Applying the Blog in an Information Literacy Program in School Library Setting:
A Case Study at Nan-Yang ElementarySchool in Taichung

Chia-Hui Huang
Researcher
Education Information Unit, Ministry of Education
Taiwan, ROC

Ellen Hao-ying F. Liu
Professor
Graduate Institute of Library and Information Science
National Chung-Hsing University
Taiwan, ROC

For a long time library services of the elementary schools developed slowly due to the deficiency of funds and human resources. The phenomenon is also easily ignored or neglected by the public. The emergence of the blog brings new opportunities for the elementary school libraries with its attributes of low cost, low technique and easy interactions. The purpose of this study is to probe into the blog applied in an information literacy program in elementary school libraries from different perspectives: students' uses of the blogs ,students' learning behavior during the program, and opinions of students and the librarian-teacher toward the program .

Introduction

The low technical threshold of the blogs enables the user by merely employing the mouse to set up the blog websites. Due to their simple and easy operations, the blogs allow information spread more conveniently. This emerging Internet service tool has started a trend of publishing and sharing personal opinions with others, which attracted attentions from various professionals and academics including educators. As probable impacts may be derived from the applications of the blogs in teaching, studies on blogs applied in the educational environments have appeared.

Katherine L. Cole found that blogs as a tool applied in language arts courses could foster quality response to literature through the development of higher levels of discussion, and have a positive impact on teacher and student attitudes toward using technology.(Cole, 2004) Susan Baim found that blogs helped create learning communities and improved interactions and discussions among students. (Baim, 2004, p.5)

Elementary school libraries are closely related to school teaching and usually the information literacy is a fundamental goal of the libraries. Because of its easy operations, low

costs, free and open communication, blogging could be employed as a teaching and promoting tool for information literacy programs, and the blogs could be the new means for the literacy services by the school libraries. The Nan-Yang Elementary School in Taichung County was found where the library has already posted blog websites for information and announcements and a case study at the school was designed by the authors to examine the current usage of the blogs as a classroom application and perceptions of the students and the librarian-teacher regarding the blogs.

Related Studies

Meaning and Development of Blogs

According to Dave Sifry's report, the latest global blog count was 27,200,000 as of Feb. 2006, while still soaring continuously at the speed of 75,000 for every day. (Sifry, 2006)

A blog or weblog, the newly coined, word, has many definitions. The Oxford English Dictionary's draft definition of 'weblog' was: "A frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary."(Coates, 2003) Peter Scott pointed out that a blog was formed by pieces of brief information, and it was a web page containing brief, chronologically arranged items of information. A blog could take the form of a diary, journal, what was new page, or linked to other Web sites. (Scott, 2001) Dave Winer used four concepts to define it: "1. A weblog is personal, 2. A weblog is on the web, 3. A weblog is published, 4. A weblog is part of communities." (Winer, 2001)

These features have won users' approval rapidly and made the development of the blogs as a focal point of the Internet users . Leaders and professionals in various fields, like business, government, academics and education, took notice of the new trend of the blogs and launched studies of applications of the blogs.

Classroom Blogs in Primary Schools

Catherine Poling found that classroom blogging led to deeper and more meaningful interactions among students and a collaborative blog connecting students of different classes and different grades offered exciting experience. (Poling, 2005) In rural Ohio Pam Pritchard set up student "audioblogs" in a school of grades K-4 and found many positive effects of the publishing format. Students worked their best for an audience. The teacher could use the blogs as a handy planning tool and give an immediate assessment of the blogs. Parents were offered a way into their child's learning experience.(Pritchard) Ann Davis launched a blog project on writing instruction with 11 students of grades 4-5. She observed similar results in that instant publishing and an audience made the graders enthusiastic to share their ideas and that parents gained a window into the student's educational journey.(Davis) Instruction tactics through blogging lay in encouraging students to express their ideas and train them to learn in reflections. Liu and Yang pointed out that the blogs applied in teaching were to promote introspective learning. By exchanging ideas with others, students were stimulated in introspective thinking. Records of the blogs allowed the students to trace and examine their learning processes.(Liu & Yang, 2004, p.6)

The blogs allowed students to gain autonomy in learning and made classroom teaching really a student-centered activity. The fact that students gaining more opportunities to communicate and to exchange ideas further promoted interests in learning and degree of participation.

The Blogs Applied in the Elementary School Libraries

Penny Garrod pointed out that some public libraries such as the Caestecker Public Library already linked blogging with their reading activities, and the blog services were introduced to children and teenagers. (Garrod, 2004) A report on the Authors in Autumn Interactive Story described how 15 elementary school students joined in the collaboration of telling a story with the help of the school library media specialists. (Youse & Kenniburg & McCormack, 2005) In Taiwan, both "Lan Tan Book Club Blog" and "Wu Shih Children Reading Club Blog", posted by the primary school libraries, were examples of efforts to encourage students to share their reading experience and to train them in blogging.(Lan Tan Book Club Blog & Wu Shi Children Reading Club Blog) Theresa Ross Embrey advised school librarians to improve their skills and collaborate with teachers to implement blogs to achieve students' goals of learning and developing their literacy skills at the same time.(Embrey, 2002) In the U.K. as a result of participating an after–school blog club, the children, some as young as seven years' old, have improved their knowledge of IT beyond that expected of their age group, and literacy levels have also risen.(Garrod, 2004) Clyde summarized well in stating that "blogging in schools is an information-related activity that requires and develops information skills in students; it is also a teaching and learning activity that should be supported by school libraries…" (Clyde, 2004, p.179) In view of these reports and case studies it seemed natural that school libraries could make good uses of the blogs as a very cost-effective means for their information literacy programs.

Research Design

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is four-fold: (1) students' uses of the blogs; (2) learning in an information literacy program with classroom blogging; (3) students' opinions of the information literacy program with blogging, and (4)The librarian-teacher's opinions of the information literacy program with blogging.

Research Methods

The first author carried out a teaching plan of information literacy with blogging for 120 minutes to three classes of 101 sixth graders at Nan-Yang Elementary School in Sept. 2006. Then, questionnaires based on the "Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology"(Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, Gordon B. & Davis, Fred D, 2003) as the research model, consisted of 14 questions organized under "Performance Expectancy," "Effort Expectancy," "Social Influence," and "Facilitating Conditions" were sent to these students. A total of 71 questionnaires were sent and 66 valid ones were collected, with a return rate of 92.95%. From the population, 14 students were drawn by the method of purposive sampling for a semi-structured interviews, and the librarian-teacher was also given an in-depth interview.

Research Results and Discussion

Background of Students

The valid questionnaires showed that numbers of female and male students were even. Prior to the case study, 90% of the students had heard about the blogs, 63% of the students had used the blogs, and 22% of the students had their own blog websites. Furthermore, 56% of the students had computer and networking facilities at home. These figures revealed that as a whole students were quite familiar with blogging. The low cost, simple technique, and easy operations made blogging readily accessible to many of them.

Uses of the Blogs by Students

The survey showed that on issues of "Performance Expectancy," 86.4% of the students felt that posting on the blogs gave them a sense of accomplishment, and 78% of them felt that the blogs helped them in responding to others freely and thus made them participants (Table1). On "Effort Expectancy". 78.8% of the students thought that the interface of the blogs were user-friendly and 66.6% of them thought that blogging as a learning tool was simple. On "Social Influence," 86.4% of the students reported that their friends or classmates could use the blogs, and 69.7% of them reported that they liked to share experience of blogging with friends or classmates. On "Facilitating Conditions," 78.8% of the students thought that their classmates or teacher could help them solve problems of blogging, and 77.2`% them thought that related resources for the blogs were plentiful and easy to get.

Table1 Uses of the Blogs by Students

Performance Expectancy	Strongly Agree(%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree(%)	Avg.
To post on the blog makes me feel accomplished	37.9	48.5	13.6	0.0	0.0	4.24
To respond on the blog makes me a participant	47.0	31.8	21.2	0.0	0.0	4.26
Using the blog as a learning platform enhances joys of learning	34.8	22.7	36.4	1.5	4.5	3.82
Effort Expectancy						
Learning to blog is easy	28.8	36.4	24.2	7.6	3.0	3.80
Interface of the blog is user- friendly	33.3	45.5	18.2	1.5	1.5	4.08
Learning to blog does not take a lot of time	30.3	30.3	31.8	4.5	3.0	3.80
Blogging as a learning tool is simple	33.3	33.3	28.8	1.5	3.0	3.92
Social Influence						
My friends or classmates, can use Blog	59.1	27.3	10.6	1.5	1.5	4.41
My friends or classmates look upon the blog as an effective learning tool	27.3	34.8	33.3	3.0	1.5	3.83
Blogging can earn me praises from other people	30.3	27.3	30.3	9.1	3.0	3.73
I like to share the learning experience of the blog with my friends or classmates	33.3	36.4	25.8	3.0	1.5	3.97
Facilitating Conditions						
Even I do not have experience of related services, I still can use the blog	39.4	28.8	24.2	6.1	1.5	3.98

	Strongly Agree(%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree(%)	Avg.
Related resources of the blog are plentiful and easy to get	40.9	31.8	24.2	3.0	0.0	4.11
My classmates or teachers can help me to solve problems with the blogs	53.0	25.8	19.7	1.5	0.0	4.30

Interviews of 14 students further revealed that by allowing graphics and sounds on a blog the new tool afforded them more pleasures of learning. To be able to post or update at their own pace gave them more freedom in communications and exchanges. These students also indicated that as they keyed in fast, the blogs facilitated them to complete a reading report more efficiently.

Effects of an Information Literacy Program with Blogging

After implementing a library information literacy program (hereafter abbrev. as ILP), students' opinions were gathered on various aspects. Over half of the respondents answered the four questions of "Learning" in the affirmative, and 69.7% of the students found that reading became more interesting after they took part in the ILP.(Table 2) On questions of "Participation" 77.3% of the respondents found that they liked learning by participation through the blogs. On "Adaptability" 75.7% of the students answered that they could adapt themselves to the teaching program with the blogs. On "Information Literacy Accomplishments" 65.2% of the students thought that reading club through the blogs improved their writing abilities. On "Interactions" 66.7% of the students thought that the blogs improved interactions with both classmates and the teacher. On "Promotion Effects" 71.2% of the respondents liked the promotion of teaching with the blogs and would continue their participation of other programs with the blogs.

Table 2 Effects of an Elementary School Library Information Literacy Program with Blog

Learning	Strongly Agree(%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree(%)	Avg.
After taking part in ILP with the blogs, I enjoy writing more	27.3	24.2	34.8	7.6	6.1	3.59
Reading is more interesting after I joined the information literacy program with the blogs	36.4	33.3	27.3	3.0	0.0	4.03
Sharing ideas with others on the blog inclines me towards more reflections after reading	39.4	18.2	36.4	6.1	0.0	3.91
Blogging helps me to fulfill a reading report more easily and quickly	34.8	30.3	30.3	4.5	0.0	3.95
Participation						
I like to share ideas on the blog	30.3	24.2	39.4	4.5	1.5	3.77
I like to respond to others on the blog	42.4	24.2	30.3	1.5	1.5	4.05
I like to join in the classroom blog	39.4	37.9	18.2	3.0	1.5	4.11
Adaptability						
I can adapt to the program with the blog	43.9	31.8	16.7	4.5	3.0	4.09
I can learn with blogging by myself	31.8	25.8	34.8	4.5	3.0	3.79
Information Literacy Accomplishments						
Reading club with the blog can upgrade my reading ability	33.3	30.3	31.8	4.5	0.0	3.92
Reading club with the blog can upgrade my writing ability	36.4	28.8	28.8	4.5	1.5	3.94
No longer afraid of writing reading report	33.3	18.2	43.9	4.5	0.0	3.80

after joined the ILP with the blog						
Iinteractions						
I like to discuss readings with classmates by the blogs	34.8	30.3	24.2	7.6	3.0	3.86
I like to discuss readings with teacher by the blogs	21.2	24.2	37.9	9.1	7.6	3.42
Blogging increases interactions with classmates and teacher	37.9	28.8	30.3	3.0	0.0	4.02
Promotion Effects						
I approve the learning effect of ILP with the blog	34.8	33.3	30.3	1.5	0.0	4.02
I would continue my participation of other program with the blog	39.4	31.8	21.2	4.5	3.0	4.00
I like the promotion effects of ILP with the blog	43.9	27.3	21.2	3.0	4.5	4.03

Interviews of the students showed that in the past only the reports bearing top grades could be posted on the bulleting board, and exchanges of ideas usually were limited to close friends. The blogs allowed them to publish freely giving them confidence and a sense of accomplishment. More interactions of the blogs extended the sphere of learning and exchanges of ideas became a social channel. These findings are similar to those by Poling and Davis(Poling & Daivs). The majority of the students looked forward to join in other classroom learning with the blogs.

The Librarian-Teacher's Opinions of the ILP with Blogging

Based on the interviews with the librarian-teacher, the authors organized her main ideas as follows:(1) On the use of the blogs: The interfaces were user-friendly, the operations and techniques of blogging were simple and easy.(2) On students' learning: Students learned and performed well in their adaptation to the blogs. Since students regarded the blogs as a channel to express their opinions, it had positive impacts on their self-expressions.(3)Benefits and difficulties: The blogs as a platform to announce teaching resources could be updated easily. But due to the large numbers of students, it was difficult to give individual responses. Also malicious comments could only be removed as they were spotted but could not be prevented.(4) The blog applied in the ILP: The low costs of the blog operations made it a very beneficial tool to the library functions. In order to gain experience of the blog applied in the information literacy activities through time it would be better to concentrate efforts before promoting it to the whole school.

Conclusion

Based on findings of the survey and the interviews, the authors concluded as follows:

(1) Students' acceptance of the blog was helpful to promote information literacy activities. The blogs applied in the information literacy program gave the students a sense of accomplishment and participation. All these positive signs of performance expectancy indicate that the blog is helpful to promote information literacy activities by the school library.

(2) The sharing and interactive mode of the blog could enhance students' pleasures of learning. Reading activities with the library blog changed their previous experience of reading by offering opportunities to publish at their own pace. Students could record their reading journeys, observe comments by others, and publish their own opinions. Sharing their ideas or responding to others could intensify levels of participation.

(3) Blogging with the information literacy program had positive effects on students' learning. Students gained more chances to communicate with classmates and teachers. Most students indicated that they would join other programs of information literacy with the blog. The information literacy program linked with the blog received positive responses and could be used to promote extended activities.

(4)The librarian-teacher perceived that the blog could augment promotional effects of information literacy programs. She indicated that the blog provided a two-way communication channel. Applying the blogs could offer students chances of free and independent revelations, train students to communicate with others, and encourage parents to participate in their children's learning process and so to augment the promotional effects of the information literacy program.

References

Baim, S. (2004). Blog Help Create Learning Community. *Online Classroom*, August, 5.

Clyde, L.A. (2004, Winter) Blogs and School Libraries. *School Librarian*, 52(4), 179.

Coates, T.(2003, August). The OED Draft Definition of a Weblog. *Plasticbag.org*. Retrieved April 16, 2006, from http://www.plasticbag.org/archives/2003/08/the_oeds_draft_definition_of_a_weblog.shtml.

Cole, K. L.(2004). Providing the Soapbox, Developing Their Voice: An Analysis of Weblogs as a Tool for Response to Literature in the Middle School Language Arts Classroom〔Abstract〕. *University of Alabama*.

Davis, A. (n. d.) A Place to Be Heard. *The Intel Innovator*. Retrieved April 20, 2006. from http://www97.intel.com/odyssey/Story.aspx?storyID=300

Embrey, T. R.(2002, December). You Blog, We Blog: a Guide to How Teacher-Librarians Can Use Weblogs to Build Communication and Research Skills. *Teacher Librarian*, 30(2), 7-9.

Garrod, P.(2004, July). Weblogs: Do They Belong in Libraries. *ARIADNE* 40. Retrieved November 16, 2005, from http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue40/public-libraries/

Lan Tan Book Club Blog. *Chia Yi City Lan Tan Elementary School*. Retrieved August 10, 2006. from http://blog.webs-tv.net/lteslibrary&page=2&limit=6

Liu ,L.-X. & Yang ,Y. (January 2004). Applying Blog in Education. *Modern Teaching,* 1,2 combined issue, 6.

Pritchard, P. (n. d.) A Space of Your Own. *The Intel Innovator*. Retrieved April 20, 2006. from http://www97.intel.com/odyssey/Story.aspx?storyid=302

Poling, C.(2005, March). Blog on: Building Communication and Collaboration Among Staff and Students. *Learing and Leading with Technology,* 32(6), 12-14.

Scott, P.(2001, November). Blogging: Creating Instant Content for the Web. *Internet Librarian*. Retrieved February 14, 2006, from http://library.usask.ca/~scottp/il2001/definitions.html.

Sifry, D. (2006, February). State of the Blogosphere: On Blogosphere Growth. *Technorati   Weblog*. Retrieved February 15, 2006, from http://technorati.com/weblog/2006/02/81.html

Venkatesh, V., Morris, Michael G., Davis, Gordon B. & Davis, F. D.(2003, September). User Acceptance of Information Technology: Toward a Unified View. *MIS Quarterly,* 27(3), 447-471.

Winer ,D.(2001, November). What are Weblogs. *Weblogs.Com News*. Retrieved February 14, 2006, from http://oldweblogscomblog.scripting.com/personalWebPublishingCommunities.

Wu Shi Children Reading Club Blog. *Taichung County Ziyou Elementary Wu Shi Branch*. Retrieved August 10,
    2006. from
    http://blog.yam.com/nokan
Youse, C , Kenniburg, C. & McCormack, B.(2005, March/April). Student Voices: Blogging and Beyond.
    Knowledge Quest, 33(4), 21-22.