Blogging and Journaling are the same, but different

There are many technologies that have been developed that assist in the sharing of information and hence the development of knowledge. Since Tim Berners-Lee wrote the specification for the World Wide Web in 1989 (Berners-Lee, 1990), many different ways of using that specification have developed. Perhaps the use closest to that envisaged by Berners-Lee is the WebLog – a “space for sharing information” (Berners-Lee, 2005).

The weblog, or blog, developed from early efforts to maintain a log of pages visited on the World Wide Web (see for instance Rebecca’s Pocket). Since those early days, tools such as Del.icio.us and CiteULike have developed to maintain these records. Blogs are more often now used to journal activities in the sense that an individual may update their blog or journal with their daily activities and many other aspects of their professional and personal lives as well as research interests and progress. Specific use of blogs can be made within education as a space for reflective journaling of work and learning undertaken and learning processes engaged in.

Communities of practice

One of the potential features of blogs is their contribution to the development of communities of practice. Communities of practice allow individuals to move from the periphery to more central positions within a disciplinary or practice group (Lave and Wenger, 1991). By sharing knowledge openly, blogs and wikis allow newcomers to quickly appropriate information and knowledge central to the group. Blogs in particular allow individuals to negotiate their way into a new field of knowledge, weighing and balancing different viewpoints. The interactive nature of blogs, the ability to cross reference and critically analyse traditional and non-traditional sources of information, allows a multi-disciplinary approach to knowledge.

Currently, in a project designed to examine the use of Wikis in education at Griffith University, Queensland Australia, a course in information and communication technologies (ICTs) requires students to create wiki pages about the core concepts of ICTs, specifically technical aspects, and social and business uses of technologies. In order to facilitate their work (and the assessment process), students are required to journal their learning journey. The requirement allows students to use any tool (eg word processors, blogs, spreadsheets etc) which best suits them.

The wiki being used for the course, TikiWiki, incorporates a blogging tool which students may use for the purpose of their journal. Each journal entry can link to any wiki page they have been working on as well as the reference material gathered from the World Wide Web. Thus students are able to revisit their work and maintain ownership of the pages and the information contained therein whilst sharing that information with the community of students in the course.

The course, Information Communication Technologies takes an inter- and multi-disciplinary approach to developing students’ understanding of the core issues at stake in the information age. Students not only deal with concepts about the technologies and their uses, but are able to reflect and present their viewpoints in the blogs beside factual information created in the wiki pages. Students of different nationalities are also able to connect the Australian-centric course content to issues arising in their own countries.

Use of blogs

In order to facilitate student understanding of how the blogs work, a number of teaching and related blogs were implemented. One blog, the ‘how to’ blog, contains posts by the instructor which show various techniques that can be used for learning. Figure 1 shows the blog entry which discusses the use of blogs for the Journal assessment item. This post is descriptive of processes and facilitative of student activity. The post was to present the blogs as one of a multitude of forms for a ‘Journal Assessment’ item which required students to keep a log or journal of their activities in the wiki.
Another blog demonstrates the reflective nature of learning and teaching. This journal, maintained and posted to by the instructor only, reflects on issues of using technology in learning. As a blogger of many years, the instructor has appropriated the technology as an everyday part of reflective practice. However, this level of understanding of technology has the effect of forgetting the learning journey. Journaling the process of using the wiki for teaching and learning allows the elaboration of issues of using technology and working with students who have varying experiences.

Figure 2 shows a post which reflected indirectly on the post in Figure 1. The blogging feature in the wiki allows individuals to describe the purpose of the blog in a ‘description’ field. As a result of the two step process of setting up a blog, some students used the ‘description’ field as the ‘content’ of the blog post field. In order to utilise the blog, it must first be created and described. The blogging tool allowed the instructor to reflect on this and to realise the varying levels of information literacy of her students.
Students in the course are being provided opportunities to openly discuss their learning and gain feedback from both their peers and instructors. Reflections on both the face-to-face lecture and the collaborative lecture wiki page are possible within individual blogs and the wiki pages. This expands the learning potential within the course to include preparation for the lecture, interaction during the lecture and post lecture reflections. Such skills are becoming necessary within interactive and collaborative environments particularly within user-content-generated web spaces. The collaborative skills being developed provide a basis for both traditional and online interactions within a work environment.

Conclusion

Collaborative patterns of learning and working are becoming essential for individuals who will be working in the information age. Developing skills in these areas requires planning and practice. An instructor can use a blog to reflect upon processes, mistakes as well as triumphs in teaching processes using it as a journal of teaching practice, a journal of the journey of teaching. This provides a model for students and helps to demystify the process of learning. Further, the use of blogs as a journal of a journey of learning can enhance students’ engagement in knowledge creation. Blogging allows activities to be recorded by individuals in effect creating a simple list of visited pages and found sources, however journaling, particularly a reflective process of engaging with information provided on visited pages and within found sources provides a more reflective and engaging space for learners building upon the technology of blogging.
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