supported the notion that education is greatly enhanced when both students and teachers collaborate using technology which makes their roles conjoint (Alqudsi-ghabra & Al-Bahrani, 2012).

Boyd (2013) emphasized the need for the technologies to be introduced in a way that challenges the traditional pedagogical practices rather than replicating them. The student-centered approach is replacing the traditional teacher-centered classroom structure, and teachers are developing new ways to promote the students' active participation in a learning process that is centered on concepts such as experiential, cooperative, and interactive learning (Duarte, 2015). The Internet and blogs can provide new, interactive and cooperative ways, and serve as an educational networking tool (Duarte, 2015). Blended learning is a newly accepted approach and one of the major trends in higher education today (Park, Yu, & Jo, 2016). Many institutions are considering blended learning as a way to transform traditional pedagogy for on campus and distance education mode, in order to maximize student learning and success (Park et al., 2016, p.2).

Blogs are perceived to be a widely adopted Internet-facilitated tool that has an important pedagogical and social role in higher education settings (Liu, 2006). Today many educators are using blogs in teaching and learning environments (Tekinarslan, 2012). There is a kind of delay in teachers implementing new tools because there are no guidelines for designing effective

learning activities (Freeman & Brett, 2012). However, basic blogging activities that do not need sophisticated Web design or programming skills can be implemented (Tekinarslan, 2012).

Huffaker suggested the use of blogs in classrooms across disciplines and in all levels (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). Sim and Hew (2010) indicated that the most frequent use of blogs was in the education discipline (40%), followed by information technology and sciences (28%), others (20%), business (8%), and language (4%). Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) indicated that blogging is close enough to traditional academic communication, in the sense that even teachers who are not of the Web 2.0 generation can understand and relate to. Hungerford et al. (2014) stated that integrating digital pedagogies such as blogging is “one way to mediate large classroom discussions in culturally relevant ways” (p. 325). Electronic reading and writing can be integrated into the classroom with the use of weblogs (Sawmiller, 2010). Halic et al. (2010) suggested incorporating blogs into learning in order to increase students’ feeling of belonging by creating a classroom community and helping them to become part of it, and consequently to enhance their learning experience.

Neira-Piñeiro (2015) conducted a study about the value of blogs for literary education in Teacher Training, which showed their usefulness in higher education and their contribution to the linguistic and literary training of future teachers. The results showed the usefulness of blogs in higher education for the training of literature teachers.

Based on 26 case studies from UK institutions, Minocha found that the use of social software in higher education benefited teachers by enabling them to track their students’ progress, give feedback early, and teach more interactively (as cited in Robertson, 2011). Levy recommended blogging as “a useful tool for professional education or internship since blogs are simple and accessible personal diaries that allow a community of users to interact and

communicate with each other” (as cited in Chu et al., 2012, p. 989). Paulus et al. (as cited in Halic et al., 2010) noted that reading the blogs can help teachers better understand their students’ struggles with the material and design methods to help them overcome barriers to learning, especially that blogs can contain questions that were not answered in class or through the course material. In addition, the blog’s archive can be used as an accessible source of information about student learning and as a basis for ongoing feedback and redesign of learning activities. Blogs can be used as teacher-driven administrative tools since they can be easily used for posting announcements, facilitating discussions, or linking to class resources (Nackerud & Scaletta, 2008). Cakir (2013) pointed out the potentials for blogs to be used in teaching courses requiring students to discuss, write, reflect, and comment about the content. Walatka (2012) recommended blogging as a powerful tool for maintaining a student and discussion-centered classroom, when it is combined with “a mixture of discussion, think-pair-share activities, one-minute papers, peer instruction, and group work in order to promote higher level learning” (p. 381). He stressed that blogging on its own is not enough and that teachers should always integrate discussion as a central part of their pedagogy in addition to using blogs. DOS and DEMIR (2013) concluded that “blogs could be used as a strong learning tool for many courses at any level especially in the blended learning format” (p. 1342).

According to Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) blogs could have many uses at universities: they can provide a space for faculty, students, and staff to share polished and unpolished opinions, research and views on different opinions. They recommended university libraries to host such blogs which can provide not only a kind of cultural memory of the institution but also an important material even if some of the content was of questionable academic value. They explained that “a great deal of important material is being written on off-campus services that do

not share the research and educational missions of the institution” (p. 78-79). According to Deitering and Gronermer (2011) a lot of people use what they called the “participatory web” to talk about their lives and work, including scholars. They described the *participatory web* as being dynamic since anything might be changed or replaced at any time. For those reasons, they believed the process of constructing scholarly knowledge can be available for anyone, including students. They discussed how “scholars use tools like blogs to talk about the research that is being published in more formal, traditional channels” and how they provide the chance for students, with guidance, to “enrich their understanding of the peer-reviewed research that they are required to use in their papers and projects” (p. 494). For them, information literacy instruction that is delivered by a classroom teacher or a librarian can be improved by informal channels of scholarly communication. They further suggested that there are new ways for librarians to “connect students with scholarly research other than the peer-reviewed journal” (p. 494). For them, librarians who teach should provide students not only with traditional resources of information but also with current learning material of online places where the meta discourse, the disagreements, and discussions between scholars and which are not available in the authors’ finished products, are made visible to the students.

Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) conducted a survey to examine the effectiveness of three different online writing activities in formal universities education: forums, blogs, and wikis. Their results revealed positive perceptions with wikis being the most favorable, followed by blogs and forums. However, despite the positive expectations in research for the use of new technology in language education, Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) believed “it will likely take several more years before blogging becomes a stable component of quality teaching practices” (p. 187). Some studies about the use of blogs in the writing classroom suggested that blogging is

not that effective: Lin, Lin, and Hsu found that given the labor and time required for implementing blogs, perhaps they were not the most effective intervention tool (as cited in Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013). Woo and Reeves found that blogs only promoted critical thinking with selected topics and that information literacy training is necessary to improve the effectiveness of online writing in generating critical thinking (as cited in Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013). They also noted that blogs are useful in terms of peer interaction and self-reflection but not that effective in collaboratively constructing knowledge. Sharma found that blogs were effective in archiving information and thinking but only promoted reflective thinking with structured guidelines (as cited in Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013).

Robertson (2011) pointed out the need for students to develop self-directed learning skills especially in the first year so that they can be successful university learners because of its increasing importance as a goal of higher education. She added that blogs offer the opportunity for students to become self-directed learners in a supportive social environment. Furthermore, Daley pointed out that students in the future will need to have new literacy skills of combining their words with audio and video to express their thoughts (as cited in Boyd, 2013).

The rapid advance of technology has enabled higher education institutions to transcend the barriers of time and space to educate students (Pooranachandran & Balasubramanian, 2011). Rhodes et al. (2009) state: "As technology continues to improve, we will continue to be challenged to think about how we educate and how we research" (p. 27). We need to better understand the use of blogs in the learning environment so that learning conditions for both teachers and students are well prepared to increase their effectiveness (Cakir, 2013). Teachers may struggle with their decision to implement blogs into the classroom curriculum, partly

because of their level of comfort with technology. But once both teachers and students gain knowledge and confidence in blogging, a learning curve will exist for sure (Sawmiller, 2010).

Recommendations for blogging. Based on their research into the development of a framework for introducing blogging into higher education coursework, Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) suggest five factors for successful course blogging. The factors included

1) course integration of technology, 2) clarification of the role the technology should play in the course, 3) offering the students guidance on best practices in using the technology, 4) making sure there are optimal chances for socialization and collaboration, and 5) implementing activities that foster continual development of the greater learning community (p. 20).

According to Ellison and Wu, blogging does provide benefits but as any type of technology it does not increase learning all by itself. So teachers should recognize why they are adopting it and how to use it in a way that meets their pedagogical goals (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Boyd (2013) added that once the teacher determines the blog's goals, he or she should make these goals clear to the students. For Walatka (2012), a key element of the success of student blogging is to set questions that help achieve the lesson's learning objectives and encourage engagement with the material. Neira-Piñeiro (2015) recommended the necessity for finding effective ways to stimulate the students' participation.

Boyd (2013) pointed out the need for teachers to provide prompts for students in order to guide them with their blogging. According to Halic et al., prompts should be a mix of structured blog posts that focus on the course requirements and unstructured posts that promote conversation among students (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Boyd (2013) recommended that teachers present the prompts in questions so that they can guide their students without imposing on them

how they should write the blog. She added that it is best for teachers to begin with prompts and then survey the students and adjust the prompts to meet the students' desires and make the blog students-centered. She illustrated through the example of blogs that would aim at critical reflection on the students' learning. She explained that teachers can ask the students to reflect on the success of the blogging process in order to encourage them to reflect on their experiences, thus enacting the descriptive reflection of Hatton and Smith. Moreover, teachers can ask the students to engage in conversations with their peers' posts, thus enacting the dialogic reflection of Hatton and Smith in which students can weigh different perspectives on their learning experiences (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Both descriptive and dialogic reflections are important for students to evaluate their learning experiences and consider different learning strategies when blogging. At the same time, teachers can benefit from these student reflections as they decide how to structure the blog prompts (Boyd, 2013).

Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012) wondered whether institutions can help this challenge faced by teachers to keep students engaged in blogging by investing in tools and resources that can ease this responsibility on academics.

Williams and Jacobs recommended that "it is important to give students direction about how to blog and what benefits they might expect to experience from it" (as cited in Robertson, 2011, p. 1631). Gallagher recommended the teachers to provide technical instruction about how blogs work, and guidance on how to write for the genre of blogging which requires the students to draw on their personal experiences and opinions about the course material (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Hungerford-Kresser et al. (2014) suggested that the teacher brings the blog's conversation back to the classroom, even if the teacher is not participating in it, in order to help make learning more explicit to them and to help them see the blog as helpful medium for expressing themselves

rather than just a task to complete. According to Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) an important part of blog management is intervention when the course blog is losing its flow in order to reanimate it. They experimented with strategies using the two themes: building interest and positive reinforcement (Bartholomew, Jones, & Glassman, 2012), to find that commentary was the most effective and constructive positive reinforcement in re-energizing blog posts. For instance they suggested that teachers read over the blog each week and pick two of the most interesting posts to discuss before lecture.

Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, and Conole (2009) were against developing rigid guidelines for blogging because they believed students would better explore blogging for themselves and appropriate it within the requirements of their particular course. However, they suggested that teachers provide guidance on the pedagogical and technology-related aspects of blogging, so that students understand the role of blog in the course and how to use blogging in conjunction with other tools such as wikis.

Boyd (2013) recommended teachers to provide effective feedback that promotes interaction. She explained that feedback and interaction are important aspects of blogging that are often not achieved well, and for that students need to know how to provide feedback to their peers and respond to their peers' feedback too so that authentic conversation and interaction would be created. Ellison and Wu indicated that students should be given "guidance about how to provide constructive criticism" and that teachers should emphasize that "respectful disagreements are acceptable and helpful" (as cited in Boyd, 2013, p. 104). Boyd (2013) added that instructors should emphasize sustained peer-to-peer interaction and that students must learn the need to respond to their peers' feedback. Manfra and Lee (2012) stressed the importance of

explicitly encouraging student interaction via the comments. They suggested that students can be asked to respond to one or two of their classmates, which facilitates the conversation.

Walatka (2012) recommended student blogging as means for writing-intensive courses, even with large classes because the teacher does not have to analyze details and respond to each point on each blog, which he considered a virtue since the grading process can be completed in two hours or less for a class of forty. Walatka (2012) recommended grading the student blogs as pass/fail (100/0 percent) and as high pass/pass/fail/not complete (100/90/50/0 percent). And when reading and grading the blogs, he suggested that teachers must only consider if the post merits a pass, if there is a misunderstanding that needs to be addressed or insightful point that deserves a comment or should be brought into class time. Thus he confirmed that this task is more focused and efficient since the teacher would be looking for overall quality, checking the level of student understanding and helpful points that should be raised in class. Walatka (2012) suggested that teachers start the class with some of the student responses, which is a key part of JiTT (“Just-in-Time-Teaching”) pedagogical approach (p. 379). He maintained that blogging enables bringing student responses directly into the classroom which creates a student-centered classroom and encourages participation and dialogue. He noted that teachers need to address errors and misunderstanding focused on the blogs without identifying a student directly. He also added that it would be easier with undergraduates since it would be difficult for classmates to read through dozens of blogs to look for those who made a particular mistake. He suggested that teachers should clarify from the beginning that blogs are for reflection and engagement regardless of who gets the right answer, if and that there might not be a right answer.

Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) indicated that teachers should work around their students’ needs. They illustrated that a private blog provides a solution to teachers with students who are

concerned about privacy issues. Ellison and Wu suggested that teachers give guidance on how to provide critical and appropriate feedback to the students through ice-breaking activities in a face-to-face setting before the start of the blogging activity, so that students acquaint themselves with their peers enough to be motivated to contribute with their opinions and comments (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). Ellison and Wu also recommended teachers to consider blogging within a password-protected course or simply allow students to use a pseudonym when blogging in order to address their concerns of privacy (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010).

In order to address the students' unfamiliarity and boost their confidence with using technology, Sim and Hew (2010) suggested teachers to provide demonstrations, hands-on practice, and guidelines on how to blog. Consequently, they believed that an increase in confidence would shorten the time for blogging as students would be more actively blogging and amend the factor of time-constraint. Walatka (2012) suggested that students complete their blog postings and comments at least six hours before class in order to provide time for the teacher to evaluate the students' understandings, locate errors or misconceptions, and develop the lesson plan accordingly. He also noted that teachers should be flexible because the students' initial reaction and engagement may be different from their expectations.

Sim and Hew (2010) recommended future research to examine the effect of using blogs over more than one year to see if there could be any changes in the students' and teachers' perceptions or if there could be any undesirable effects of using blogs over a long period of time. Duarte (2015) administered a survey to 135 undergraduate and graduate students in order to assess their experience in using a group blog. The blogs visitors' statistics and feedback showed that blogs can effectively be used to support learning activities for longer than one semester, and that the majority of students perceived blogging as a useful learning tool and reported that their

blog experience was positive. His study showed that blogs can be used to complement a course syllabus, and can be used for more than one class or course activities and for more than one semester.

This chapter presented the research questions and two sets of literature reviews. The first set of literature review was prepared for the purposes of writing and defending the research proposal. Once the data were collected and analyzed, some clear themes emerged related to the blogging and learning experiences of the participants in the case study. It was then that a more focused literature review was conducted related more specifically to the themes that emerged from the data analysis, in order to be able to place the discussion of the results in clearer context in terms of convergence and divergence from what exists in the literature on the subject.

The next chapter will present the profiles of the participants and the actual data collected from each one of them in the interviews, presented in two ways: grouped in table form presenting the verbatim quotes under the emergent themes as well as stories constructed by me, the researcher and based on the data gleaned through each interview.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology and Presentation of Data

This is a case study of a graduate seminar in adult education at a large English language university in Montréal. In this MA level graduate seminar, blogging was used as part of the assignments and evaluation of the course. Ten students were enrolled in the seminar and I was one of them. This exploratory case study sought to investigate the implications of blogging as a Web-based learning environment in a formal educational setting, through the examination of the experiences of six graduate students with the course blog.

The qualitative study approach was adopted for this project since the participants' experiences were examined through their narratives obtained by one-on-one interviews I conducted. As Bogdan and Biklen state qualitative researchers start their investigation "as if they know very little about the people and place they will visit. They attempt to mentally cleanse their preconceptions" (as cited in McMillan, 2004, p. 259). In a qualitative approach, researchers try to understand the participant's behavior and experience from the participant's frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) defined qualitative data analysis as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 145). Following the approach of qualitative data analysis, the interviews were systematically searched and organized around emergent themes and ideas. The data were read through, initial

codes were assigned then data were read again to determine if the emergent codes sufficiently and succinctly represented the data. Then codes were adjusted and modified.

I met with the students in January 2012 and explained the purpose of the study. I obtained the permission of those who signed the consent to contact them for the interviews. Out of the nine students, eight filled out the consent form. I contacted the students long after the submission of the final grades for the course, and six of the nine students were still willing to continue their participation and be interviewed. Five of the six interviews were then carried out one-on-one in one of the library rooms at the university and at a time that was mutually agreed on by the participants and researcher. The room was booked prior to each interview to make sure it was quiet in order to protect the participant's identity and to make sure the interview would not be interrupted. One interview was conducted on Skype. Care was taken to make sure no one else was present at the time of the interview in the house of either the researcher or the participant in order to ensure confidentiality.

All interviews were audio-recorded and each lasted for approximately thirty minutes. The interviews included unstructured questions such as the following: "How was your experience with technology in the course blog?" The interviews were informal and open-ended, and carried out in a conversational style. After listening to recorded interviews, I typed transcripts, and reflected upon them. Then transcripts were analyzed for relevant themes or specific ideas. The data were initially analyzed and grouped around themes derived from the interview questions. The themes emerging from the responses were identified and then utilized for a second analysis. Connections between categories and themes were used to further my understanding and shape the organization of the data in my final document.

Presentation of Data

The aim of this research project was to explore the implications of using blogging as a learning tool in a traditional educational setting through the examination of the experiences of students in the course. Six graduate students participated in this study. Their pseudonyms are: Carol, Emily, Fiona, Isabel, Mandy, and Vicky. This chapter presents the findings that are obtained through the one-on-one interview with each participant. The purpose of this case study was to examine the lived experience of blogging in a traditional university seminar setting. The main guiding research questions were:

1. What are the benefits of using blogs in a traditional educational setting in higher education?
2. What are the challenges of using blogs in a traditional educational setting in higher education?
3. How can blogging be best implemented in higher education?

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim then common themes were identified. The six major themes identified, with related sub-themes are:

1. Challenges of the course blog experience
 - a) Technology
 - b) Time constraints
 - c) Difficulties with the blog content
 - d) Required skills for blogging
2. Running the blog experience
 - a) Participation and the effect of grading
 - b) Experience as leader
 - c) Experience as reader

- d) Role of learner
 - e) Role of teacher
3. The impact of blogging on learning
 - a) Benefits and acquired skills
 - b) Type of learning and interaction on the blog
 - c) The impact of blogging on the students' collaboration
 4. Moodle versus Blogger
 5. The impact of blogging on the traditional educational system
 - a) Blog learning vs class learning
 - b) Incorporating blogs in higher education
 - c) Recommendations
 6. The participants' evaluation of the experience

Profile of the Participants

The participants in this study were taking an Adult Education course in the MA level graduate program at a university in Montreal, Canada. Pseudonyms were assigned to them so that they remain anonymous and their identity would be protected. The participants' names are listed in the alphabetical order throughout the study, and their profile information reflects their age and situation at the time of the course.

Carol was a 25 year old white single female who was a student of the M.A. in Applied Linguistics from Concordia University. She got her Bachelor's degree in TESL from McGill University in 2010.

Emily was a 37 year old white married female who was on maternity leave when she was taking the course. She was a student of M.A. in Educational Studies after obtaining a B.A. in Sociology, Public and Community affairs.

Fiona was a 54 year old white married female with more than 25 years of experience working in industry in human resources, when she was enrolled in the Graduate Diploma in Adult Education. At that time she also had a Bachelor of Commerce, a B.A. and M.B.A. in business, and she was teaching English by phone to business people in Europe.

Isabel was a 59 year old white married female who was working in an administrative position full time while attending university and working toward the MA level graduate degree in Adult Education part time.

Mandy was a 34 year old white married female who was a student of the M.A. program in Educational Studies. At that time she also had M.A in Psychology.

Vicky was a 25 year old white single female when she began the MA level graduate program and was working as a pre-kindergarten teacher. She completed her M.A. in June 2015 and has been working as a second language and kindergarten teacher.

Table 1

Profile of the Six Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnic and Marital Status	Program / Major during study period	Degrees held
Carol	25	Female	White-Single	MA Applied Linguistics	TESL
Emily	37	Female	White-Married	MA in Educational Studies	BA Sociology, Public and Community Affairs
Fiona	54	Female	White-Married	Graduate Diploma in Adult Education	BA and MBA Business
Isabel	59	Female	White-Married	MA Educational	Administration

				Studies	
Mandy	34	Female	White-Married	MA Educational Studies	MA Psychology
Vicky	25	Female	White-Single	MA Educational Studies	Pre-kindergarten teacher

Plan for Data Presentation

For each of the participants a table is included, presenting the verbatim responses under each of the six themes and the related sub-themes, followed by a narrative constructed by myself as the researcher and based on their interview contributions. The data are presented in the alphabetical order of the pseudonyms. This two prong design (table of verbatim quotes and story told by the researcher) for the presentation of the data was adopted because I did not respond personally to the questions and did not present my own narrative of the blog experience in this seminar. This is the reason I opted to present the raw data contributed by each of the six participants using their actual verbatim statements before telling their story in my own words. This was a choice I made rather than giving my own answers to the questions as it is done in qualitative studies to make clear the researcher's bias or positionality. An important note about my point of view has to be stated here in order to avoid any semblance of bias in the analysis. I have to acknowledge that I am an enthusiastic supporter of using technology in education but I tried my best throughout the analysis of the interview data and the selection of the themes emerging, to keep my personal point of view under control and to rely on the information contributed by the participants themselves.

The plan is as follows:

Table 2: Data contributed by Carol, followed by Carol's story as told by the researcher

Table 3: Data contributed by Emily, followed by Emily's story as told by the researcher

Table 4: Data contributed by Fiona, followed by Fiona's story as contributed by the researcher

Table 5: Data contributed by Isabel, followed by Isabel's story as contributed by the researcher

Table 6: Data contributed by Mandy, followed by Mandy's story as contributed by the researcher

Table 7: Data contributed by Vicky, followed by Vicky's story as contributed by the researcher.

Table 2

Data contributed by Carol

1.Challenges of the course blog	
a)Technology	<i>I could not find what button to click to get onto our blog...but it took like a week of me sending emails of "I can't find the blog, can you help me? So...initially I couldn't find where to post. But afterwards it was OK</i>
b)Time constraints	<i>Half an hour to post and comment but about five to six hours the whole week to lead the blog: because ...I would write...but., I would write and I would think...and at the end I would re-read what I wrote to make sure I didn't have any mistakes or if I wanted to add something so a good half hour each time I would say approximately.</i>
c)Difficulties with blog content	<i>There was something I didn't like and I didn't know how to get around it was...when you read the blog there were different people who wrote and if you wanted to respond, some people responded to the same comment and it got a little confusing at one point...because you have all these answers ...and everyone is talking about the same thing or everyone is talking about different things...so at one point I thought it was a little confusing, a lot of ideas in the same spot. I think that might be one challenge that I had...it's kind of decipher everything together. That could be one of my challenges, yeah.</i>
d)Required skills for blogging	<i>N/A</i>
2.Running the blog experience	
a)Participating and the effect of grading	<i>...an honest answer...my motivation increased because we were graded on it...because we had to do the blog, we had to participate in the blog because it counted as part of our participation in the course. If we had not been marked on it, yes, I still would have done it but not as in depth and as with as much conviction to really REFLECT that much...if it had been a topic that I was really interested in, then I think I would have wanted to participate more and respond more to something that</i>

	<i>I already had knowledge about...So I think it depends on, one the topic and two who you are blogging with – for me, anyways.</i>
b) Experience as leader	<i>...That's the only time (laughter) that I responded...when I was leading the blog discussion. As I knew that was my blog, yeah...I felt that they responded well, uh, they answered whatever question I had posted coherently and fully answered the question, there was no...students brought up points that I would not have thought of on my own, so once again you get other ideas from other people that maybe you had never thought of ... so in a sense the blog...when you ask a question, maybe you are expecting a certain response from people but you get a completely different response, which is fine because we don't all think alike...so you get different viewpoints from different people.</i>
c) Experience as reader	<i>...I would write...but... I would write and I would think...and at the end I would re-read what I wrote to make sure I didn't have any mistakes or if I wanted to add something...</i>
d) Role of learner	<i>...to be their own teachers because ... it doesn't matter if you're the blog leader...it doesn't matter if you are a blog participant...you are responding to something you are ... by posting something for others to read, a different view point...so you automatically learn from others, and others learn from you.</i>
e) Role of teacher	<i>...to supervise the blog is being used adequately...so if the blog turns into some negative, or hatred or if you are this and you are that, then obviously to stop it... and maybe to supervise also in the sense that, if the blog is going nowhere, if no one is responding or if they're in a different way because maybe the students do not understand the initial question...so it's really to supervise. Supervise for... negative things and supervise to push students to respond. If he or she sees that...the blog is not ...going the way he or she planned.</i>
3. Impact of blogging on learning	
a) Benefits and acquired skills	<i>...so I now have two different blog systems I know how to use...I might already have had the skill...but we might not constantly be aware of it, but the blog enables us to consciously reflect on we're thinking about something that we read...so it forces us to put our thoughts on paper and maybe go a little further and to maybe a little more research ...and if I just read something and went to class and sat there and listened to the teacher speak...se we had to...kind of internalize what we read, which was just a little different ...cause I've never really done that before either... Also, students brought up points that I would not have thought of on my own, so once again, you get other ideas from other people that maybe you had never thought of...</i>

b)Type of learning and interaction on the blog	<p><i>...It's not you're being forced but it's...it's a more I can say hands on learning ...the blog is a tool for consciously reflecting on a topic. I think it is interactive, but not a hundred percent interactive...because...and this is just especially for the blog in our class. It really was interactive in a sense because we had to write something, we had to read other people's posts and we had to respond to other people's posts. But...this was being forced...forced upon us. I'm gonna compare to maybe a blog in real life outside on the intent that it's not part of a course – it's part of something you want to blog on the internet...I think that is more interactive because you actually want to do it. And you're talking about a topic that you really want and you're asking...valid questions that you want answers for...but in the class setting...I would not say it's a hundred percent interactive...I don't know if I am explaining myself correctly.</i></p>
c)Impact of blogging on students' collaboration	<p><i>...this is a tough question...how can it improve collaboration (whispering...silence) ...because I'm trying to reflect on what I was doing...if ...it was collaborating with anybody? ... no it was on my own...I don't think it's collaborative UNLESS you see it as everyone is putting some knowledge in it in a pot and everyone learns from this pot of knowledge.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, yes, I do think some knowledge is being built there because I learned things that I didn't know...so in a sense it's collaborative learning...but through other people. Not through the teacher. I mean the teacher sets up the system the blog but ...you communicate together to reflect and...I guess in that sense that could be to collaborate.</i></p>
4.Moodle vs. Blogger	N/A
5.Impact of blogging on traditional educational system	
a)Blog learning vs. classroom learning	<p><i>...was it interactive one more than the other? (Silence)...it's the same ...because it's within our classroom context and there is a specific topic chosen...so it's not...I think the idea of a blog in a classroom is good, because you want your students to interact, and we are interacting... maybe it is my personal opinion because I'm not "Wow I love blogs!" or...if you want me to answer the question it is interactive. But I think it's more interactive outside of a class setting. Yes, yes, yes you mean without the grade part ...yeah, yeah</i></p>
b)Incorporating Blogs in higher education	<p><i>...The good thing about this is that in the traditional sense, when you write a reflection, the other students in the class don't SEE your reflection... 'cause you only give it to the teacher...' so blog could help others see "oh this person thought this, I never thought of that point". So it could be an online tool to collect reflections for the teacher, but it can also be a way for</i></p>

	<i>students to quickly just look at what the other students are thinking about that same thing.</i>
c) Recommendations	<i>...I might not follow that system of blog leader each week. I don't think I would ADD anything to it...in class if you were the blog leader you were in charge of the blog but you were also in charge of participating for that week. And I felt that was a lot. To be the blog leader and to prepare your presentation for that week...So...If I were to use it in an actual classroom within higher education, I would not...match it with a presentation and a blog leader in the same week...I think I would calculate it in overall participation but NOT give an actual blog grade (Silence)...I am curious to see how it would be to take a different university class with a different teacher, and see how they use the blog...I am curious to see if it would be different...</i>
6.Participant's evaluation of the experience	<i>I can't say that I enjoyed it but I can't say that I hated it...it wasn't an aspect of the course that I was SO excited about...If it was not graded or if the topic was something that I had background knowledge on...I think I would have enjoyed it more.</i>

Carol's Story

(Age 25; White and Single; MA Applied Linguistics)

Challenges of the Course Blog Experience

In terms of technology challenges, at the beginning, Carol could not figure out how to get onto the blog. She was not sure if it was because of the blog website link sent by the professor. It took her a week of email exchanges with her classmates on First Class before she could find where to click to post her comment once she entered the website. But once she achieved this stop the rest was fine. In terms of time constraints it took Carol about thirty minutes to post a comment: she wrote, thought, then re-read before posting. As a leader it took her thirty minutes to post her blog question but it took her more time to participate and respond to others, about five to six hours the whole week. As a leader she checked the blog twice a day and that was the only time that she was actually responding to others, i.e. when she was leading the blog discussion.

The blog experience was stressful for Carol in terms of writing in depth. The fact that others were reading what she was writing made her want to write better. She even sometimes tried to post a comment before others did to escape this pressure. She thought it was challenging to have so many ideas in the same spot, which “kind of decipher anything together”, and she thought that could be a negative aspect of blogging. Carol does not enjoy blogging even outside the classroom and the course did not change that. The topics of the blog (technology and adult education) were interesting but not to the extent that she wanted to really indulge in responding more because they were not in her field of studies (her field of study: teaching English as a Second Language). So she would have been more engaged in topics related to her own field of study.

Running the Blog Experience

Carol affirmed that she could have enjoyed the blogging experience if it was not graded, or if the material was in her field of study, because she felt the pressure to perform well comparing herself to others who had background knowledge about the topics discussed on the blog. She said everyone participated in the blog but some participated more. She noticed that some students responded “very close to the following class”. She believed that those who were more intellectual or skilled in writing were the ones who participated more and wrote earlier in the week, and those who were not as skilled tended to write later in the week or right before the class meeting. She thought it could be their strategy so that no one would respond to them and this way they would not have to respond back too. According to her, the participation would have been less if it was not graded and she added that those who were intellectual and reflective would have still participated as much and those who were less intellectual and reflective, half the class, would have participated less. As a blog leader, Carol tried to extend the blog discussion

(she believes that is the role of the leader too) by writing down on a paper the others' comments and trying to come up with ideas and thoughts to a "tangent question" to "further along" the conversational thread. She also noticed that the students usually responded "very close to the following class". She would check the blog twice a day when she was leading the blog. She conveyed that was the only time when she was actually responding to others, i.e. when she was leading the blog discussion. She also mentioned that students were responding well when she led the blog. They also brought up new points. Carol observed that some people posted and responded more than once but for her once she did, she did not feel she needed to post again. Nevertheless she remarked that she would write, think then re-read, before she would post a comment on the blog. Carol affirmed that the role of learners in that course blog was to be their own teachers because they were writing and responding to each other, sharing different points of view so automatically learning from each other. According to Carol, the role of the instructor is to supervise the blog to make sure no negative things occur and to intervene to initiate conversation if the blog becomes passive and no one was responding.

Impact of Blogging on Learning

Carol learned how to use a platform for blogging that is different from that of Moodle. She also learned how to internalize her thoughts about readings, reflect on them and do research beyond that. Students responded well to all her questions when Carol led the blog. They also brought up new points. So for her with a blog, one gets different responses and points of view from different persons. Carol described the learning outcome as explicit because they had to write down their critical thoughts about the classroom readings, so the blog was a "tool for consciously reflecting on a topic" and responding to the others' reflections. She also thought that it was collaborative learning through the students themselves but not through the professor

because they were reflecting and communicating in a sense that it could be a way of collaborating. Carol had already experienced blogging with Moodle, a platform other than Blogger.com. She declared two things that were different about it. First, it was not graded and they only had to learn how to use the blog as a teaching tool. Second, the Moodle blog was private for the class itself only. People could respond on it based on the imposed question. However, she thought interaction on Blogger.com was the same as the one on Moodle's since it was within a classroom context, discussing certain selected topics.

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Education System

Carol thought incorporating blogging on the traditional classroom curriculum in higher education is a good idea. She thinks blogging could replace the “traditional paper hand-in reflection” of the regular classroom so that not only the professor but also other students can access it online. This way, blogging can help the students to see different thoughts and points of view other than theirs. She described blogging as an “online tool to collect reflections” for both the professor and the students. To implement blogging in higher education, Carol suggested changing the blog platform into one that is more organized. She also suggested changing the way the blog was used, i.e. not having a different blog leader every week because she thought that was a lot of work for one student to have a presentation in the overall class participation but not to specify a grade only for the blog participation itself. She also felt curious and wondering whether the whole experience could be different with a different university course and a different professor.

The Participant's Evaluation of the Experience

Carol thought she could have enjoyed the blogging experience if it was not graded, or if the material was in her field of study, because she felt a lot of pressure to perform well,

comparing herself to others who had background knowledge about the topics discussed on the blog.

Table 3

Data Contributed by Emily

1.Challenges of the course blog	
a)Technology	<i>...It went smoothly...I think I had to like...look at posting or re-posting but was one of those “Oh I don’t know this and I have to learn it on the spot” but...it was pretty intuitive how to do it.</i>
b)Time constraints	<i>I tend to be a bit of a junkie...when it comes to stuff like that ...like I am someone who...I check my e-mail pretty often...and...so it’s just like...when the blog is on my electronic to-do-list, it was like I would check pretty often and if there was any kind of movement on the blog ...any activity, I would go and follow up right away.</i>
c)Difficulties with blog content	<i>...No, no, my own personal view is that everything should be open source so...if post something, I expect to go feed in the general mill of information out there.</i>
d)Required skills for blogging	<i>...I think they definitely should be able to read in depth, be able to scan...I guess filter...useful from not useful information for lack of a better way for saying it...So I think those skills are necessary and I guess a high enough level of written comprehension, reading comprehension, being able to write clearly and succinctly...which is...sometimes hard for university students to do...I guess those would be the skills required.</i>
2.Running the blog experience	
a)Participating and the effect of grading	<i>... Well if there is something I really find interesting...for instance like the topic of connectivism really stay with me because it’s something that I want to like...really really continue RESEARCHING because I personally find that really engaging and interesting. And there are other topics ...like blah(laugh) you know...I am not really that interested in...going in digging deeper. But there wasn’t clear criterion for grading so it’s hard to separate ...in a case like this...the usefulness of this as the learning device and the evaluative part. They are mixed together...which kind of clouds over the use of it I guess. ...I seem to remember some people like posting more than others – just many more drawn to electronic and others were better in group discussions in class – so the level of participation is uneven from week to week depending...but once</i>

	<i>again, like the level of participation ...there's participation and there's engagement. So everybody had to participate at some point. How engaged people were? Not so much. There was definitely a feeling of forced participation and...and umm... "let me appear smart" as opposed to just...I guess authentic sharing or curiosity.... We are trying to incorporate a new pedagogy...but without actually changing the framework of the old system, always grading...So that's kind of what I am struggling with. It's inauthentic. You know, let's do this collaborative cooperative online thingy where people have conversations but there is still an authority power figure who GRADES the quality of your participation...Honestly my reaction to this is "FU". I thought the feedback, that I personally got, was useless. In terms of the feedback from the professor. So there is the real problem – there we're trying to incorporate new pedagogy while retaining old power models...it DOESN'T work in my opinion.</i>
b) Experience as leader	<i>I posted my thing and as soon as I got...any kind of activity I was on it...So that's what I really try to be...I try to be really diligent and try to...engage...to continue the conversation, but that's all I remember (laughter).</i>
c) Experience as reader	<i>I don't...there wasn't anything meaningful that ... stays with me. I put something out there and somebody who responded or vice versa, you know, that...stays with me.</i>
d) Role of learner	<i>The role of the learner is affected by the teacher's role. Is the role of the teacher to provide a learning environment? Or ...is the role of the professor to create activities that he or she can evaluate...and...so...this leads to what the role of the learner is. If the role of the professor is to create activities that he can evaluate, which is something like the blog, and he or she can like, cross it off their to-do list, then that influences what the roles of the learners are. Because in that case the learners are learning in order to obtain credit, therefore they're participating to get graded. That's one thing. The other thing is...if the professor is creating a platform in which learners can deepen their understanding of the topic, then it is up to the learners to take leadership within that platform...of all the ways that they need to support...in terms of deepening their understanding of the topic.</i>
e) Role of teacher	<i>See (d)</i>
3. Impact of blogging on learning	
a) Benefits and acquired skills	<i>I am a face to face person, Like I'm not big on participating in any kind of internet forum. Doing this course was REALLY useful...because I found myself NOW that I am working in a TECH company...so I at least had a little bit of intro then I'm</i>

	<p><i>like...KINDA know what they're talking about-so that has been really useful. I mean having the opportunity to use some tools was very, very, cool. I guess having to synthesize your thinking to present your research ...or what you're working on in a blog forum...anytime I have an opportunity to try to synthesize my thinking I always find it very useful.</i></p>
<p>b)Type of learning and interaction on the blog</p>	<p><i>I found it very superficial. Like one guy actually posted the same video that I had already posted. And it's like "dude"...maybe he didn't see the link...you know there may be reasons why. I actually brought that I remember in the blog (Laughs) I found the comments to be kind of contrived, like here's the thing I have to do...and very little engagement with actual ideas. There seems to be more of a concern "let me go and find something academically sexy (laughs) and relevant that I can post to show how much I know or whatever about this topic' and you know...it would have been interesting to see maybe more of a debate or not even debate but collaboratively trying to think through an idea of somebody going 'I don't understand this' and other people going 'I don't understand this either maybe this maybe that'...and I don't find it was – it was a bunch of people going 'here's what I think, here's the me you should read.'" That was my ...impression.</i></p> <p><i>Well, for me...and I mean this is where I guess I must wear my professional hat...it's always make a distinction between container and content. What we were posting on the blog every week was content and the blog itself was the container and I DEEPLY, deeply, question the use of the container that has forced interaction, whether it's in a classroom setting or in an electronic setting, the forced interaction that will be EVALUATED (sighs) ...it's...I REALLY struggle with that ...it goes very deeply against my values around learning and people driving their own learning. So I question whether there could be a way for incorporating a blog and having it useful...without this forced interaction that is evaluated. The flip side is, you know, doing this...and then...nobody participates because it is not ... it's not mandatory...So it's ... I understand the ... tension there but I still struggle with that question.</i></p> <p><i>No, it was not interactive. Interacting to me is we're, I guess, we're building together...we are deconstructing together...We're doing something together; we both know we are navigating the same thing. And we're both aware of the other person's contribution. So you could have posted on that blog without reading anything else...I think it was focused on "I'm supposed to do this weekly thing' and we're all...we're all trying to do the best we can in our courses...try to be insightful rather than being actually insightful..."Here's is a video</i></p>

	<i>(laughs) that already appeared” ...you know, but...or whatever, just ...you know, create a post and... You know, probably some weeks I was like “Yeah, let’s what about this, what about that!” and other weeks like “Yeah here’s something ... Pff...</i>
c)Impact of blogging on students’ collaboration	<i>... It depends. I think the only way to create collaboration is to create opportunities for people to collaborate in a meaningful way. And to set the appropriate structure and conditions for that to happen. In a way the blogging we did in our course was like “Okay, now just go collaborate”. But ‘il n’y a pas d’encadrement’ in terms of what are the proper conditions in which this kind of collaboration and intellectual community, which is what it’s intended to be, can thrive. That is not thought through. It’s like “here’s a space...you know, I post this...go collaborate OK! (chuckles) you know.</i>
4.Moodle vs. Blogger	<i>N/A</i>
5.Impact of blogging on traditional educational system	
a)Blog learning vs. classroom learning	<i>I remember for example that someone posted about Connectivism and it was just then it was like “Oh wow let me go look up this, let me go look up that’ ...spend three hours on a topic....looking up all kinds of things, that are directly and indirectly related...so it’s a way of ALMOST passively learning about stuff here. Searching but passively learning at the same time ...’Cause it’s NOT, there’s not a clear objective to why you’re researching this as opposed to if you’re writing the paper but it gives you a good overview of all the different topics that we’re, reading.</i>
b)Incorporating Blogs in higher education	<i>Students were participating because they had to...so to me that diminished the quality of it and the other thing was the grading. Using tools that are out there that is really great...but should I ever teach myself, would that be an interesting thing to incorporate? I don’t know...that’s something I will have to think about. I think it goes with classroom philosophy...you know in terms of the “in profondeur’. My teaching style is not “magistral” in terms of like, I am ...an expert in French and then the learners. Like I’m not, I don’t ascribe to the traditional teacher-learner dichotomy. So how I would incorporate a blogging to my course, would be the same in terms of how I teach my course, you know. Yeah there is a pedagogical philosophy my job is to walk with the people who are learning, so a blog will have to be congruent with that approach. In the class where we used blogging, we had a super authoritarian “I am in charge and I’m gonna evaluate you...and cutting ways...and I’m gonna cut people down and make them feel stupid” ...classroom culture</i>

	<p><i>but we're supposed to have this collaborative blog's base. Doesn't work.</i></p> <p><i>Learner focused learning – I am saying 'cause in my opinion professors are learners too. So learner-focused learning whether in blogs or traditional classroom settings.</i></p> <p><i>Maybe it's getting people to start questioning this notion of who holds knowledge and who holds expertise. It's a way of displacing expertise in a sense that more people get to have a voice on a topic. And one of my FAVORITE, FAVORITE Blogs is a blog called "Black Girl Dangerous". If it wasn't for...the tool of blogging, I'd never even hear about a lot of these arguments...makes me question things more and become a better critical thinker. So, you know, for me THAT's the TRUE nature of the true intention of a tool like blogging whether it's within or without an academic community, of something like the Black Girl Dangerous blog...would be that ...within an academic community they would have to reference.</i></p> <p><i>You know, so there's this, this notion of being able to create communities of practice online...that's how would that work within...you know a university system? Is it about the content which is essentially blogging as a platform for content...or is it about relationships...</i></p>
c)Recommendations	<i>See 5b</i>
6.Participant's evaluation of the experience	<p><i>...Useful to learn to use something...I enjoyed seeing what other people think and all of that and getting a view into my fellow students... I did not enjoy the structure of how it was...positioned within the course. And how it was evaluated. Did it help me deepen my academic understanding of topics? Probably not.</i></p>

Emily's Story

(Age 37; White-Married; MA Educational Studies)

Challenges of the Course Blog Experience

Emily's experience with technology went "smoothly" as she was able to learn "on the spot" some things that she did not experience before. To her it was rather "intuitive." As a blog leader, Emily spent about eight hours over the week to do both the research and the blogging. As a blog reader, she spent about two hours a week as a total. For her that was not a time

consuming task. She was getting notifications on her e-mail of any activity that occurred on the blog. She did not face any difficulties with copyright issues nor sharing online reliable resources. Emily thought the required skills to be engaged in the course blog were to be able to filter reliable resources, and to have a high level of reading comprehension, and writing skills. She noted that writing “clearly and succinctly” is not always easy for university students.

Running the Blog Experience

Emily participated fully throughout the week. Even as a leader, she was always responding to everyone. Then she recalled that her weekly participation level depended on the topic at hand and whether, it was interesting and engaging to her and her other responsibilities at the time. She declared that the grade she got was disappointing and that she deserved more as based on her full participation and engagement. She added that the criteria for grading were not clear and that the evaluative part of the experience clouded its usefulness. She stated that the participation level differed from one week to another. She thought that some students were posting more than others and that some were better in the classroom discussions than with online ones. For her they were not very engaged in the blog discussion. She also felt, that the students’ participation was neither authentic nor moved by their own desire. She believed that the participation level would probably be not the same if it were not graded but she wondered if there could be another way to make blogging more engaging and relevant to the students. As a blog leader, all Emily could remember was that she tried to be fully dedicated and responsive to everyone as soon as she got notification of any activity on the blog. As a blog reader, Emily mentioned that she spent about one to two hours a week in total, and to her that was not a time consuming task. She could not remember anything particular, among the students’ responses that was interesting to her. Emily declared that the role of the learner is affected by the teacher’s

role. If the teacher's role is to create activities, such as the blog, to be evaluated then the learners would only be participating or learning for the sake of the grade. But if the teacher is providing the learning environment or the platform in which the learners' understanding of the material can be deepened, then learners can choose to take the leadership of the blog to enhance their learning. She gave an example of her Facebook post asking her contacts about a complex paragraph in an article that she was trying to understand for another course and people of different educational level were highly responsive and interacting on her post. She described that as her own learning community. Emily declared that the professor's role affects the learner's role as discussed above.

The Impact of Blogging on Learning

Emily declared that she is not an active person on the internet so the course was quite useful to her; it served as an introduction prior to her job at a technical company. Technology skills she has learned included working with Google Docs, going behind the scenes on a blog, converting YouTube links. She described blogging as a useful tool that gave her the opportunity to synthesize her thoughts and research on a blog forum. Emily found the interaction on the blog was "superficial" and annoying to her in general. She mentioned that one of the students posted the same video that she already had posted, herself. She had the impression that the students' comments were "contrived" and she wished there was instead more collaboration towards explaining and understanding the students' ideas and thoughts.

She questioned the interaction that would occur when forced by some sort of evaluation, (i.e. grading). She stated that for her as a professional, this goes against her values around self-directed learning. But she also wondered if there is any other way for implementing blogging in a useful interactive way without forcing it on the students but yet to make sure everyone

participates. The type of learning that occurred was not interactive to her. For her, interaction is collaborating together, navigating the same thing in order to build something and being aware of each other's contributions. She explained that students could have posted something without reading the others' comments. And that their interaction was focused on doing their best in the course, trying to be insightful and tutor on the blog as opposed to actually being insightful. She mentioned that she was doing that too, trying to get it off her weekly to-do-list. Emily thought blogging can only improve collaboration in a meaningful way by setting the right structure and conditions in which an intellectual community can "thrive". But, for her, in that course, there was no appropriate framework thought through, only a space provided for them to "collaborate".

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Education System

Emily declared that with a blog, one gets different responses and points of view from different persons. She observed that blogging was different from the classroom presentation in the sense that it gave her an interesting overview of the others' different thoughts and points of view about the readings. She described learning that occurred as almost passive learning, while searching and researching all kinds of things on the topic at hand. At first, Emily found it would be interesting to incorporate blogging into the classroom but she was not sure about it. She said that trying to incorporate a new pedagogy without changing the framework of the old system is inauthentic. She explained that getting the students to collaborate online while grading the quality of their participation, by an authority power figure, just does not work in her opinion.

When asked if she were to implement blogging as a teacher in higher education, she thought it would go with the classroom philosophy or the way she would teach her course. And she explained that trying to incorporate blogging, which is a "non-traditional collaborative space" within a very traditional pedagogy, this may or may not work in terms of the depth with

which it is meant to work. She conveyed that she does not “ascribe to the traditional teacher-learner dichotomy.” She further explained that with adult students, who are in class because they want to and who carry lots of expertise, the online blogging “culture” (experience) should reflect the classroom “culture” or practices. And since they are adults, the focus should be on their experiences. She said that in that course they had a “super authoritarian” figure since the professor was in charge and was evaluating them. They were having this kind of authoritarian classroom culture instead of having a collaborative blog’s base, and that, in her opinion, does not work. To her, the blog cannot be separated from the classroom reality: if the classroom is meaningfully engaging then the blog will be the same. But if it is authoritarian then there will be lack of harmony between the two. Then she added that people can lead their learning in the classroom if they are supposed to be leading their own learning on the blog. She maintained that she has a critique of the traditional classroom. To her a blog would be more interesting when changing the paradigm of learning and thinking than simply including the blog as a classroom activity that it is a bit different from writing an essay. To her that philosophy of changing the paradigm into learner-focused learning can “spill over into the blog”. In that case both the students and the professor are the learners in this paradigm.

Emily added that the production of workers is different from the production of critically thinking citizens. So it depends on which objective the universities are aiming for. She also believed the use of blogs in the traditional educational system can get people to question the notion of who holds knowledge and expertise; that learning can happen differently, and that learners can learn from each other in a more interesting way than from the teacher. This can also challenge the notion of the knowledge authority and validation.

She described blogging in general to be a “way of displacing expertise in a sense that more people get to have a voice on a topic.” She gave an example of one of her favorite non-academic blogs on the Internet that she perceived as collaborative where people are discussing different topics and building a particular discourse together as based on their real life experiences (non-academic because they were not using references). She thought in that case blogging was a tool by which she could get to read such arguments that helped her become a “better critical thinker.” And that, to her, should be the real intention behind blogging within academic and non-academic communities. But she also noted the fact that people might be freer to write whatever they want in non-academic blogs.

To her blogging serves as a platform for any type of content. She thinks there is a “fuzzy” line between blogging in social media and blogging within a university system and that there can be an interrelation between them. As for improving education in the future, she thought blogging can help people create online communities of practice. She gave an example about how she was able to find online blogs about being a TA as part of her work.

The Participants’ Evaluation of the Experience

In general, Emily perceived the course blog as useful in having an overview of what every student was doing. For her, it was really interesting to see the others’ writing styles, some of which were brilliant to her, but probably did not deepen her academic understanding of the topics. She enjoyed seeing her fellow students’ thoughts and ideas but she did not enjoy the structure of how blogging was “positioned within the course and how it was evaluated.”

Table 4

Data Contributed by Fiona

1.Challenges of the	
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course blog	
a)Technology	<i>...I was initially rather nervous about the process mostly because from a technical perspective I am at best adequate, I'm not particularly skilled, but that proved to be ...I don't need to be concerned about that, it was very simple, we clicked on a link and we followed the instructions.</i>
b)Time constraints	<i>...I guess it certainly took time but I think that was appropriate time the same as homework. It definitely took me at least two hours I would say each week to think through the blog and respond to it and do some research...probably two hours on average. Leading the blog took longer... it's very difficult for me to remember ...what I remember is that I had a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon...I was very happy with (laughter) ...I think it summed up because it was experiential learning...but then I was to take that and find angles to it...so it would have taken longer for sure...but that could have been an hour or two hours more...then of course responding to what people wrote...so maybe four, five hours, I don't remember exactly.</i>
c)Difficulties with blog content	<i>...about difficulties on sharing online resources; answering some questions, no – maybe fear of copyright violation...that kind of stuff (laughter) Maybe I should have ...but No.</i>
d)Required skills for blogging	<i>...it is a public forum so I felt I had to be coherent, have something of value to say...to contribute to the dialogue that was there, ...personally I felt there are certain standards that I had to meet ...not through the professor, not through my fellow students, it was a personal obligation and felt I had to think outside my own box, so it was very beneficial, it was very good. I think to be operating on a Master's level, where you're expected to make the material your own, and I think it works very well...so everyone would have that skill set at this level and they have to be able to write coherently...obviously, and again I would expect that would be a requirement at the Master's level.</i>
2. Running the blog experience	
a)Participating and the effect of grading	<i>...I wanted to appear like I was adding value to the discussion...I guess some participated more than others, some weeks with longer blogs than others...yes, so I think the participation was probably good. I would not say extraordinary but it was good. They were participating partly because it was a course requirement (laughter) partly because people more or less just got on and said yeah I agree with everything that's been said. Is that the level of participation you would hope for? Probably not but that would have been probably just a function of either how interested they were or how much time they had ...So if the blogging was not</i>

	<i>graded???(Laughter) the participation would not have been the same because it's the nature of the beast right? (Laughter). People set their priorities ...it's unfortunate but it's true ...then it should be an incentive often within a course in order to do something.</i>
b) Experience as leader	<i>...I shared Outward Bound and then the article that I had found in the newspaper...the discussion did not go in the direction I meant to go – but that's life. I answered all the questions but not on the day they were posted – I could not respond the the day of...I was not at my computer on the day of...posting that was a problem.</i>
c) Experience as reader	<i>...well I guess sometimes I wasn't quite sure what people were getting at or I didn't think perhaps a few times that the conversational thread was necessarily there ...some were less insightful than others...were of less interest to me than others...so it is just typical of course material...you know.</i>
d) Role of learner	<i>...to add new ideas...or to expand upon ideas that have been presented. If everybody says yes I agree than the blog kind of dies (laughter)...the ideal situation is to build on the responses...for a learner to really learn...That's where I guess we did feel some academic pressure because we knew we had to pick our top five... so...you know... (laughter)...</i>
e) Role of teacher	<i>Well, I think they have to oversee it to make sure nothing inappropriate starts to happen and that it doesn't deteriorate – anyway just nothing personal in it ...just... sort of ethical and moral issues. Other than that, I think it could be a mistake for them to get very involved in it... I presume that the instructor has the opportunity during class time to share his or her view point and to make that point after the fact if they want to...but I think in terms of adult learners, making it relevant to themselves it's important to let it run its course...I suppose if there was some blatantly wrong interpretation of something that had to be corrected then it might be important for the instructor to redirect, but if it goes ...if you are at A and you end up going down passed it leading you in a totally different direction, I think that's part of the learning process and...it would be ...it would perhaps inhibit some response just later if you felt that the professor was really checking what you were doing. Yeah.</i>
3. Impact of blogging on learning	
a) Benefits and acquired skills	<i>...I think to be operating on a Master's level, where you're expected to make the material your own ...so everyone would have that skill set at this level. I can't think of additional skills that I would have acquired...no...knowledge but not skills. Well, every subject that was put forth. I learned more about the subject. We went from the readings to the angle that was</i>

	<i>presented by the person of the week. If you like ... then the angles that were brought up through the dialogue in the blog... that my fellow students brought up ... so it enlarged my knowledge base...I wasn't thinking in a linear fashion. I had to detour (laughter) to respond, which was I think very beneficial.</i>
b)Type of learning and interaction on the blog	<i>...it expands everybody's horizons a little bit...and so there is learning because of that ...but I didn't change the way I learn in general. So there was interaction – people did respond I agree to I do not agree ...well I don't think people were reacting really spontaneously...it's set at a certain controlled pace...so I guess that keeps the emotion out of it...its interactive but I ...in our experience, I don't remember emotional exchanges or critical...well I guess some of them were a little critical but...I don't now...</i>
c)Impact of blogging on students' collaboration	<i>...I don't think it was a collaborative process...because you are responding as an individual...I didn't need to consult with my peers before I responded...trying to think how you define collaborative. I would say it's synergy you know the pieces the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the individual pieces but...I didn't think that it was to make collaboration where there is an idea of working together...and I did not feel it was working together...especially I mean it is just a physical aspect...I'm sitting miles away at home in my house...thinking about MY response...responding perhaps to YOUR statement...I'm not collaborating with you...I'm thinking about things and you've challenged me to think but...I feel free to disagree with you...I feel free to challenge you ...in my idea, collaboration is very cooperative and ...well there may have been times when it was competitive ... but I don't see it as something that builds collaboration at all.</i>
4.Moodle vs. Blogger	<i>N/A</i>
5.Impact of blogging on traditional educational system	
a)Blog learning vs. classroom learning	<i>I was forced to think more through the blogging activity than through just typical classroom activities...I felt pushed. I felt it's a public forum I had to be coherent. I felt there were certain standards that I had to meet...not through the professor, not through my fellow students, it was a personal obligation...I felt that I had to synthesize the information, I had to really think about it and make it my own by responding...it made me read more critically but when my fellow students responded, inevitably they brought up things that I hadn't thought about so I had to think some more!(laughter) outside my box, you know, it was very beneficial, it was. Depending on what happens in the classroom ...so this was different...sort of self-directed I</i>

	<p><i>guess, you'd say...self-directed learning ...yeah within the boundaries of the topic I guess. I think it is a very good tool it forces you to make the material your own, it exposes you to different view-points.</i></p> <p><i>Well I think it forces you to learn, and I think you know you read something in a course pack and you can read it really well and you can take notes and you can really understand it...but you can't ... you don't really make the material your own...you don't...just because of time I mean I'm not going to sit there and sort of do also all sorts of research on some random aspect of the article that I've just read...but...when you get into blogging, you are forced to do...well in the way it was structured you're forced to do some research, on a particular angle so it enlarged my knowledge of the field, it gave me exposure to view-points that I probably would not have found on my own, or consider on my own...yeah so it made me...and just the fact of starting to read to respond to prepare my response...enlarged my knowledge base, my...enlarged my understanding of the topic so....it was very positive.</i></p>
b)Incorporating Blogs in higher education	<p><i>...It may be difficult at the undergraduate level ...as I said before it takes a certain set of skills that they may not yet have at that level. Also I mean if you have thirty people participating it might become very cumbersome ...we were a small enough group that we could sort or respond to each other but if you're a big group that would be difficult. You have to have everything multiple threads running...I don't know. If you were going with an online course then it might be a good tool but I don't know much about courses that are totally online...to have it in every course ...it may lose its novelty (laughter)...I would not like to see it in every course...it took a lot of energy, it took a lot of work (laughter) sorry I'm being honest (laughter). But I think it is something that you should put in your toolkit and you set at times...you know maybe even within a course for one particular subsection of the course...but like anything if it's overdone I think it loses some of its power and influence.</i></p>
c)Recommendations	<p><i>...maybe I wouldn't have it run for the entire course...it became a little more cumbersome with time and maybe some of the responses were not as high quality...you know...might be better to do it for ten weeks instead of fifteen weeks...but that could be just people get tired (laughter) I can't think of anything honestly that I would differently...yeah.</i></p>
6.Participant's evaluation of the experience	<p><i>It was very beneficial, it was very good. ...sometimes I was frustrated but overall I really think that I learned a lot from that experience.</i></p>

Fiona's Story

(Age 54; White Married; Diploma in Adult Education)

Challenges of the Course Blog Experience

At the beginning Fiona was nervous that she could not have enough technical skills for the blog but then it turned out it was very easy and simple. Blogging took about two hours a week of Fiona's time, which was appropriate, as she stated, just like any other homework would have taken. Leading the blog took more time than being a blog reader; it might have taken four or five hours instead of two. She could not remember how much time exactly but she remembered that she had included a cartoon image with which she was happy. Fiona did not face any difficulties with copyright issues nor sharing online reliable resources. Fiona personally wanted to contribute to the blog and write something valuable, so she felt she needed to read critically, think deeply and synthesize the information. And as the others were responding too she also had to think out of her own box because they had different thoughts, so it was very beneficial to her. She found there were no particular required skills for blogging other than the required writing skills at any graduate degree level, i.e. writing coherently.

Running the Blog Experience

Fiona participated in the blog, usually once or twice at most if there was an interesting response to her or if she felt she needed to respond. She mainly participated to add a value to the blog discussion through her intelligible responses, and she added that everyone knew what she was getting at. She perceived the participation level as good because everyone participated every week despite the fact that they could have missed it once or twice. She observed that some students were even participating more than once a week, and some of the blogs posted were longer than others. She said that people partly participated because it was a course requirement

and that some were only participating with the mere response to agree with the others' statements. To Fiona, this kind of response showed that they were either not so interested in the subject matter or they did not have much time. For her the participation level would not have been the same if it was not graded because that is just typical with any course where there should always be an incentive to accomplish something. As a blog leader, Fiona remembers she had two angles to her blog post but it did not go in the deep direction that she wanted it to go. And that taught her that her question on the blog was probably not so clear to the readers. But that was okay to her because "it happens". She was able to read and respond to all the readers' thoughts and questions except for the day of her presentation classroom meeting because she could not be at her computer on that day. As a blog reader, not all of Fiona's questions or ideas were always answered but to her that was normal and happens just like in a classroom setting.

She sometimes felt that the "conversational thread" was not that interesting, but to her that is typical of any course material. Fiona explained that the role of learners in a course blog is to expand upon the blog posts and respond in a way that would build on it. For her, that is how the learner would ideally learn and that is where they felt "academic pressure" because they knew they had to choose their own top five blog posts and/ comments.

According to Fiona, the role of the instructor is to supervise the blog only to check moral issues or redirect it, if absolutely necessary. Otherwise she thinks it is wrong for the instructor to be involved because that would inhibit some response and the whole learning process. To her the instructors can share their point of view during the class.

The Impact of Blogging on Learning

Fiona declared that she gained knowledge through the blog experience, not skills. Her knowledge about every subject was acquired at different stages: from the readings to the blog

discussion, to the classroom presentation and discussion. All of that process enlarged her knowledge base and made her think in a non-linear way. She affirmed that blogging enlarged her knowledge and understanding of the topics given in the course pack. Fiona described blogging as a tool that helped them learn by enlarging their knowledge and horizons, and there was learning because of that. She also declared that blogging did not change the way she learned in general, but she learned because of that tool. She thought that the type of learning that occurred on the blog was interactive as people were responding to each other instantaneously but not spontaneously. She noted that they were not throwing out thoughts randomly; their responses were supported with literature and at controlled speed so mostly lacking emotional exchanges.

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Educational System

Fiona declared that she learned more through blogging than through any typical classroom activity, because she wanted to contribute to the blog and write something valuable so she felt she needed to read critically, think deeply and synthesize the information. And as the others were responding too she also had to think out of her own box because they had different thoughts, so it was very beneficial to her. She believed it was self-directed learning that differentiated blogging from classroom learning. She thought that blogging is a good tool that exposes the learners to different points of view and pushes them to make the material their own. In her opinion, the whole blog experience was structured in a way to make the students not only do the readings but also do further research about it and be exposed to different points of view.

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Fiona thought it might be difficult to implement blogging at the undergraduate level because it requires a certain level of writing and communication skills. She also said it would only be applied to small classes otherwise the conversational thread would become cumbersome. She pointed out that blogging can be used as a tool in online courses for the students to connect with each other and discuss things. As for the traditional courses, she believed it should not be implemented in every course because it could lose its effect if it was overdone; she thought it should also be used for only one subsection of the course because it needs a lot of work and energy put forth by the students. Fiona suggested running the blog for only part of the course time frame because she noticed that there was a time when it became cumbersome and some responses were not of high quality so she thought that maybe it was because people got tired.

The Participant's Evaluation of the Experience

Fiona enjoyed the experience and described it as very beneficial. She sometimes felt frustrated but in general she learned a lot from the blog experience.

Table 5

Data Contributed by Isabel

1.Challenges of the course blog	
a)Technology	<i>...OK there are a lot of technical skills that I learned...it was my first blog experience...when it was my turn to do the blog, I had to find out how to insert a video in there...I had to know</i>

	<i>where to click to see the blog, you know, I mean it was just even to answer the blog it wasn't so evident ...I had to find out how the blog worked, you know. That's it! Inserting the movie took me I am sure a whole evening to find out how to actually figure out how to do it...it was a big learning curve ...it was hard, I faced challenges with technology...Big Time!</i>
b)Time constraints	<i>Yes definitely very time consuming it was ...well the research behind answering the questions that was one thing... and then you know when it was my turn to do the blog, just inserting the movie took me I am sure a whole evening to find out how to actually figure out how to do it...was a big learning a big learning curve it was ... it was hard.</i>
c)Difficulties with blog content	<i>N/A</i>
d)Required skills for blogging	<i>I think there might be yeah a way...to motivate people to answer...first of all it has to be something that they're interested in...right? And then you have to give them the opportunity to see different views so that they can see themselves in one of those views and then answer ... you know...</i>
2. Running the blog experience	
a)Participating and the effect of grading	<i>I don't think I participated like back and forth much.. maybe I did with couple of people but not all. Maybe the subject was more something that I knew about so or more familiar with you know yeah... but if the subject was something totally different I didn't go research it necessarily and then go back and say hey what about this maybe that was something I could have done but I didn't. I participated both because a subject was interesting to me and I wanted to add to the blog ... also because I knew that I would be graded... differently if I didn't participate...I think it depends on the subject....you know I think it depends on the question or the person who's doing the blogs ...Some blogs were dynamic you know like they had videos...so I think when you have like...additional things like videos...probably people will respond more...you get their attention more, you know...</i>
b) Experience as leader	<i>I was not able to reply to everybody and comment on everybody's post and I think it was just because of time constraints. First of all it took a long time to make the blog and then when it was posted I think we got the link on Friday ...so we had a couple of days to put it together and then the next day was class ...you had to present the blog so not only did you have to have a blog ready but you also had to have a presentation for the day that you were going to discuss the blog</i>

	<i>– so the back and forth was hard to manage...like I didn't have a chance to really respond to everybody who responded during the first couple of days and then I got busy doing the presentation I didn't go back but I planned to do it like on the day of the presentation...</i>
c)Experience as reader	<i>I think they did answer all my questions yeah and I did engage with a couple of people but like I said, you know time was restrained, so I wasn't able to... like sometimes people would answer only the day of the class so there was no way that I could respond to them and then see it online...so... you know ...so it was difficult to do in the amount of time we were given...</i>
d)Role of learner	<i>... Well maybe yeah participate but also like question maybe critically say ..like I think there was one person in this class that said that because this was an adult learning course and she was finding that she wasn't learning anything new you know... like it was mostly like theories for children and how do you adapt it to adults you know? so I think that was a good thing for her to have said because maybe everybody thought of that and nobody said it so I think that the learners' role would be you know not so accepting as to things but to question them and critique them and you know, critically think...</i>
e)Role of teacher	<i>Ok- so the teacher of the course I think should participate in the blog... well... I think the teacher as a facilitator should question the comments and give different scenarios and be more involved in the comments... involved in the discussion not just sit back and watch people talk but I think that their role should be more ...to facilitate the movement of the conversation. So I mean then if the blog could stay on track maybe the professor doesn't have to respond but you know sometimes the questions or the answers go off the topic and it's the teacher's role to bring it back into the topic... I think</i>
3.Impact of blogging on learning	
a)Benefits and acquired skills	<i>I think it had lots of benefits first of all just made us more comfortable with the technology behind it ... you know... well it made me feel more comfortable with trying new things on the internet...yeah...it made me feel that if I could do this, I could do more... in my other courses... you know. as far as learning goes I learned a lot in this course because of the blog and because of all of the different exercises that we had to do and the learning stuff that I've used and that has helped me in other courses... I found that the blogging and all those technical things that we had to do was 80% of my learning.</i>
b)Type of learning	<i>..But as far as responding to them well I tried to respond to</i>

and interaction on the blog	<i>their questions yeah... unless it's something that you know well you have to also look up what they meant... so it was very self-directed... the learning, you know, you had to decide which way to go...People talk about almost like a chat...maybe that's what I am mixing up the blog with ...but I just picture myself doing a conversation or something...I will go on the blog and say does anybody know how to do this or that ...you know and somebody else will answer...ok, I've researched this and this...and this is the link to this place and so on...is that a blog? (laughter) I don't know.</i>
c)Impact of blogging on students' collaboration	<i>...not much collaboration. Like at the beginning of the course I had thought that there would be more interaction between the teacher and the bloggers but as it was, it was just the students interacting with each other. Some of the feedback I found a bit long and not directed and I attribute that to the fact that the teacher had told us beforehand that it was important to participate into the blog and that he was gonna mark the answers. I thought a lot of students were answering but like, you know, going overboard just for the effect of having, you know, the grade, yeah...that's my opinion (chuckles). Well we did collaborate when a person was making the presentation...I think that was essential to get everybody's idea because you can write something down but then I'm not getting the real point of what you're trying to say but then when we're all together, then you discuss it and you say well what I meant was this, you know, maybe didn't come out the same as I was writing – do you understand what I am saying? So, if I were doing an online course and I wanted to add blogging then I would add like a “rendez-vous” time where everybody will be simulating a classroom. So whenever the history behind how someone got to their point was discussed, I thought that was of interest to me and helped me in my learning...like it's interesting to know how a person gets where they are at ...I could build on my experience, you know.</i>
4.Moodle vs. Blogger	N/A
5.Impact of blogging on traditional educational system	
a)Blog learning vs. classroom learning	<i>OK...how does it improve it? But it improves it by giving them the opportunity to putting out their thoughts and other students commenting on it ...in the classroom you can do the same thing but you don't necessarily have the background knowledge to do it as well...like in blogging you have the time to research what you're gonna say, answer or research what that person said, and then you know be more informed by answering...do you</i>

	<p><i>understand what I'm trying to say? ...communicating with other people and their ideas sort of opens up doors and new directions for you; ...If you were in a classroom sitting around the table, somebody would talk about something but you won't necessarily remember it...on the blog where there is a link you can click on the link provided and that brings you to something else, then that brings you to something else again- so it is almost like a domino effect...the learning becomes more real...I don't know how to express it but it becomes more of a journey, you know. Also the time lapse is there...If I'm in the same room with you I can't say "oh wait a minute, I'm gonna look it up..." although some people probably do that on their little phones (laughter)...so probably the time issue is helped by blogging.</i></p>
<p>b)Incorporating Blogs in higher education</p>	<p><i>I think it would be, I think it's a very useful tool because it opens up communication outside the classroom ...and if you have problems people could blog about the problems that they had and give the solutions that they found and other people can learn from other students' experience and solution that they found...you know so I think it's a very good interactive tool to use in learning. She believed that blogging could be applied everywhere and for all majors. Yeah I think it could be very easily applied in the sciences for sure... I mean I think it could be applied practically everywhere.. I mean ...maybe even arts, I guess I don't know... yeah I think so..</i></p>
<p>c)Recommendations</p>	<p><i>We didn't get any instructor's feedback...I thought there would be more interaction between the teacher and the bloggers ...as it was it was just the students interacting between themselves and I found some of it a bit long and not directed ... I attribute that to the fact that the teacher had told us beforehand that it was important to participate into the blog and that he was gonna mark the answers so a lot of students, I thought, were answering but going overboard just for the effect of having the grade ... that's my opinion (chuckles). I think that it is essential to add a " rendez-vous" time where everybody would be simulating a classroom and there will be discussion with the teacher present as well like we did it when the person did a presentation...whatever is written in the blog should be discussed ...to get the history behind how they got there and that would be of interest to me and help in my learning...so that knowing their experience, I could build on my experience, you know.</i></p>
<p>6.Participant's evaluation of the experience</p>	<p><i>I don't think this was a very traditional course... I mean it was a teacher led course but it wasn't online but we had a lot of ... technology that we had to ... discover for ourselves and ...you don't find? I think it was very very good... So it was a very good course because of the blogging and because all of the</i></p>

	<i>technical stuff that was intertwined into it...yeah...interrelated in it..yeah</i>
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Isabel's Story

(Age 59; white Married; MA Educational Studies with Adult Education concentration)

Challenges of the Course Blog Experience

Learning to blog was difficult for Isabel on the technical level. She declared that she experienced technical problems with the website blogger.com. Among the technical difficulties she faced she had to figure out how to access the blog and to know how it works. Figuring out how to blog on the technical level took a lot of her time. But after all, she confirmed that she learned technical skills from the blog experience. She also said that doing the research to participate both as blog leader and reader was time consuming in addition to the technical difficulties that took a lot of time.

Running the Blog Experience

According to Isabel, an essential skill leading to the blog success, is to know ways to motivate others, and give the participants a chance to reflect upon their experiences. Isabel admitted that she participated once a week and did not usually check the next day if someone had reacted to her comment. She was only participating more often when the subject matter they were mentioning in their comments was familiar to her, otherwise she did not bother to research it. She also stated that she participated because she was interested in some subjects and because participation was being graded. When asked whether she thought the students' participation level would be the same if it was not graded, she answered it might have been and she added that it depends on the subject and not only on the post content but also whether the post contains additional dynamic stuff like videos and cartoons. She thought that such posts got more attention

than those with just writings, and got more comments and responses. When it was her turn to lead the blog, Isabel could not read all the comments because of time constraints: it took her a lot of time to write the post and prepare for the presentation. She planned to respond to everyone on the day of the presentation. As a blog reader, Isabel responded only a couple of times because of the time constraints, since she had to do some research if the topic was not familiar to her.

According to her, the role of learner is to participate in the blog, question things and practice critical thinking. She felt that the role of the teacher was missing from the blog and she thought that the teacher should participate in the blog as a facilitator by providing feedback just like a traditional classroom, and by keeping the discussion on track.

The Impact of Blogging on Learning

She said that she learned technical skills from the blog experience and therefore she felt more interested in looking at other blogs. She felt more comfortable with the technology behind blogging and trying new things on the internet. It made her feel confident that she could perform better in other courses on the technical level. She added that most of her learning in that course came from the blog and technology related tasks. Isabel found that the type of learning on the course blog was self-directed. To her, blogging is almost like a chat but not instant. She explained that the difference between blogging and chatting is time. Isabel pointed out that blogging in general improved the students' collaboration in formal courses by making them more informed and giving them the opportunity to communicate their ideas.

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Educational System

Unlike learning in the classroom, learning had become like a journey to Isabel because one could always go back to the blog and communicate endless strings of thoughts. She asserted

that blogging has the advantage over the classroom learning of offering the students the “time lapse.”

Isabel declared that incorporating blogging in higher education is good as an interactive useful tool for learning that would promote communication outside the classroom. She believed that blogging could be applied at all levels and for all majors and subject matter. The main recommendation of Isabel was including the teacher’s feedback in order to have interaction between the teacher and the students on the blog. She stated that students were participating in the blog because the teacher told them he will mark the answers, i.e. only for the effect of grading. She suggested adding some real time to the blog where everyone should be online including the teacher who would start a conversation. Isabel confirmed that it was the discussion that followed the blog later that was beneficial for her; to discuss whatever was written in the blog when they were meeting in the classroom for the presentation. That was an important part of the blogging experience that helped her in her learning, because she could build on her ideas and thoughts from theirs as they could explain the background and reasons behind their comments on the blog.

The Participant’s Evaluation of the Experience

Isabel believed the course was not traditional because it incorporated a lot of technology, despite the fact that it was teacher led. She declared that it was a good course because of blogging and technology that were interrelated in it.

Table 6

Data Contributed by Mandy

1.Challenges of the course blog	
a)Technology	<i>...it was good but it had some limitations as well, for example, it</i>

	<i>didn't let you to publish multimodal texts...I mean images or inserting movies directly into the blog...you could have links but you could not have the whole material inserted directly...In creating the blog we were able to embed other stuff but in commenting we were not.</i>
b)Time constraints	<i>Yeah...at the beginning it was fun... but as we were going through the course uh you had other deadlines and uh you know...your work was accumulating... I didn't have time to go through all the blogs and read each individual comment... and especially at the end of the semester I knew who writes what. Some people just tend to write uh you know superficial things that only show that they have participated. The content was not that critical and deep... So after a few sessions you would know who writes what...So I had learnt to know who I wanted to read. I just read a few people ...toward the end of the course. ... In answering the questions I try to answer the blog leader's question more precisely and looking for resources to answer those questions, because I was thinking I am maybe graded for that... and I was obliged to. But the questions that other commenters... paused, I just shared my own experience. If you know ...the knowledge I already had. Yeah.</i>
c)Difficulties with blog content	<i>I had a fear of, you know, copyright issues, plagiarism... and this made me more careful about what I am telling and how I cite stuff. Yes.</i>
d)Required skills for blogging	<i>... Firstly you should read...be a good reader and read all other participants very well you should be patient to read and understand other people. This was... a good experience because reading academic stuff, you know, something is written for you and the intention is for you to read them and understand them. But in a blog you're not dealing with professional writers but peers and sometimes it takes a little bit more to understand them fully... but it gives you... it equips you with means to understand various types of expression self-expression by other people.</i>
2. Running the blog experience	
a)Participating and the effect of grading	<i>... in answering the questions I try to answer the blog leader's question more precisely and looking for resources to answer those questions, because I was thinking I am maybe graded for that.. and I was obliged to. But the questions that other commenters paused, I just shared my own experience. If you know...the knowledge I already had. Yeah. You know blogs are interesting but participating in a blog takes more energy and</i>

	<p><i>time, so people usually want to consume it rather than produce it ... unless they are so fascinated about something. Yeah. ... And you could see by writings, if somebody ... was in a hurry and did it at the last minute, so you could see a few sentences that meant to just fulfill the requirements. But some people took their time and writing uh interesting stuff and go into detail yeah... and do you know? ... I myself also... a few times, I just ended up writing something very fast and short because I I didn't have time... yeah</i></p>
b) Experience as leader	<p><i>... (cough) Being blog...leader was... I think, kind of empowering...moment in that course for me because I had the control of the material. It was like my space to teach something and to convey ... the amount and extent of information I wanted. So my blog consists of a summary and two links to psychoanalysis theory and Erik Erikson's...psycho-social theory...So I shared what I found meaningful and important I I'm not sure if everybody took their time to go through all of them but at least I shared what I felt that was important.</i></p>
c) Experience as reader	<p><i>I try to answer the blog leader's question more precisely and looking for resources to answer those questions, because I was thinking I am maybe graded for that... and I was obliged to. But the questions that other commenters paused, I just shared my own experience. If you know... the knowledge I already had. Yeah.</i></p>
d) Role of learner	<p><i>The role of learners? Having this blog in mind I think it was... mainly... created and conducted by students by learners. .so it was all the learners.. you know</i></p>
e) Role of teacher	<p><i>Oh the instructor there had a role, I cannot tell of authority but he had set the assignment for us...the idea was his and it was a part of his course design so we took part in what he had decided on.. in terms of using a blog.</i></p>
3. Impact of blogging on learning	
a) Benefits and acquired skills	<p><i>Skills? Firstly a blog gave us (cough) a limited space for writing. I don't remember how many words we could write in a blog section as a comment...but it made me write more concisely...So this was one experience and a new learning. There were also the skills for working with the blog itself. Other than the technical skills you should read, be a good reader, you should be patient to read and understand other people. This was a good experience because reading academic stuff you know something is written for you and the intention is for you to read them and understand them. But in blog you are</i></p>

	<i>not dealing with professional writers but peers and sometimes it takes a little bit more to understand them fully...but it equips you with means to understand various types of expression, self-expression by other people.</i>
b)Type of learning and interaction on the blog	<i>...It depended on people's style of interacting with questions and the material... some people tend to answer one or two questions per blog, not all of them... and the way they expressed themselves was to write that...they had a holistic view to the topic but some people weren't very precise and very explicit and search questions one by one and numbered all of them. It was informal learning, if I want to tell you that.. you don't.. nobody tells you OK there are specific guidelines to take part in the blog, or how you answer how you read how you find your ways. This, I can tell it was a good informal learning for me. It was peer-to-peer and teacher-to-student. So it was interactive because you published something and you received feedback.. and in the class you were able to answer the questions that a student have from you and also you could ask each person about their own comments...The blog actually expanded the time of discussion. It made a discussion begin before the class time and continues into the class.</i>
c)Impact of blogging on students' collaboration	<i>N/A</i>
4.Moodle vs. Blogger	<i>it was good but it had some limitation as well for example it didn't let you to publish multimodal uh texts... I mean images or inserting movies directly into the blog...you could have links but you could not have the whole of material as they were... you could not insert them directly.</i>
5.Impact of blogging on traditional educational system	
a)Blog learning vs. classroom learning	<i>...Firstly it gives a background before the class begins. So every student knows what's going on and who had said what, and in class everyone everybody enters equipped with some knowledge. So the class time maybe harnessed more efficiently. (Silence) I mean when you come to class, you have something meaningful to begin with. You don't want to... play around the bush, give introductions...the introduction has been said before class. People have done the warm-up, the brainstorming before class.</i>
b)Incorporating Blogs	<i>My experience was that the educational learning is not ...</i>

in higher education	<p><i>continuing to be like past. If we want to harness the most of everything, in social sciences or technical stuff whatever, we have better to use online environment and new technologies. It depends on the topic and also it depends on the sensitivity of the topic... if it brings conflicts more or collaboration more. For example there are topics that are more controversial...about...I don't know wars, ideologies, and things like this that sometimes bring about conflict rather than peace in the class. So maintaining peace in the classroom sometimes may become a concern. Controlling the blog... actually blog is written form so... If you're the administrator of the blog, you can...erase or... you know censor... but it is not ethical so... I think you don't have control more than you have on the classroom...because if you don't want to...delete anything... from the original messages... If somebody puts a comment, the blog administrator does not have the right to delete it. .. I don't know if I'm wrong but...yeah this is a concern...yeah.</i></p> <p><i>Incorporating in higher education... depends about what place in the world we talk.. Here in Canada it is not a very strange thing...these technologies are you know intertwined in everyday social life, people are kind of comfortable with them. But if you want to integrate this in another place in the world, it is not predictable... unless you go and implement it... so you need to experiment with it. But here in Canada, or you know in Western world, it has been tested and I think it has been proved to be successful experience.</i></p> <p><i>Impact on educational system? It promotes more peer-to-peer learning and in higher education ...it puts the instructor role as a facilitator more than a teacher...a traditional teacher.</i></p> <p><i>Facilitating the content, the flow of knowledge or just an observer to see where the students are going wrong...to bring them back on track...to the right track.</i></p>
c)Recommendations	<p><i>What I would add or change in a blog? It depends on the...technical stuff available on the internet. I would like a blog which works more on multimodal ways of expression so that you can insert voice, track, or images... you know videos...make it more multimodal... visuals, audio, and things like that.</i></p>
6.Participant's evaluation of the program	<p><i>Firstly I think it was kind of blended course. Traditional with online. It was a good experience because for the first time I had the feeling that I'm contributing something to the digital world...because I had never produced anything online...I had always been the consumer of online products. So this was my first experience in terms of production. OK the blog experience</i></p>

	<p><i>had its own effect ... it taught me how these environments work, how the social interaction works...how you read others and how you answer...how you navigate your way...in such a gathering of the members of the blog.</i></p> <p><i>It was a good experience (cough) and people wrote their summaries and put these online for others to read. It changed the nature of the interaction and the education environment.</i></p> <p><i>...Instead of handling your summary to your professor and it's only one to one, professor to a student interaction... you only receive the feedback from your professor...however in the blog you publish your summary for each and every student in the class, and you receive more input.</i></p>
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Mandy's Story

Age: 34; White Married; MA Educational Studies

Challenges of the Course Blog Experience

Mandy mentioned that her overall experience with technology was good, but she found that Blogger.com had some limitation as they could not directly insert images or videos onto the comments but they could insert links instead (they could do that onto the blog post though). Her time was consumed mostly on researching the Web to find the right resources and links.

Preparing the content itself for leading the blog took Mandy a lot of time (not technically). Time was consumed mostly on researching the Web to find the right resources and links. It took her about ten hours for leading the blogs and about an hour when commenting on others' blogs. She explained how reading the comments was fun at the beginning but as they had other courses' deadlines to meet toward the end of the semester, she didn't have the time to go through all of the comments especially that after a few sessions she was able to predict what each student was writing. She conveyed that the time constraints sometimes had an effect on the students' participation and writings. To her it showed in their writings whether they took their time going into details or write fast just to meet the requirements. Mandy's fear of copyright issues and

plagiarism made her more careful in her writings and citations on the blog. When asked about the required skills for blogging, she maintained that one should be a good reader to be able to understand the ideas of others.

Running the Blog Experience

Mandy thought that participation was required once a week and she mainly participated because of that. She sometimes participated more than once, when the topic was interesting and when she received response from the others. She mentioned that she did the research only to answer all the questions posed by the blog leader because she thought that she might be graded for that. If it were not for the grade, Mandy did not think the participation level would have been the same because no matter how interesting blogging was, participating used much time and energy. She added that people in general would rather consume than produce a blog unless they were fascinated about something. Time constraints sometimes had an effect on the students' participation and writings. To her it showed in their writings whether they took their time going into details or writing fast just to meet the requirements.

Leading the blog gave Mandy power in terms of controlling the material, she felt she was able to teach something within her own space. As a reader, she read most of the comments of the other students but only as much as time allowed. It was more practical to answer and interact with them, based only on her knowledge and experience. She did the research only to answer all the questions posed by the blog leader because she thought that she might be graded for that.

Mandy asserted that the learners' role was to run the blog all by themselves. According to her, the teacher's role was to set up the blog and assign tasks.

The Impact of Blogging on Learning

For Mandy, it was a good experience because it made her feel she was producing something of her own and contributing to the digital world. Before that course she was always worried to go online, but because of it she learned the technical skills and writing skills for blogging. She learned how to write concisely because there was a limited space for commenting on a post. Moreover, she pointed out that it was a good experience because it equips the student with means to understand different types of self-expressions written by others. And she explained how in general blogging equips the students with knowledge before they come to class. This way the classroom time becomes more efficient, she described this kind of knowledge as a “brainstorming before class.” Mandy declared that she received good feedback from both the students who were commenting and those who were leading the blog. Then when asked about the students’ interaction on her own post, she talked about the students’ style by which some of them were not precise in answering all the questions she asked, and some took their time in researching and answering them one by one. She described the learning outcome as a “good informal learning”. She further explained that instead of having only teacher-student interaction there was the peer-to-peer interaction by which there was more input and feedback. She affirmed that learning that occurred on the blog was interactive. She also added that the blog expanded the classroom discussion.

Moodle vs. Blogger

Mandy had only experienced blogging with Blogger. However, she pointed out that the platform had some limitation as they could insert links, images and videos onto the blog posts but they could only insert links onto the comments.

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Educational System

Mandy stated that educational learning has changed, that we should use new technology in all types of majors in order to access information and grasp as much learning as we can in the least amount of time. And to her that is fun. For her, the decision whether or not to incorporate blogging in higher education depends on the course content. She explained that some topics can be sensitive and this may create a concern of conflict in the classroom. But she added that controlling the blog can actually be of the same concern as controlling the classroom since it would not be ethical for the blog “administrator” to alter or delete some comments. Then she noted that blogging has been successful in Canada and the Western World because people had already become comfortable with the use of technology in their lives, but in other countries blogging should be tested before implementing it in the formal educational system. She believed that blogging promotes peer-to-peer learning in higher education and that the instructor plays the role of a facilitator, facilitating “the flow of knowledge”, or a supervisor to keep the students on the right track on the blog.

Mandy noticed that the blogging websites’ designs are somehow limited and she would like a blog that works more on “multimodal” expressions by which videos, audio files, and images can be inserted.

The Participants’ Evaluation of the Experience

Overall, blogging was a good experience for Mandy because it made her feel she was producing something of her own and contributing to the digital world. She described the course as a blended one. The blog experience was new to her; it taught her a lot of things.

Table 7

Data Contributed by Vicky

1.Challenges of the course blog	
a)Technology	<p><i>...You know the instructor had to make us do all those technological things...and I was struggling throughout the class and I thought I was so savvy with using computers but...I really wasn't,.. I wasn't necessarily comfortable with using blogs? So why? It's because...you know ...in classes we didn't necessarily go FURTHER than what...like I said you know what was Moodle... what is used in school.....being a teacher, you know, I find that it's kind of interesting to sometimes have the students question me at home or...you know discuss that way... so we can bring further discussions into class, so I feel as though that I've been able to transcend that into my work-related atmosphere and not just my school atmosphere...Overall it was really, really, good... it was easy to follow, and it was easy to get into...so even as a blog leader, once the link was sent, to me I felt as though self-explanatory did what I had to do, pressed send...and everything was great.</i></p>
b)Time constraints	<p><i>analyzing what everybody would have said and then questioned everybody on that. Now there are certain people who did that, for me, for example...being a full time teacher and stuff I didn't feel as though I HAD enough time to ANALYZE everything that everybody said, and to then come to class and question. So when I did my actual presentation I was the blog leader, I didn't feel as though I necessarily grasped what everybody was saying... I felt more comfortable, writing in Microsoft Word, whatever I had to write. Then I copied and pasted it into the blog group. So the actual work related time...you know was for writing what I had to write...you know...that was time on its own, but the actual use of the Blogger was very quick. You know... you just...apply whatever words you had there or sentences as well paragraphs you wanted to send in there...you press send and then...it was instantaneous in terms of the transition onto... plopping everything onto the Blogger...yeah.</i></p>
c)Difficulties with blog content	<p><i>Technically there was none...but sometimes what was difficult was that students wouldn't necessarily answer right away, and you're kind of just sitting there and waiting for like you'd be "well what do you mean by that?" and you would...you know you'd be waiting for a response sometimes students did not necessarily respond...and ... I feel as though that maybe is the restriction of the course, you know because they...they thought "okay we just had to participate once on the Blogger",</i></p>

	<i>so you wouldn't necessarily get the full grip of what they were trying to say. Otherwise....you know...it was good.</i>
d)Required skills for blogging	<i>N/A</i>
2.Running the blog experience	
a)Participating and the effect of grading	<p><i>...I do remember, I actually got a fairly good grade, like an A or A- somewhere there...In terms of my participation...In terms of the other students, and the use of the blogging, there were some students that were there constantly...you know...blogging and really feeling really comfortable...I started off like... not knowing if I wanted to.. am I comfortable? And then, eventually I was like getting into the groove of it...so overall, I think it went really, really, well for everybody ...and everybody in the end enjoyed the blogging itself, yeah. I can say that I think people were a little bit more motivated to participate in this blog, because it was very.i.it was very functional very easy... the way that we had video links we were permitted to link two other sites make it more interesting...The frequency of my participation changed from week to week I can say, because you know certain topics I was a little bit more interested in...so I would...blog maybe ...you know twice, three times...if somebody had a question for me, I wanna answer back... definitely as a blog leader I was there a hundred and ten percent... but some weeks I would say that I did blog once, because I wasn't necessarily able to express myself more than what I had said in that one blog..you know...so.</i></p> <p><i>...I think people would have still participated without grading as they did....with grading. Because...you know, we're adults...you know we're taking the course because we wanna take the course...we're taking it to... help us with our own education, our own knowledge our own everything...you know... so why wouldn't people wanna... participate as much as they did now. I did say that obviously we would (laughter) want to participate more to get the grade, it's obviously something that motivates us more, but I'm sure we would have been around the same percentage of participation.</i></p>
b) Experience as leader	<i>...I enjoyed it more as a blog leader because I felt as though I needed to be on the blog and needed to be there all the time...I read everything everybody wrote...and I tried to respond as much as I could. In the time constraint that we had...you know, we had one week, right? Yeah. I really prepared for that week ahead of time and ...plugged everything on the blog as quickly as I could...you know...once I received the link from the</i>

	<p><i>professor, and the minute that I got notifications that people were writing on my blog, I would try to be there as quickly as possible to give my answers...but I noticed there is a couple who would do like right before class...and I wouldn't necessarily be able to answer to them ... so I tried to catch up and ...and have conversation in class itself. From what I remember, I remember some people questioning what I had written, so I would ...try to answer back as quickly as I could but in terms of being the blog leader itself...people were really detailed in answering what I had to say, and really expressed what they had to feel and sometimes they would question me on things and I would answer back, so...if you would put out of a hundred percent, maybe eighty percent was answered.</i></p>
c)Experience as reader	N/A
d)Role of learner	<p><i>I think it is important for them to bring in their own personal experiences to the blog...I was gonna say table...(laughter)...to the blog, because I feel as though each individual experience about whatever topic we're talking about, clarifies it more...and so I think as a learner, you're meant to....even if it doesn't necessarily have to have a huge relevance with the topic itself but just pinpointing certain things...I think it might even clarify something for somebody else that doesn't necessarily understand the topic at hand. So I feel that...you know, because you feel like you're in your own little circle your own little bubble...explaining or expressing what you need to say...and ...I feel that blogging allows that to happen definitely.</i></p>
e)Role of teacher	<p><i>...I think the instructor's... job... is obviously to put forth the topics at hand that have to be discussed...and create like a momentum or a ladder...so that we can get to a point where we have a full grasp or understanding of ...you know...the topic at hand...it being let's say technology or...feminism...or...whatever it is...you know? So I feel as though that was really succeeded in this class, especially with the...not necessarily the blog, but the little activities that we had to do as well, and the paper that we had to finish with and everything. It kind of led up...you know...and helped with the blog itself.you know...so for more discussion...so I really think that the...professor's job is really to kind of....create that ladder...in getting us to that final picture...you know...like understanding the technology or understanding whatever. So.</i></p>

3.Impact of blogging on learning	
a)Benefits and acquired skills	<p><i>I believe that I learned about a new space of blogging, not as restricted as let's say Moodle was that I had experienced before...which I liked... which then I was able like I said to transcend in my work related life.</i></p> <p><i>...as a blogger, because now I'm using it, you know, with my work related and students...I find that it's really like opened up my space in terms of expression if you will...you know...'cause blogging you can kind of express yourself without necessarily being seen...you know...So you can say what you wanna say, and people can deal with it how they ever wanna deal with, right? So in class, and outside of class I think for both situations I feel comfortable and, you know, willing to kind of express myself the way I've I want to. (laughter)</i></p> <p><i>I thought that... it was useful in a way of getting to know what other people were thinking about on the topic for that week. My learning experience (whispering)... well...in the course itself, I can say that...with blogging, I probably felt...more comfortable...to...express myself and to get the feedback from my classmates. So...maybe as a learning experience for myself, I'm feeling more comfortable with the material itself, and maybe I'm more comfortable in going into the class itself and knowing more about the material, based on what others were writing in the blog as well. So...maybe blogging ...as a whole...allows for more elaboration on topics at hand...you know whether it's about technology or anything else. So...that's what I think it has brought to me.</i></p>
b)Type of learning and interaction on the blog	<p><i>Well in terms of the actual course material....I think WE...as a whole we really dived in and went into detail about it; the professor allowed us especially as blog leaders you know to go beyond the reading, right? Which is what I did I kind of grabbed other material along the way to show. So I think that the blogging itself allowed more for connections elsewhere, so...each individual brought in their own experience, right? And they brought in their previous knowledge about other materials and experiences and whatever it is, so it kind of mishmash altogether so that we can grasp the material a little bit better...so...yeah.</i></p>
c)Impact of blogging on students' collaboration	<p><i>Yeah so we were like nine students, and we were comfortable enough with each other... that we were willing to kind of express what we wanted to express, so overall I feel as though, in terms of the learning experience, I think it was more of bringing us together, and really discussing</i></p>

	<p><i>what...you know...the material was and understanding it more...I think by being so close and being a limited amount of people, it allowed that to happen. Yeah.</i></p>
<p>4.Moodle vs. Blogger</p>	<p><i>The blogger.com was a lot better compared to Moodle's blogging ...Moodle's blogging is ...almost...like...too...what's the word I'm looking for... too limited. .exactly...where you have to...put in a title...you have to say what you're saying...you know... send, you have to wait like thirty seconds, and then it sends through...and then if you wanna add it again after, you have to kind of go into another....but it's like as if you're sending emails... to each other. Do you understand what I'm saying? So it's not like you're sitting there and you can answer back to one another. Like almost like you're having a conversation. It's like as if emails just keep popping up...okay? So I found that it was very restricted and you didn't feel as though you were necessarily having a conversation, with your peers, it was more just answering...you know...whatever was necessary to answer that week. Yeah.</i></p> <p><i>The way that we had video links we were permitted to link two other sites make it more interesting. I found that that was bringing a lot more to the blog. I'm comparing to my experience with Moodle where, like I said it was very limited, so people had to say what they had to say...people responded, sort of, you know and went on like that. So with the blog you can kind of have a conversation and be comfortable... on the blog itself...so I think...I think yeah that's it.</i></p> <p><i>In higher education....in some classroom settings I find that I'm gonna go back to my Moodle one...I thought that it was...it wasn't necessary...because when we went back into our class, the way that the professor would...break down his course would simply be where he would...say what's important from the reading, and then leave maybe thirty minutes at the end of the class, to go back to the blog and say "so you...this was interesting about the blog...and this was interesting about the blog"...and there wasn't necessarily a discussion amongst students, about the material at hand or that allowed us to kind of go further than what the blog said...so I found there were...two different classrooms like one of the blog and then one of the classroom setting...so I found there was no relevance to it, you know like...wasn't necessarily brought into the class discussion itself.</i></p>
<p>5.Impact of blogging on traditional educational system</p>	

<p>a)Blog learning vs. classroom learning</p>	<p><i>In terms of the fact that it wasn't an online course...when we got to the actual course I found that it's fairly repetitive, in terms of what we saw...sometimes I didn't necessarily think that the blogging was necessary. So in some ways those questions could have just been easily done just as a classroom setting, versus being done on the blog. Like I would have preferred it if it was just either an online course, or just an actual class participation. Personally I like interaction, you know, seeing people's you know reactions and things like that facial reactions, so I like being in a classroom setting, but...in terms of .the way that people express themselves I find that everybody was fairly comfortable in the blogs. So in terms of the experience I had with THAT course, I find either way would have been perfectly fine.</i></p> <p><i>I think everybody was fairly comfortable with the way that the classroom was going and I...and I know that the instructor was really pushing it in a way that we can experience...both...you know...but otherwise, no I think everybody was kind of comfortable with both aspects.</i></p>
<p>b)Incorporating Blogs in higher education</p>	<p><i>But I think if it's more of a...discussion course where you have to really...you know be around people and really discuss something. Having a blog and then having the classroom time, I think it's too much...I think it's gonna be repetitive. I think people are gonna participate in one...and not participate in the other one. So like I said...technology oriented courses...do the blogging...do that thing...but when it's a feminist course, a Dewey course or...whatever...I feel like it's more relevant when you're in a classroom setting...alone...or if it's an online setting alone.</i></p> <p><i>Right. So I feel as though...the way that the professor really...made it relevant is that...learning can be done online, right? Learning can be done...not solely in the classroom. So that's what he wanted us to experience...and I feel I feel that was really relevant...but I feel as though that could have been a course that was done online solely, okay? So that we didn't necessarily have to meet once a week, and discuss it, okay? And have somebody...I feel that we just met because we needed marks...and we had to do a PowerPoint and that's it, you know? So that's what I mean, there is a difference... it could be adult education where it's solely online...and then there is some adult education that has to be done in the classroom, because... there is...an enormous amount of reading that's done associated to</i></p>

	<p><i>it...there's an enormous amount of discussion that needs to be developed. So that I feel like...when you're...in a circle...when you're around bodies...and you're like...you know around the table...that more discussion can happen that way... and PowerPoints can be done you know...development of the material, the professor can describe what they have to say...but in terms of this course, this adult course, I find that the material could have been solely done online. So there's a difference...like a feminist course I don't think could have been done online. In terms of higher education, I think that it's an interesting way of of bringing forth you know the discussion...I just find that professors need to pick and choose on what topics to really bring forth in the blog. So like I said... you know...like I've only experienced it twice... One was an experience that is very limited there wasn't that much discussion you know...and another one where...you know...the blogging was very easy which is this one...and the discussion was easy to kind of...you know follow...because personal experiences were easy to bring into the blog. But when you're discussing like...histories and stuff...it's hard...it's hard to develop those things...and bring in personal experience...because I think blogging is...is a place to bring in personal experience...so...I just find you have to be selective in where you...you put the blog in.</i></p>
c)Recommendations	<p><i>Like if there's the blog leader answering it...like a student in the blog itself, and why I say that? Because...you know the professor has a lot of knowledge, right? And can probably create more discussion or more...I was gonna say confusion but...more like...analysis to what the discussion is...you know? So you don't wanna have a professor neither kind of hiding around in the background...you know...you wanna now as...as a student I would wanna know that the professor is reading what we're writing, and interested and maybe want to...you know participate in the blogging itself. The blogging that I do with the secondary five students so...they're seventeen...you know they're...they have their own thoughts (laughter) ...little immature compared to ours...but still...I think I would as well...if I was a professor myself, I feel as though I'm kind of going in there and saying what I have to say, would also help them express themselves maybe a little bit more, because that's what you have to do as you have to question your students so that they can start like...thinking... you know? Let's say the leader of the blog that week could have analyzed what everybody would have said maybe if there was more time</i></p>

	<p><i>affiliated to being in control of the blog then this would have been possible...but analyzing what everybody would have said and then questioned everybody on that. Now there are certain people who did that, but for me for example...being a full time teacher and stuff I didn't feel as though I HAD enough time to ANALYZE everything that everybody said, and to then come to class and question. So when I did my actual presentation I was the blog leader, I didn't...I didn't feel as though I necessarily grasped what everybody was saying. I feel as though...if the blog and the classroom time would have been used, maybe analyzing what it was said on the blog, and then that blog leader finding questions to kind of...pull from that ..so that we can look further than what the actual blog was discussing.</i></p> <p><i>But for this course, honestly, the way that it flowed ...the actual access to the blog ... the easiness of it...no...I wouldn't change it at all.</i></p>
<p>6.Participant's evaluation of the experience</p>	<p><i>I think it went really, really, well for everybody...and everybody in the end enjoyed the blogging itself, yeah. Oh I enjoyed it...I thought it was interesting that it was an adult ed. course and we were using technology and (laughter) how adults really don't know anything about blogging (laughter) adults learn all the time...that we learn from different experiences...so I think blogging it really definitely brought something to my adult life...</i></p>

Vicky's Story

Age: 25; White –Single; MA Educational Studies

Challenges of the Course Blog Experience

At first Vicky was not very comfortable with using blogs because her previous technical experience was limited to only using Moodle at the university. But from this experience she learned technical skills about blogs that she was able to use later in her teaching job. Her experience with technology with this course was pretty good. She described the technical steps to follow as “self-explanatory” and easy. She also declared she did not have any challenges with locating online reliable resources etc.

Running the Blog Experience

Vicky declared that she could not analyze all the students' comments on her blogpost and address them in class when it was her turn to lead the blog, due to time constraints and her job commitment. She noted that her actual use of Blogger.com was quicker by typing whatever she wanted to write in Microsoft Word then copying pasting it into the Blog group. Vicky did not have any challenges with locating and sharing online reliable resources, or fear of plagiarism and copyright infringement. What was difficult to her was waiting for the others to further explain their ideas and respond right away, and to her some of them did not respond because perhaps they thought it was enough for them to participate once a week as a course requirement. Other than that, she described the blogging experience as good.

Impact of Blogging on Learning

Vicky had got a good mark in terms of her participation. There were some students who were also constantly participating and blogging comfortably which made her feel comfortable and more engaged. She thought students were motivated to participate in the blog because it was easy, functional, and interesting because they could share other links and videos. She believed that students only participated once or twice every week because they only wanted to get through the course itself, since participation was being marked. She stated that people in general dive into blogging because they want to and because they are enthusiastic about it. But since that blog was a part of a course, she believed that no one had participated at a hundred percent.

She maintained that she fully participated and dived into blogging when she led the blog. But as a reader, she participated twice or three times a week only if the topic was interesting and if she wanted to respond to others on the blog. But sometimes she participated only once when she was not passionate about the topic and when she did not have much to share. She thought

that the participation level would have been the same even if it was not graded because they were all adults. She agreed that the grade motivated them to participate more but she was sure the percentage of participation would not have changed much because they willingly took the course for their own education and knowledge, for themselves.

Vicky enjoyed her experience as a blog leader. She felt she needed to be on the blog all the time to respond to everyone and she did as soon as she got notifications but she enjoyed it. She also noticed that there were two students who would only post their comments once right before the class. She could not answer them but she tried to catch up with them in the class when she had her presentation. In terms of others responding to her blog post, she thought they were posting detailed comments expressing themselves well, questioning her and she was answering them back.

Vicky thinks the role of learners is to share their own experiences and thoughts on the blog in order to bring more clarity and understanding of the topic at hand to the others. She believes that blogging allows for learners to have their own space where that could happen; i.e. where learners can express their ideas and share their own questions and experiences.

According to Vicky, the instructors' role is to assign the topics that need to be discussed on the blog. And beside the blog, they should create what she called a "ladder" to help learners get a full understanding of the material. She stated that was done in that course as they had little extra activities and tasks to do in addition to the blog (class presentation, top five blogs, final paper, etc.). Because of this experience Vicky learned technical skills about "a new space of blogging" which she was able to use in her teaching job. From the course blogging experience and also after she used blogging with her students, she found that she felt comfortable expressing herself freely through blogging. She maintained that blogging allowed her to be comfortable

with herself and with expressing her thoughts in different aspects of her life, whether personal or work related life as a teacher. She also thought that this experience was useful in knowing the others' points of view about the weekly topic. Moreover, she felt more comfortable expressing herself, getting to know the material more, and getting to know her classmates' feedback. She thought that the topics can be more elaborated with blogging.

Vicky believed learning that occurred on the blog was interactive in the sense that they went beyond the readings. Everyone brought their knowledge and experiences, and connected with each other in a way they were all able to "grasp" the material better.

Vicky thought blogging can improve the students' collaboration and that they worked well with each other. She noted that it probably happened because it was a small group which made them comfortable with each other, expressing themselves, discussing the material and understanding it more.

Moodle versus Blogger

For Vicky, it was not her first experience. She had already experienced blogging with a previous course on Moodle. She thought blogging on Blogger.com was much better than on Moodle because the latter was too restricted and limited. She described it as sending emails to each other rather than having a conversation, answering the weekly questions rather than discussing the material at hand.

She thought Blogger.com was more functional than the Moodle because they could share videos and other websites. She stated that Moodle was limited and that made their responses limited too, whereas the Blogger.com made blogging easier and more comforting for them to respond and have a conversation on the blog. Moreover, she found the blog experience with

Moodle was not necessary because the blog was not relevant to the classroom meeting and there was no discussion amongst students.

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Educational System

Vicky thought either blogging as an online course or the classroom setting would have been enough because of the fact that ideas were either repeated or further discussed when they met in class. Then she added that it would have been better if the blog content was separate from the classroom discussion in order to avoid repetition. She prefers a classroom setting so she could see facial reactions but she noticed that people are more comfortable expressing themselves on a blog. She declared that in that course she had no particular preference with either blogging or classroom setting. She thought students were comfortable with both settings in that course and she believed the instructor wanted them to experience both aspects.

Vicky thought that implementing a blog in a traditional setting would be too much and would cause repetition in the classroom meetings, unless it was a technology oriented course. She said it would be more relevant for students to be either in a classroom setting or an online setting when the course involves theories and such, but not both.

She believed from the experience that the instructor made it relevant to students that they can learn online. But she felt that the course could have totally been done online with no classroom discussions. She thought they only met in the class for their PowerPoint presentations to be marked. Moreover, she noted that a feminist course would be difficult to be discussed online because of the huge amount of readings and discussions that would be done. She stated that in terms of education, blogging allows for a larger knowledge about the material at hand. And here she got confused during the interview; she felt blogging could be positive for a traditional educational setting. Then she described blogging as an interesting way to develop the

classroom discussion. And she added that the topics to be discussed on the blog should be selected because with some topics, like history, it could be hard for students to bring their personal experiences into the blog discussion.

Vicky thought it would be interesting if the instructor has taken part in blogging. She believes the instructor's participation in the blog could add a lot of knowledge and promote more discussion or analysis. She added that students would be more motivated with the instructor reacting to their posts and comments rather than remaining silent in the background. She does it with her 17 year old students. She takes a part in the blog discussion to question them and she noticed that it helps them think and further express themselves more. She believes the same thing can be done with adult students.

She pointed out that there was repetition in the classroom setting that followed the weekly blog. She also added that it would have been better if the blog content was separate from the classroom discussion in order to avoid repetition. To avoid having some repetition in the class discussion, she suggested using the classroom time for the blog leader to analyze the readers' comments and address them. She added that some people actually did that but she did not, because of the time constraints and her job commitment. She suggested that the blog leader should build on what the students discussed or questioned on the blog, and find further new things to discuss in the classroom so that no repetition occurs. Other than that, she found she would not change or add anything to the whole blogging experience which she found easy and simple.

The Participant's Evaluation of the Experience

Vicky thought that blogging went well for everyone and that they enjoyed it. There were some students who were also constantly participating and blogging comfortably which made her feel comfortable and more engaged. She enjoyed the experience. She thought it was interesting

to see how they were using technology in an adult education course and how adults had no idea about blogging. With the blogging experience she learned to see how adults can learn all the time and in different experiences.

Summary

This chapter presented the design of the study, the participants, the data collection process and the analysis of the data for emergent themes. The data were presented in two forms: first a presentation of the interview results organized under the themes and then the story of each participant based on the data contributed by each participant. Before moving forward with the discussion of the results of this research project in Chapter 3, this section offers a brief summary of the results under each theme identified in analyzing the interviews. The six themes identified were: 1) Challenges of the course blog experience; 2) Running the blog experience; 3) The impact of blogging on learning; 4) Moodle versus Blogger; 5) The impact of blogging on the traditional educational system; and 6) The participants' evaluation of the experience.

Challenges of the Course Blog Experience

The study participants faced different challenges with blogging. Most of them had difficulty with technology and found the time constraints to be affecting their engagement in the blog. However they believed that they learned technical skills from the experience which was useful for them in other courses or job related life. On the other hand it was perceived that a good level of writing and reading comprehension skills was required for blogging.

Impact of Blogging on Learning

The blog experience had a good impact on the participants' learning. Benefits which they acquired included technology and writing skills, exposure to different points of view, knowledge

enlargement, deeper understanding of the material, critical reading and conscious reflection on their thoughts. All participants believed that students were interacting well on the blog but one participant felt this interaction as rather contrived because it was forced by grading. They had different perceptions of the type of learning that occurred: explicit, passive, informal, and self-directed learning. Moreover, although all of the participants perceived the interaction of students on the blog as good, they had different perceptions of the learning process in terms of collaboration: some believed it was interactive and collaborative, and some believed it was only interactive.

Moodle versus Blogger

From the blogging experience of two participants with a different platform, it was perceived that Blogger was easier, more functional, and less limited than Moodle. It was noted that students were sending emails to each other on Moodle answering the imposed questions rather than discussing the material as they did on Blogger. One of the participants declared that Moodle was too restrictive and limited, and that the blog on Moodle was unnecessary and irrelevant to the classroom meeting since there was no discussion amongst the students. She affirmed that Blogger was easier and more functional because they could share videos and links, which was interesting and motivated students to participate in the blog and easily discuss their personal experiences. She also added that blogging on Blogger was easier and more comforting to respond to and to have a conversation. Nevertheless, another participant, who had only experienced blogging on Blogger, pointed out that Blogger had also some limitation as it was possible to insert links, images and videos onto the blog posts but they could only insert links unto the comments. And there was a recommendation from those two participants to look for a platform or a web design that could be more organized.

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Education System

One of the important themes emerging from this study is the impact of blogging on the traditional educational system. The participants talked at length about the characteristics that not only differentiated blogging from the classroom learning but also offered it many advantages. They also provided their opinion about implementing the use of blogs in a traditional setting in higher education. There was an enthusiasm amongst half of the participants about applying the use of blogs in all courses whereas the other half were reluctant and offered different perspectives. And all of the participants had recommendations about adding and changing elements to their experience.

The Participants' Evaluation of their Experience

The majority of the study participants perceived blogging in that course as a good experience which they enjoyed. Three of the students evaluated the experience as good and useful, two of them found it to be enjoyable, and one of them acknowledged that she does not enjoy blogging in general and that the experience did not change that. Some described the course itself as a blended course or not traditional because it incorporated blogging and technology related tasks despite the fact that it was a teacher-led course.

Chapter 3 will present the discussion of the results in the context of the existing literature reviewed in Chapter 1. It will also summarize the case study results and indicate directions for further research or implementation.

Chapter 3: Discussion

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of six graduate students who experienced blogging as a learning tool in a traditional university setting. Six major themes were identified: Challenges of the course blog experience, running the blog experience, the impact of blogging on learning, Moodle versus Blogger, the impact of blogging on the traditional educational system, and the participants' evaluation of the experience.

In this section the findings of this research study are discussed and compared to those of the literature review.

Challenges of the Course Blog Experience

Technology. Three participants reported uneasiness when trying to blog for the first time then felt things were easy as soon as they figured out how the blog works. Two participants described their experience with technology as smooth and good. One participant described her experience with technology as difficult and time consuming. But after all, all of the participants declared that they learned technical skills from the blog experience.

The finding of this study in regard to technology supports the results of a previous study in the literature (Cakir, 2013) which indicated that blogs can be used without worrying about the students' level of technical skills, and that they do not have to learn complex technical knowledge to be able to blog successfully.

However, unlike the results of the study conducted by Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012), all the students in this study perceived blogging as contributing to their technological skills regardless of their prior skills level. So it seems that the student technical competence at the beginning of the course is neither a critical factor nor a required skill for the success of the course blog experience. Unfamiliarity with the technology should not constitute a barrier to

blogging in higher education. Nevertheless, several steps can be taken into account to build the students' knowledge and confidence with the blog tool.

Time constraints. All of the participants declared that leading the blog took a lot of their time between researching resources and links, preparing the content of the blog post, and the classroom presentation. For some of them the time constraints, especially when they had other commitments, prevented them from reading all the comments and being able to reply to each. They reported time consumption that varied between four and eight hours a week only for the blog leadership, i.e. once during the whole course semester.

One participant conveyed that she was typing everything in Microsoft Word then copying and pasting into the blog group in order to save time.

The majority of the participants declared that they could not read or respond to all the others' comments, as blog readers, because of the time constraints due to other commitments and/or deadlines. However, two of them declared that reading the comments and responding was not a time consuming task and that it would consume of their time as much as any homework would do. In general, all the participants reported time consumption that varied between thirty minutes and two hours per week for reading the blog comments. One participant was checking her email for notifications of any activity on the blog, thus reading the comments did not really take a lot of her time.

One participant believed that the time constraints affected the students' participation and writings. She believed that they would either write fast only to show their participation or would take their time going into details. But according to her, participation used much time and energy irrespective of the interest level of the blogging.

These results are consistent with the previous research of Freeman and Brett (2012) which was discussed in chapter one. These show that the blogging process took a lot of time and might have affected the participation and writings of some students. Most of the participants in their study could not read or constantly respond to all of the comments. The majority also found the time constraints to affect the level of their engagement in the blog. So the time factor in this study might have been the reason why some students' comments were short or written quickly in order to meet the course requirement at the right time.

Difficulties with the blog content. Three participants affirmed that they did not have any fear of copyright issues and did not face any challenges finding or sharing online reliable resources. One participant conveyed that her fear of plagiarism and copyright issues made her more careful in her writings and citations on the blog. This finding implies the importance of the issue of plagiarism which was discussed by Yang and Chang (2012) who pointed out that social and peer learning could be open to plagiarism. Moreover, the findings reported by Tekinarslan (2012) revealed that the features of copy and paste in blogs may affect the students' creativity and initiate plagiarism.

One participant faced challenges with the blog in terms of writing in depth. She felt the pressure to write better on the intellectual level because she kept comparing her writings to the others. She declared that unlike the other students, she had no background knowledge about the Adult Education topics discussed on the blog which were out of her own field of study, teaching English as a Second Language, and that caused her to post a comment before the others so that she could escape that pressure. She also observed that students were sometimes posting similar responses to a particular comment, and that confused her because she felt they were either

writing about the same thing or about different things. For her it was challenging to see many ideas in the same spot.

Privacy concerns were also included as one of the negative perceptions of using blogs. (Boyd, 2013). Some students in their studies tended to feel discomfort knowing that others could see what they write on the blog. Boyd (2013) pointed out the need for students to get familiar with blogging in academia. She explained the difficulty for students to write in the informal style in an academic context about their personal interests and experiences with the course context because they are not used to it. She recommended that teachers offer the right balance of guidance when they introduce blogs in education because too much or too little of it can be either constraining or frustrating.

Required skills for blogging. Participants in this study believed that a good level of writing and reading comprehension skills was required for engagement in the course blog. They explained that those skills would include the ability to read critically, think deeply, and synthesize the information. Some added the ability to motivate others in order to make them reflect upon their own experiences as an important skill for the blog success. This lends support to the declared need for students to develop certain skills to blog effectively, and the need for creative and network literacies for students to actively participate in knowledge construction (Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, & Conole, 2009).

One participant pointed out that being able to write clearly and succinctly would not always be easy for university students. However, another participant noted that the required level of writing skills for the course blog, i.e. to be able to write coherently, would be the same standard required skills at any graduate degree level. This does not correspond with the findings

of Boyd (2013) who indicated that using blogs requires literacy skills that are different from the traditional skills of writing an essay and new attitudes requiring learner-centered practices.

Running the Blog Experience

Participation and the effect of grading. The majority of the participants conveyed that they were mainly motivated to participate in the blog because it was a requirement of the course, i.e. because participation was graded. Only one student declared that she mainly participated to add some value to the blog discussion, especially because everyone knew what she was getting at. This does not support the findings of Duarte (2015) whose results showed that students preferred not to participate because they were not sure they could contribute something valuable.

As blog leaders, all of the students declared that they were fully present, participating, and responding to everyone. As blog readers, students reported that they were participating more than once a week (the requirement was to participate at least once a week) only when the subject matter was interesting, was familiar (no need for further research), and if they received responses from the others on their comment. This was supported in the literature review by Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) who pointed out that a course blog is most successful when there is reinforcement through commentary and grades.

When asked whether the participation level would have been the same if it were not graded, two of the participants thought it would have been the same because they were adult learners, and because it is typical of any course for students to have an incentive to accomplish something. The findings of Chu et al. (2012) similarly showed the students' engagement in blogging regardless of whether it was graded or not.

One participant thought it would have been the same if the topic was interesting and if the posts contained additional dynamics since she observed that posts containing videos or cartoons

gained more attention and comments. Boyd (2013) suggests that the importance of internal motivation should be reflected in teachers creating interesting blog assignments to help students interact actively in blogging, and by asking them what motivates them so that they write for their own purposes rather than for just completing an assignment or achieving a good grade.

Another participant thought it would have been the same but with less depth and reflection except for the intellectual students, which she believed was half the class. And two other participants thought it would have not been the same because blogging needs much time and energy but she pointed out that there could not be any other way to make it interactive and relevant to students except by some sort of forced evaluation that is grading.

Among the main observations pointed out by the participants, was that the familiarity and the level of interest of the subject matter and the time constraints affected not only the weekly participation level of the students but also their writings.

One participant conveyed that she got a good mark in terms of her participation. She declared that some students were constantly participating and blogging comfortably, which made her more engaged. She added that the fact that the blog was functional, easy, and dynamic (they could share videos and links) made blogging more interesting and motivating for them to participate. Interaction with peers, the ease of use and enjoyment were also found in the studies of Hsu and Lin, and Kerawalla et al. (2008) as factors related to positive attitude toward blogging.

Another participant observed that some students were posting more than others but some were better in the classroom discussions. She also conveyed that the grade she got for her own participation and engagement was disappointing and that the criteria for grading were unclear.

In general, this research found that most participants agreed that grading had a big effect on their motivation to participate in the blog. Therefore, according to the Self-Determination Theory which was discussed in the literature review, they were mainly extrinsically motivated to blog. This was also advocated as “the necessary evil” used by teachers in previous studies in order to get the students to blog (Sim & Hew, 2010, p. 157). Moreover, Duarte (2015) believed that motivating students to regularly participate in educational blogs is the biggest challenge and that participation can be increased by means of the grading system. Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012) also wondered if students could be committed to blogging by means other than the grade award.

Experience as leader. When they talked about their experience as blog leaders, all the participants declared that they were fully present, dedicated, and quite responsive, except for one student who declared that the time constraints prevented her from reading all the comments and that she responded to everyone on the presentation day instead. It is important to note that another student conveyed that the only time she was actually responding to others was at her turn to lead the blog. However, it is important to mention that she was feeling pressured and intellectually challenged by the intellectual level of her peers who were taking the course within their field of study unlike her.

Some students said they enjoyed their experience of leading the blog. They felt it gave them the chance to control the material and teach something within their own space. In general it was perceived that the students responded well on the blog, asking and posting detailed comments. However a few were posting only once right before class.

Experience as reader. When asked about their experience as blog readers, two participants emphasized that they were posting comments as much as time allowed. It was

perceived that it also depended on their familiarity with the topic as it was easier and more practical for them to discuss things based on their knowledge instead of doing further research before posting any comment. And that could be evident when one participant declared she was posting only once a week and that she would write, think, re-read before posting. She previously declared that she felt pressured comparing her intellectual writing level to others, because the course was not within her own field of study.

Role of learner. The results of this research project showed that blogging allowed learners to be their own teachers on their own space where they could learn from each other, sharing their experiences and ideas, criticizing things for greater and deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Role of teacher. The results of this case study showed that the role of the teacher in the course blog was to set up the blog, assign the topics to be discussed on the blog, and create some extra activities to help learners get a full understanding of the material. Most of the participants felt that the role of the instructor should be supervising and redirecting the blog discussion when necessary. This finding was supported in the literature. In the constructivist learning environment, the role of the teacher is to monitor, guide, and give prompt feedback (Cakir, 2013). In the collaborative learning environment, the teacher's role is also to monitor, facilitate, and create a safe online learning environment in order to get the students to become more motivated to be engaged in the blogging process by providing encouraging comments, timely feedback, clear descriptions and grading rubrics (Wang, Lin, & Liao, 2012). Cakir (2013) also pointed out that the role of the teacher is to be a learning partner guiding students by monitoring the blog.

Some participants in this study felt that it would be more interesting for the teacher to participate and motivate the students by reacting to their comments in order to promote more discussion or analysis and add to their knowledge. This was confirmed in the literature by Duarte (2015) who believed that the teacher's participation is crucial to the success of any pedagogical strategy including blogging, and by Freeman and Brett (2012) who stressed the importance of the teacher's engagement within the student blog to facilitate blogging by encouraging and directing it.

Other participants believed it would be wrong for the instructors to be involved and that they can always share their knowledge during the class, otherwise some of the students' responses on the blog would be inhibited and affect the whole learning process. This was supported in the literature by Chu et al. (2012) who pointed out that too much guidance might be harmful to independent learning and suggested that the role of the facilitator needs to be further investigated.

The Impact of Blogging on Learning

Benefits and acquired skills. The majority of participants in this study gained technology skills from their experience with blogging, which helped them in their jobs and other courses. This is consistent with the findings of Deng and Yuen (2011) who confirmed in their study that the use of both course-centered and student-centered blogs had implicit benefits of enhancing their students' technical skills. Participants in this study also asserted that blogging helped them read critically, internalize their thoughts and reflect on them, do further research, and synthesize the information. Similarly, some studies in the literature found that blogs promoted critical thinking and reflection skills which are necessary for problem solving skills (Cakir, 2013). The study of Halic et al. also found that blending blogs with face-to-face

instruction improved the students' reflective thinking and understanding of the subject matter (as cited in Liu, 2016).

Moreover, most of the participants thought that blogging enlarged their knowledge and understanding of the material and exposed them to different points of view. The findings of Tekinarslan (2012) also revealed that blogging improved the students' knowledge in the field. Hungerford-Kresser et al. (2014) found that blogging facilitated the students' learning, extended their thinking, and deepened their understanding of the subject matter. The study of Mansor also found that class blogging boosted the students' understanding of what they learned in class (as cited in Liu, 2016).

One participant pointed out that blogging helped them brainstorm before class, which she believed that it helps make the classroom time more efficient. More studies also found that blog discussions contributed to learners' business English vocabulary (Liu, 2016). One of the pedagogical benefits of blogging mentioned was helping students become experts in the subject matter and exposing them to diverse perspectives (Alqudsi-Ghabra and Al-Bahrani, 2012). In addition, Boyd (2013) pointed out how blogging promotes critical thinking and analytical skills by exposing students to different points of view other than the instructor's.

Another participant felt that she developed technology skills from the blog experience. However, she believed that it probably did not deepen her academic understanding of the material. However in the literature, the study of Walatka (2012) pointed out that blogging provides raw material and a foundation for in-class discussions and assimilation.

Type of learning and interaction on the blog. The learning experience with the course blog varied from one participant to another. For Carol the learning outcome was explicit because they had to write down their critical thoughts about the classroom readings. She described the

blog as a “tool for consciously reflecting on a topic” and responding to the others’ reflections. Participants in the study conducted by Zeng and Harris (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010) also perceived blogging as a medium for reflective thinking and writing, and their study found that blogging actually increased the intellectual exchange between students. Dos and Demir (2013) described the blog as a constructive repository of students’ reflections, serving as a platform where they can discuss their own learning strategies. Their findings revealed that blogs provided a space for students to reflect on the learning theme and explain ideas. The results of the empirical study conducted by Deng and Yuen (2011) also confirmed that blogging helped their participants to project their feeling, document their experiences, and share their thoughts. Students in the study conducted by Halic et al. (2010) reported that blogging increased their reflection on course-related concepts and enhanced their learning by facilitating sharing perspectives on the course material. Doctoral students in the study conducted by Xie and Sharma also found that blogging allowed them to better reflect on their learning by providing different viewpoints from both teacher and peers (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). The study conducted by Zeng and Harris (2005) revealed that most students perceived blogging as medium for reflective thinking and writing. The study conducted by Yang (2009) also provided empirical evidence for blogs as a vehicle for facilitating reflection.

According to Emily learning was almost passive because it occurred while they were searching and researching all kinds of things on the topics.

Fiona and Isabel believed that it was self-directed learning that differentiated blogging from the classroom learning. They stated that blogging helped them learn because it enlarged their knowledge and gave them the opportunity to communicate ideas. For them blogging did not

change the way we learn but we learn because of it: it is a tool that helps students learn by enlarging their knowledge.

Mandy and Vicky thought that the learning outcome was informal learning because blogging provided for them a space to share their experiences and thoughts and have more clarity and understanding of the topics. For them the educational learning has changed: with technology, the information can be easily accessed and learning can be grasped as much as wanted and in the least amount of time.

Similarly, the findings of Young et al. (2011) showed that self-directed learning is a characteristic of blogging. Their participants also perceived blogging as an activity enlarging their knowledge but not building new fields of knowledge, and that it would create an ideal learning environment for adult learners who want to learn informally.

The majority of the study participants thought that the type of learning that occurred on the blog was interactive because they responded well to each other, brought their experiences and knowledge beyond the classroom readings, and connected in a way that they were all able to grasp the material better. According to the findings of Cakir (2013), the intensity of the students' interaction with their peers on the blog indicated their engagement in the learning process. Dawson also confirmed that blogs can be used as an online platform for student interaction (as cited in Cakir, 2013). In addition, the findings of Blau, Mor, and Neuthal (2013) revealed that sharing experiences on a course blog instead of just providing information increased peer interaction in a blog environment.

Participants in this study believed that the course blog was interactive and expanded the classroom discussion as they went beyond the readings. They also thought that the blog changed the educational environment and transformed the nature of interaction and feedback: peer-to-peer

interaction instead of only teacher-to-student interaction, so more input and feedback. The findings of Hall and Davison revealed a significant degree of online peer interaction among learners on a blog used in an educational setting (as cited in Boyd, 2013). Yang and Chang (2012) also observed student motivation and engagement in online interaction with peers.

In terms of interaction, two participants in this study pointed out that students were responding to each other instantaneously but not spontaneously: responses were not random, supported with literature and at a controlled speed, without emotional exchanges. This was discussed in the literature review as one of the benefits of Web 2.0 services. These enabled students to collaborate by accessing and contributing through asynchronous or non-simultaneous communication, which is efficient in time and convenient as students do not need to assemble in order to work together (Collaboration 2.0, 2009).

Only one participant thought that the interaction of the students on the blog was superficial. She described their responses as contrived because it was forced by evaluation. According to her they were focused on doing their best in the course so they could even have posted something without reading the others' comments. In terms of self-directed learning, she questioned the type of interaction that was forced by evaluation but she still thought of no other way to incorporate blogging in education in a useful interactive way without forcing it to ensure the students' participation. This does not correspond with the findings of Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) who pointed out that "A course blog thrives best when participants work towards assignments that provide reinforcement through commentary and grades" (p. 24). The studies of Duarte (2015), Schroeder et al. (2010), Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012) showed that participation can be increased by means of the grading system. Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012) wondered if students could be committed to blogging by means other than grade

award. On the other hand, the findings of Chu et al. (2012) showed the students' engagement in the course blog regardless of whether it was graded or not. Moreover, the findings of Cakir (2013) revealed that students were blogging at first because it was a class requirement then they got engaged through the end of the course in order to compare and share knowledge with classmates.

The impact of blogging on the students' collaboration. The study participants had differing views on students' collaboration on the blog. Some participants believed that learning was collaborative because they were all discussing the material and bringing in their knowledge so everyone was learning from the total input by reading the blog posts. Thus they believed there was some knowledge construction or collaborative learning through the students themselves (and not the teacher). For Pooranachandran and Balasubramanian (2011), collaboration is measured by interdependence, achievement through synthesis of information and contribution from all students, and independence from the class instructor. A blog promotes a collaborative learning environment simply when students can respond to each other with comments because it enables them to participate in a network of interactions instead of just writing their thoughts on a topic to the teacher (Boyd, 2013). Blogging can also promote collaborative knowledge construction when students share knowledge (Deng & Yuen, 2011). However, one participant believed that collaboration is navigating together the same thing in order to build something and being aware of each other's contribution, but in that course only a space was provided for them to "collaborate". And she pointed out that students could have posted something without reading the others' comments. In addition she wished there was more collaboration towards explaining and understanding each other's ideas and thoughts. Schrage also believed collaboration occurs when two or more individuals interact to create a new shared understanding (as cited in Rhoades

et al., 2009). Likewise, Pooranachandran and Balasubramanian (2011) believed that collaboration occurs when two or more individuals work together to achieve a common goal. Petersen et al. argued that blogs can be used to facilitate interaction and improve collaboration among students (as cited in Blau et al., 2013). Moreover, Bower, Hedberg and Kuswara indicated that course blogs allow students to collaborate and are best used “when concepts and issues are being explained” and when immediate feedback is required (as cited in Novakovich & Cramer Long, 2013, p. 232).

Another participant declared that blogging in the course was not a collaborative process because students were not working together, they were responding individually and not consulting each other before responding. For her to collaborate is to be cooperative, and she felt that the blog was often competitive but not cooperative. To her synergy is when everyone adds their piece of knowledge where the total results in a combined knowledge that is greater than the sum of individual pieces. As discussed previously in the literature review, Blau et al. (2013) pointed out that some authors used the term *collaboration* differently. Petersen et al. used the term to refer to sharing knowledge, whereas McInnerney and Robert used it to refer to “working towards a common goal, while each individual is contributing to the whole” (as cited in Blau et al., 2013, p. 244).

Moodle versus Blogger

Only two participants experienced blogging with another course and another platform, Moodle. They both perceived that students on Moodle were sending emails to each other answering the imposed questions rather than discussing the material as on Blogger.

It appeared from the findings in this study that the platform of Blogger was more functional and less limited than Moodle for the students to have a conversation and discuss the

material. Nevertheless, it was also perceived that the platform of Blogger had some kind of limitation as it enabled students to insert links, images, and videos onto the blog posts but it only enabled them to insert links onto the comments. Similarly, the findings of Yang and Chang (2012) revealed that blogs have an advantage over discussion boards because they enable students to use different forms of media other than a text through multi-modal methods. Hall and Davison also found that students own their blogs as they can customize them and direct the conversation whereas discussion boards are more controlled and monitored by teachers (as cited in Boyd, 2013). However, Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) pointed out that blogging platforms, such as Blogger, lack the social networking capabilities which students might prefer and which the participatory platforms, such as Myspace, possess. On the other hand, the findings of this study are similar to those of Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) who indicated that an Open Access blogging program like Blogger can be more problematic but is more genuine and successful in the classroom because it promotes the idea of ownership by students rather than teacher or school, and it gives students more responsibility as an educative force since it is more reflective of what they will experience after school.

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Educational System

Blog learning vs class learning. The study participants perceived several characteristics that differentiated or indeed offered advantages for blogging over the classroom learning: equipping students with knowledge or brainstorming before they come to class as they learn passively searching and researching about the topic at hand (self-directed learning), consciously reflecting by writing down their critical thinking of the classroom readings and responding to the others' reflections (unlike the traditional classroom setting when students remain passive), peer-to-peer interaction instead of only teacher-to-students interaction (so more input and feedback),

students having an overview of the others' thoughts and points of view about the readings, promoting education outside the classroom and offering the students the time lapse as they can always go back to the blog and communicate endless strings of thoughts.

These findings were supported by many studies in the literature review showing advantages of blogging over the traditional classroom learning. The findings of Blau et al. (2009), Manfra and Lee (2012), Garrison and Akyol (2009) showed that blogging promoted teacher-student and student-student interactions and students' collaboration that goes beyond simple interaction, which is rarely available in a traditional setting especially in large lecture classes. The study of Neira-Piñeiro (2015) indicated that blogging extended the space and time for learning and extended interactions outside the classroom. The studies of Sawmiller (2010), Hungerford-Kresser et al. (2014), Xie, Ke, and Sharma (as cited in Blau et al., 2013) indicated that blogging stimulated critical thinking and extended learning and class discussions outside the classroom. Similarly, the findings of Walatka (2012) confirmed that blogging ensures brainstorming before class. In addition, the study of Oravec indicated that blogging not only promotes critical analytical thinking but also empowers students to express their opinion with solid support as it gives them enough time to prepare and reflect on the course content (as cited in Yang & Chang, 2012). According to the studies of Yang and Chang (2012), Celsi and Wolfenbarger (2012), classrooms are often teacher-centered. They recommended the integration of blogs in order to shift this focus to a more learner-centered discussion in the classroom. The studies of Kay (as cited in Yang & Chang, 2012) also revealed that learners play a passive role in a traditional classroom-learning environment and that technology promotes both teacher-student and student-student interaction. Moreover, the study of Cakir (2013) added that blogs would increase the students' active participation in class activities even when they are outside of the

classroom. Similarly, the results of the study of Novakovich and Cramer Long (2013) proved that the use of social media enhanced learning and provided an engagement level that is not found in the traditional classroom. The findings of Oravec (as cited in Yang & Chang, 2012), Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) indicated that blogging not only promotes self-reflection but also empowers students with a public voice in the education process, two aspects of education often missing in large classes. The study of Halic et al. (2010) also revealed that blogging helped their participants reflect outside of the classroom and share different perspectives on the course material. Moreover, Boyd (2013) found that discussing emotions and personal experiences is important in blogging but not valued in traditional academic writing.

It is to be noted in this study that although one participant stated that she has benefited more from learning through blogging and that blogging had the advantage over the classroom learning, she also mentioned that the classroom discussion that followed the blog was beneficial for her and an important part of the blog experience that helped her in her learning because she could build on her ideas and thoughts from theirs as they would explain the background and reasons behind their comments on the blog.

Another participant stated that she prefers to see facial reactions in a classroom setting but with that course she had no preference and felt comfortable with both settings. She believed that the teacher wanted them to experience both aspects. In the literature review, many studies confirmed the importance of the use of blogs in empowering those students who are shy and silent in the classroom. The study of Yang and Chang (2012) pointed out that a blog is a student-student dialogue enabling every student to have a voice in the learning community, unlike the traditional classroom teacher-student discussion. The studies of Manfra and Lee (2012) and Sawmiller (2010) also indicated that blogging is different from the regular class in that it

promotes independence and ownership and gives a voice to the silent student, and because of the removal of self-consciousness students interact more freely and work at their own pace.

Incorporating blogs in higher education. Half the participants thought it was a good idea to implement blogging in higher education for the following reasons:

- Blogging could replace the traditional reflection paper so that both the teacher and students can access it online. Thus students can see different points of view other than theirs. Blogging can be an online tool to collect reflections for both students and teachers. This finding is in agreement with the study of Novakovich and Cramer Long (2013) who noted the usefulness of blogs in terms of peer interaction and self-reflection.
- Blogging can be used as an interactive useful tool for learning that promotes communication outside the classroom. Walatka (2012) also found that blogging is a powerful tool for maintaining a student and discussion-centered classroom. However, he stressed that discussion should be integrated as a central part of the pedagogy in addition to using blogs.
- Blogging can be applied everywhere and for all majors. Likewise, Huffaker (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010) Dos and Demir (2013) suggested the use of blogs in all disciplines and all levels.
- Blogging promotes peer-to-peer learning in higher education where the teacher is a facilitator or a supervisor.
- Educational learning has changed. Technology can be used in all majors to access information and grasp as much learning as possible in the least amount of time. However it cannot be used with all the courses when the topic content is sensitive and not in all countries where blogs need to be controlled the same as the classroom for ethical or

political issues. Pooranachandran and Balasubramanian (2011) also indicated that technology has enabled higher education institutions to educate students by transcending barriers of time and space.

Half the participants were not so sure about the implementation of blogs in higher education for different reasons:

- One participant thought that the implementation of blogs might be difficult at the undergraduate level (the writing and communication skill level), should be applied to small classes (otherwise there would be cumbersome conversational thread), not in every traditional course (otherwise it would be overdone) and should only be used for a subsection of the course. For her it can be applied as a tool in online courses for communication as students connect and discuss things. This does not correspond with the following studies from the literature review: As mentioned above, Huffaker (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010), Dos and Demir (2013) suggested the use of blogs as a strong learning tool for many courses and at any level. Moreover, Hungerford et al. (2014) indicated that blogging could be integrated in order to mediate large classrooms discussions. Robertson (2011) also pointed out the importance of implementing blogs especially in the first year so that students develop self-directed learning skills in a supportive social environment. However, one study in the literature conducted by Lin, Lin, and Hsu (as cited in Novakovich and Cramer Long, 2013) found that the use of blogs was not the most effective interventional tool in the writing classroom.
- For another participant, blogging would be too much in a traditional setting and would cause repetition in the classroom meetings unless it was a technology oriented course: so either in a classroom setting or an online setting. She thought it would be difficult to use

blogs in a feminist course due to large readings and discussions, or in History as it would be difficult for students to bring their personal experiences. On the contrary, the study of Hungerford et al. (2014) as mentioned above, indicated that blogs could be used to mediate large classroom discussions. However, she thought that blogging allows for a larger knowledge about the material and could be useful in a traditional educational setting for developing classroom discussion on condition that the topics should be selected.

- And another participant thought that blogging would be interesting to implement but she was not so sure about it. As a face to face person, she believed that trying to incorporate blogging as a non-traditional collaborative space within a very traditional pedagogy (teacher-learner dichotomy) may or may not work in terms of the depth with which it was meant to work. She explained that trying to implement the use of blogs would go with the classroom philosophy: if the teacher is an authoritarian figure and was evaluating it, it would not work and there will not be authenticity: the blog's "culture" would reflect the classroom's "culture". For her blogging would be interesting when changing the paradigm of learning: if people can lead their own learning on a blog then they are able to lead their learning in the classroom. So she recommended changing the paradigm of learning into learner-focused learning where both students and teacher are the learners in this paradigm. Thus, she further maintained that it depends on the objectives of the university: production of critically thinking citizens or workers because the use of blogs in the traditional education system can get people to question the notion of who holds knowledge and expertise, to challenge the notion of knowledge authority and validation because learning can happen differently, and learners can learn from each other in a more

interesting way. Then she concluded that blogging serves as a platform for any type of content. For her there is a “fuzzy” line between blogging in social media and blogging within a university system, there can be interrelation between them. Nevertheless, she thought that blogging can help create online communities of practice in the future. On one hand, this finding is not consistent with the study of Minocha who found that the use of social software in higher education enabled teachers to track their students’ progress, give feedback early, and teach more interactively at the same time (as cited in Robertson, 2011). Paulus et al. also found that the use of blogs enabled teachers to better understand the students’ struggle with the material, design and redesign methods and learning activities to overcome barriers to learning (as cited in Halic et al., 2010). Moreover, in terms of pedagogy, Rhoades et al. (2009), Cakir (2013) and Sawmiller (2010) all stressed the importance of better understanding and confidence in the use of blogs in the learning environment for both teachers and students in order for a learning curve to occur. On the other hand, this finding supports the study of Sweeny (as cited in Boyd, 2013) who pointed out that educators need to adapt to the new literacy context, and with Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Bahrani (2012) who confirmed that both teachers and students need to collaborate using technology and make their joint roles education would be greatly enhanced. Moreover, Boyd (2013) indicated that technologies need to be introduced in a way that challenges the traditional pedagogical practices rather than replicating them. Kaplan et al. maintained that the student-centered approach is replacing the traditional teacher-centered classroom (as cited in Duarte, 2015). Nevertheless, Park et al. (2016) indicated that blended learning is the newly accepted approach to transform traditional pedagogy in higher education today in order to maximize student learning and success.

This finding also agrees with the study of Neira-Piñeiro (2015) who confirmed the contribution of blogs to the linguistic and literary training of future teachers. In addition, the studies of both Halic et al. and Levy (as cited in Chu et al., 2012) suggested the incorporation of blogs into learning to help create a community of users to interact with each other and consequently enhance their learning experience.

The students' recommendations. When asked whether they would change or add anything to the blog experience, the study participants had several suggestions. Some of them recommended the teacher's participation in the blog for different reasons: facilitating the blog and keeping the discussion on track, adding knowledge, promoting more discussion or analysis, and motivating the students. Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) highlighted intervention as an important part of the course blog management in order to reanimate the blog with strategies using positive feedback and building interest. Boyd (2013) also recommended teachers to promote interaction by providing positive feedback.

Other participants in this study suggested changing the blog platform into a more organized one, and into a web design that enables more multimodal expressions (videos, audio files, images) onto the blog post comments.

One participant suggested that a grade would not be specified only for the blog participation but to include it in the overall class participation. She also wondered whether the experience would be different with a different course and teacher. Unlike this finding, Walatka (2012) recommended grading the student blogs as pass/fail and as high pass/pass/fail/not complete. Nevertheless, he recommended that teachers should look for the overall quality when grading and check the level of student understanding and helpful points that should be raised in class.

The majority of the participants also recommended changing the structure of how the blog was used. On one hand, some of them suggested having less time for the blog by running it for only part of the course time frame, or not assigning a different leader every week because they thought it was too much regarding that they also had presentations and other tasks to do within the same course. As discussed differently in the literature review, the survey conducted by Duarte (2015) found that blogs can be effectively used to support learning activities and complement a course syllabus for more than one class and for longer than one semester. Most of his students also perceived blogging as a useful learning tool and had a positive experience with it. On the other hand, some of the participants suggested adding more time for the blog discussion, either in the classroom so that the blog leader would further analyze the students' comments and address them, or adding online real time where everyone including the teacher would further explain the background and reasons behind their comments. Similarly, Walatka (2012) recommended that students complete postings and comments at least six hours before class, so that the teacher can have enough time for evaluating the students' understanding and developing the lesson plan accordingly. He also suggested that the teacher starts the class with some of the students' responses in order to create a student-centered classroom by promoting participation and dialogue. Hungerford-Kresser et al. (2004) recommended that the teacher brings the blog's conversation back to the classroom so that learning can become more explicit to the students and to show them the blog as a medium to express themselves and not just a task to complete. Furthermore Bartholomew, Jones, and Glassman (2012) suggested that the teacher reads over the blog every week and picks two of the most interesting posts to discuss before the lecture, in order to use positive reinforcement and building interest as two important strategies of

blog management and intervention. Only one participant in this study suggested separating the blog content from that of the classroom so that no repetition would occur.

The Students' Evaluation of the Experience

Three participants evaluated the course blog experience as good and useful. Two participants affirmed that they enjoyed it. Two participants described the course itself as a blended and not a traditional course because it incorporated blogging and other technology related tasks. One participant declared that she did not like the structure of how “blogging was positioned within the course” and how blogging was evaluated, i.e. the criteria for grading it. She was disappointed with her grade. Another participant declared that she does not enjoy blogging in general and that the course did not change that. However, she also declared that she could have enjoyed it if it was not graded or if the material was in her field of study.

Likewise, the findings of Coutinho revealed that most students perceived their blog experience as positive but some of them were not convinced of its pedagogical benefits (as cited in Sim & Hew, 2010). On the other hand, the survey of Scaletta in 2006 suggested that the outcomes of blogging cannot be measure after only one semester because the real benefits are gained slowly over years (as cited in Nackerud & Scaletta, 2008). Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) considered it mature blogging which can be achieved in real-world networks. However, they maintained that private blogging is still beneficial in closed discussions for class activities, such as student teachers who would benefit more from their peers' experiences than seeking out a public platform.

Implications and Future Directions

In this section implications for the use of blog in a traditional setting in higher education and suggestions for further research are discussed.

Challenges of the Course Blog Experience

Technology. In this study, unfamiliarity with technology did not constitute a barrier for the students to blog. All of the participants learned technical skills from the blog experience regardless of how they perceived their experience with technology; i.e. whether it was difficult or easy.

This study implies that technical competence at the beginning of a course does not have to be a required skill nor a critical factor for the success of a course blog experience in a traditional setting in higher education. At the same time, it suggests that blogging can foster the students' technical skills which they might need for their job or other courses.

Time constraints. The majority of participants declared that the blog consumed much of their time and reported time constraints as a main problem. This study confirmed that blogging was a time consuming task for students, no matter its level of interest, and found that the time factor surely affected the students' participation and level of their engagement in the blog. This finding suggests that the implementation of a blog in a traditional course should be well structured and planned in order to comply with the overall course requirements and the students' convenience in terms of the time constraints and deadlines.

Difficulties with the blog content. The majority of the participants reported their awareness of the plagiarism and copyright issues and that they had no problem with finding and citing online reliable resources on the blog. One participant thought that the blog experience was challenging on the intellectual level, which lead her to post her comments before the others.

Social and peer learning could be open to plagiarism and eventually affect the students' creativity. This study suggests that students should be aware of plagiarism and copyright rules in order for them to be careful in their writings and citations on the blog just like in any traditional course. Moreover, it suggests that students' unfamiliarity with blogging in academia makes them

uncomfortable sharing their ideas and experiences on a course blog. It is one of the negative perceptions of using blogs which needs to be addressed in further studies in order to recommend the ways for teachers to carefully guide their students when introducing blogs in education.

Required skills for blogging. This study found that the required skills for successful blogging would include the ability to read critically, think deeply, synthesize the information, and motivate others into reflecting upon their own experiences. This finding suggests that blogging requires quite the same traditional literacy skills for writing an essay at any graduate degree level, except only for one skill which is the ability to motivate others in order to make them reflect upon their own experiences. These findings point to the need for further research to be conducted at different university levels.

Running the Blog Experience

Participation and the effect of grading. The majority of participants agreed that grading had a big effect on their motivation to regularly participate in the blog. Students also reported that they sometimes participated more than once only when the topic was interesting, familiar, or when they received responses from the others on their comments.

This study suggests that educational blogging requires much time and energy, on the part of students, and that there is no other way to make it interactive and relevant to students except by some sort of forced evaluation, i.e. grading. Apparently, the biggest challenge for the success of using educational blogs in higher education is motivating students to regularly participate and actively interact. This study implies that students are mainly motivated to participate and interact actively in a blog when they receive reinforcement through grades and commentary. Other factors would be the time constraints, the ease of use, the level of students' comfort with blogging, the degree to which a topic is interesting and familiar to students, and the degree to

which students' posts are dynamic. The findings suggest the need for further research to be conducted in order to check whether students' participation and engagement can be increased by means other than the grading system.

Experience as leader and as reader. The majority of participants were fully engaged as blog leaders whereas they frequently participated as blog readers only as much as time allowed and when the topic was familiar and easy.

This study suggests that students get more engaged when they lead the blog themselves and would participate more frequently in it when the topic is familiar and more practical for them to discuss things based on their own knowledge.

Role of learner. The current study showed that the learners' role is to be their own teachers on their own space, i.e. the course blog, where they can learn from each other, share their thoughts and experiences, and bring more understanding of the material at hand. This implies that students can lead their own learning on a blog in a learner-focused environment. The findings also suggest that it would be interesting to see other studies where teachers participate in the course blog so that both students and teachers are the learners in a learner-focused paradigm.

Role of teacher. This study presented the role of teacher as a facilitator or supervisor of the course blog. Just like in the literature review discussed in Chapter one, the findings of the current study presented two different recommendations concerning the role of the teacher in an educational blog. Teachers could participate and get engaged in the blog in order to facilitate blogging by motivating students, promoting more discussion, directing the blog, and adding to their knowledge. In contrast, teachers should only share their knowledge during the class and should not be involved in the course blog; otherwise they would inhibit independent learning and the whole learning process. These findings imply the need for investigating the role of teacher or

facilitator in course blogs in future studies. It would also be interesting to get the teachers' perspective on the outcomes of course blogging.

The Impact of Blogging on Learning

Benefits and acquired skills. This study implies that the implementation of educational blogs in a traditional setting promotes several pedagogical benefits for the students: technology skills that would help them either in their jobs or other courses, critical thinking, analytical skills and reflection skills that would improve their understanding of the material at hand, and exposure to diverse perspectives that would enlarge their knowledge in the field. This also suggests the use of blogs for students to brainstorm before class not only in order to expand discussion by going beyond the readings but also to help make the classroom time more efficient.

Type of learning and interaction on the blog. The current study revealed educational blogging as a tool that improved the student's learning experience. Two main characteristics of blogging were perceived to be differentiating learning on a blog from the classroom learning: self-directed learning and informal learning. In addition, the type of learning which occurred on the blog was perceived to be interactive. This implies that course blogs can be used to increase peer interaction and stimulate the students' engagement in the learning process. Nevertheless, the students' participation in the blogging activity in this study was graded as a class requirement so this calls for further research to investigate other ways to incorporate course blogging in an interactive way by means other than the grading system.

The impact of blogging on the students' collaboration. This study implies that an educational blog can serve as a platform provided for students to have a collaborative learning environment where they can collaboratively construct knowledge together independently from

the class instructor. However, as discussed previously in this chapter, the findings revealed a disagreement upon the term *collaboration* not only among participants but also among researchers themselves in the literature review. Some used this term to refer to sharing knowledge while others used it to refer to working towards constructing knowledge. Therefore another study is needed to examine more closely the exact collaborative effect that blogging has on the learning process in a traditional educational setting.

Moodle versus Blogger

Based on the results of this study, the platform of Blogger was perceived to be more functional and less limited than Moodle for students to discuss the course material. This implies that Open Access blogging programs like Blogger have an advantage over discussion boards like Moodle. However, the findings also showed that Blogger still had some limitation because it could not enable the students to use different forms of media onto the comment's feature. This suggests the need for further studies to be conducted about using other social networking websites, such as Myspace, for educational blogging in a traditional setting in higher education.

The Impact of Blogging on the Traditional Educational System

Blog learning versus class learning. The findings of this study showed that the use of blogs in higher education was perceived to be offering advantages over the traditional classroom learning, which were discussed previously. However, one of the findings implied that the classroom discussion which followed the blog was also beneficial for students and a complementary part of their learning experience. This suggests the importance of blended learning in optimizing the student learning in higher education.

Incorporating blogs in higher education. Based on data obtained from the participants, the current study found that blogging can be used in higher education as a tool to collect

students' self-reflections which can be accessible for both students and teachers, and to promote peer-learning and communication outside the classroom. Nevertheless, the study results presented contrasting perceptions about the implementation of blogs in all courses and majors in higher education, which were both supported in the literature's findings. This calls for further studies to investigate the use of educational blogs as an effective learning tool for complementing a course syllabus for more than one class and for longer than one semester at both undergraduate and graduate's levels.

The students' recommendations. The study findings revealed several recommendations by the participants themselves about the implementation of blogs in a traditional setting in higher education:

- The teacher's participation in the course blog
- Looking for a more organized blog platform and a web design that allows multimodal expressions onto the blog post comments
- Including the grade in the overall class participation and not specifically for the blog participation
- Changing the structure of how the blog is integrated into the course
- Adding more time for the blog discussion
- Separating the blog content from that of the classroom's in order to avoid repetition

This implies the need for future studies to provide guidelines and tips for teachers in higher education in order to integrate blogs in their classrooms successfully and to develop their lesson plans accordingly.

The Students' Evaluation of the Experience

Based on the study results, there were mixed opinions on the students' evaluation of their experience with the course blog. The majority of participants perceived their experience as beneficial to their learning but not all of them enjoyed blogging mainly because of how it was evaluated. This implies the usefulness of blogging in higher education regardless of how it was assigned to students. It would also be interesting to explore further methods in future studies about making course blogging more interesting and motivating for students to participate, other than by means of the grading system.

Table 8

Implications and Future Directions

TOPIC	Implications for use of blogs	Suggestions for further research or implementation
1.Challenges of the course blog		
a)Technology	<i>Not being familiar with technology is not a major barrier.</i>	<i>Blogging can foster the technical skills of students to prepare them for job and other course requirements.</i>
b)Time constraints	<i>Time constraints a major problem.</i>	<i>Implementation should be well structured and planned in order to comply with the overall course requirements and students' convenience in terms of time constraints and deadlines.</i>
c)Difficulties with blog content	<i>Awareness regarding plagiarism and copyright issues. Not being familiar with the use of blogs in academic settings makes students uncomfortable with sharing their ideas and experiences on a course blog.</i>	<i>This is a negative perception of using blogs which needs to be addressed in further studies in order to recommend ways for teachers to carefully guide their students when introducing blogs in education.</i>
d)Required skills for blogging	<i>Same tool kit as traditional MA level study requirements: read critically, think deeply, synthesize</i>	<i>Need for further research to be conducted for the reading and writing and related skill tool kit to</i>

	<i>the information PLUS the additional skill to motivate others in order to make them reflect upon their own experiences.</i>	<i>introduce blogging at different levels of academia</i>
2. Running the blog experience		
a) Participating and the effect of grading	<i>Students are mainly motivated to participate and interact actively when they receive reinforcement through grades and commentary. Other factors would be time constraint, ease of use of blog, level of students' comfort with blogging, the degree to which a topic is interesting and familiar, and the degree to which the posts are dynamic.</i>	<i>These findings suggest the need for further research to be conducted in order to check whether students' participation and engagement can be increased by means other than the grading system.</i>
c) Experience as leader and reader	<i>More engaged as leaders – as readers on a need to respond basis.</i>	<i>Will be interesting to investigate conditions for more regular participation as reader.</i>
d) Role of learner	<i>Learners see their role to be their own teachers on their own space-the course blog. They like the learner focused environment.</i>	<i>Conduct comparative studies where teachers participate in the course blog so that both students and teachers are the learners in a learner-focused paradigm.</i>
e) Role of teacher	<i>As facilitator or supervisor of the course blog. Two scenarios: a) Teachers could participate and get engaged in the blog in order to facilitate blogging by motivating students, promoting more discussion, directing the blog and adding to their knowledge. b) Teachers should only share their knowledge during the class session and should not be involved in the course blog, otherwise they would inhibit independent learning and the whole learning process.</i>	<i>These findings imply the need to further investigate the role of teacher or facilitator in course blogs in future studies. It would also be interesting to get the teachers' perspective on the outcomes of course blogging.</i>
3. Impact of blogging on		

learning		
a)Benefits and acquired skills	<i>Promote several benefits for students: technology skills; critical thinking; analytical skills and reflection skills; exposure to diverse perspectives widening their horizons</i>	<i>These findings also suggest the use of blogs for students to brainstorm before class to make the classroom time more efficient. Needs further investigation.</i>
b)Type of learning and interaction on the blog	<i>The type of learning was described as self-directed learning and informal learning as well as interactive engaging students in the learning process.</i>	<i>The student participation in the blogging activity in this study was graded as a class requirement so this calls for further research to investigate other ways to incorporate course blogging in an interactive way by means other than the grading system.</i>
c)Impact of blogging on students' collaboration	<i>An educational blog can serve as a platform for student's collaborative learning environment independently from the class instructor: a) Sharing knowledge? b) Constructing knowledge?</i>	<i>The findings revealed a disagreement on the term of collaboration not only among participants in this study but also among researchers in the field as seen in the literature review. Need for further research to examine the exact collaborative effect that blogging has on the learning process in a traditional education setting.</i>
4.Moodle vs. Blogger	<i>Blogger was perceived to be more functional and less limited than Moodle for the discussion of course material. This implies that Open Access blogging programs like Blogger have an advantage over discussion boards like Moodle. Still, Blogger had limitations – it could not enable students to use different forms of media onto the comment's feature.</i>	<i>This finding suggests the need for further studies about using other social networking websites, such as Myspace, for educational blogging in a traditional setting in higher education.</i>
5.Imapct of blogging on traditional educational system		
a)Blog learning vs. classroom learning	<i>The use of blogs was found to be offering advantages over the traditional classroom learning. One of the findings implied that the classroom discussion which</i>	<i>This finding suggests the interest for blended learning in optimizing the student learning in higher education settings.</i>

	<i>followed the blog was also beneficial for students and complementary to their learning experience.</i>	
b)Incorporating Blogs in higher education	<i>Useful as a tool to collect students' self-reflection accessible for both students and teachers and to promote peer-learning and communication outside the classroom. There were contrasting perceptions about the implementation of blogs in all courses and majors in higher education as also supported by the literature review.</i>	<i>This finding calls for further studies to investigate the use of educational blogs as an effective learning tool to complement a course syllabus for more than one class and for longer than one semester at both undergraduate and graduate levels.</i>
c)Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>-Teacher's participation in the course blog.</i> <i>-Looking for a more organized blog platform and a web design that allows multimodal expressions onto the blog post comments.</i> <i>-Including the grade in the overall class participation and not specifically for the blog participation</i> <i>-Changing the structure of how the blog is integrated into the course</i> <i>-Adding more time for the blog discussion</i> <i>-Separating the blog content from that of the classroom's in order to avoid repetition.</i> 	<i>These recommendations imply the need for future studies to provide guidelines and tips for teachers in higher education in order to integrate blogs in their classrooms successfully and to develop their lesson plans accordingly.</i>
6.Participants evaluation of the experience	<i>Mixed: Most perceived their experience as beneficial to their learning; but not all of them enjoyed the blogging mainly because of the evaluation system.</i>	<i>These two findings imply the usefulness of blogging in higher education regardless of how it was assigned to students. It would also be interesting to explore further methods in future studies about making course blogging more interesting and motivating for students to participate effectively other than by means of the grading system.</i>

This case study provided insight into the experience of six graduate students with blogging in a traditional educational setting in an adult education seminar, over one semester. Although the results cannot be generalized they resonate well in relation to the existing body of the literature on the topic and point towards further research projects as summarized in Table 8 above.

A few methodological points may be made for future investigation. In order to get a more holistic picture of the participants' experience with course blogs, one would also want to analyze the blog itself where the participants interacted. This would help the researcher gain further insight by examining their interaction on the blog and compare the results obtained with their stories about their lived experiences.

Another important consideration is to look at the quality of the experience taking into consideration the diversity of the participants. In this case study all the participants were white and female. Will the blogging dynamics be different with classrooms where there was more gender, cultural and ethnic diversity?

The literature surveyed indicated the need to pay closer attention to definitions of the concepts being examined, such as interactive vs. collaborative participation or learning contexts. But there are other points that need to be paid closer attention to: What is the real learning taking place – at times it seems that the emphasis is on technological skills rather than substantive content learning. So it will be interesting to methodologically develop designs that make clearer the emphasis on learning technological skills, versus content of the course subject matter, versus the interaction of the two in bringing about results which are or are not so different from learning in traditional settings.

The general literature on the use of the web related technologies speaks of difference between the young people growing up with the technology and the older generation trying to adopt and adapt to the web based tools in general and in learning in particular. In our group the technological divide between the participants in their twenties (2), thirties (2) and fifties (2) did not seem to be too skewed. But it will be interesting to pay closer attention to this factor as well in future studies.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, I was one of the students in the same course with the six participants of my case study but I decided not to include my own detailed experience in this study. I tried to focus on listening to and analyzing the experiences of the other participants but I could not help but see that my experience with the course blog was not so different from the other participants. For example, like most participants, I found the blogging experience to be generally useful and enriching to my learning and technical skills. And despite the fact that I am an enthusiast of using technology in education, I also found that the course blog, as it was set up, took a lot of time and effort as expressed by the other participants.

This case study adds rich data about the experience of learners with educational blogging to be added to the existing literature with regard to implementing blogs in traditional classrooms in higher education. This thesis may also be of use for educators interested in integrating technology in traditional classrooms in order to promote an active and useful learning experience for learners.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Duha Zok of the Department of Education of Concordia University. Questions or concerns should be directed to Duha Zok at 514-234-5676 or duha.zok@hotmail.com

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to better understand the use of blogging as an interactive learning tool in a traditional educational setting.

B. PROCEDURES

I understand that that my participation will include an interview that is expected to last approximately thirty minutes to an hour related to my experience with the course blog. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and location and will be audio recorded. I understand that will be audio recorded recording will be transcribed and sent to me for editing.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

I understand that there are no foreseeable risks that I can incur from being part of the study. I also understand that by participation in the study, I will be contributing to the advancement of research on integrating Web 2.0 technologies in adult education.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences by contacting you, the research, or your advisor Arpi Hamalian at 514-848-2424 #2014 arpi.hamalian@sympatico.ca; or both of us.
- 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 will be published
- I agree to be interviewed Yes No

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 _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

DATE _____

Appendix B

Interview Questions

A review of the course experience:

We were assigned technology related tasks to help us create our own learning environment through the use of Cloud software (everything was graded). All the students had to read the assigned academic topic and sometimes look for further reliable resources before participating in the online classroom blog to share their perspectives, experiences and their researched sources. Every week taking turns, one of the students had to initiate and lead the blog discussion then present a new aspect of the topic using Power Point to continue the discussion in the class meeting.

The following questions will be most specifically concerning your experience with the course blog.

1. Was this course your first blogging experience?
2. Tell me about your experience of having participated in a public blog for a traditional educational course
3. Describe or list the skills you have learned. Do you think there are any required skills to participate or engage in the blog?
4. How was your experience with technology in the course blog?
5. Approximately how much time did it take you to do all that? [Was it a time consuming task?]
6. Tell me about the challenges you faced with blogging. [For instance did you face any difficulties locating or sharing online resources, answering questions, any time challenges, fear of copyright violation?]
7. How do you see the feedback (if any) that you received in the course blog? [feedback from other students or maybe the teacher]
8. Tell me about your experience as a blog leader:

[How did you manage to lead the blog? Were all your questions answered? Were you able to read all the others' perspectives/answers and reply to them? Or did you answer only questions addressed to you?]

Tell me about your experience as a blogger:

[Were all your questions answered? Were you able to read all the others' answers and interact with them? Or did you answer only questions addressed to you?]

9. Tell me about the benefits you grasped/gained from your experience with blogging in a traditional course.

10. Describe your overall learning experience from the blog; learning that occurred and the impact of blogging on the way you learned.
11. In general, how would you evaluate the course blog that you experienced? [Did you enjoy your experience with blogging in a traditional educational setting?]
12. Did you enjoy your experience with blogging in a traditional educational setting?
13. Can you say the type of learning that occurred on the blog was interactive? Why or why not?
14. In your opinion, how can blogging improve the students' collaboration in a traditional educational course?
15. How do you perceive the participation level in the course blog? [Was everyone participating? Why or why not?]

How often did you participate? [Why or why not?]
If blogging was not graded, do you think the participation level would have been the same?
16. What do you think is the role of learners in a course blog?
17. What do you think is the role of the teacher/instructor in a course blog?
18. If you were to implement blogging as a teacher in higher education, what would you add or change?
19. What is your opinion about incorporating blogging in the traditional classroom curriculum in higher education?
20. In your opinion, what impact does the use of blogs have on the traditional educational system?

Ok. That will be all, thanks for your time!