The Promises of Videoblogging in Education

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Introduction

Recent technological advances have redefined the traditional concepts in many fields and restructured the interactions in our social environments. The ways we communicate, learn and socialize are now different than once they used to be. The criteria for being "competent" or "successful" in our society are now measured with the extent we adopt new technologies into our lives, use them effectively and create solutions to the current problems. For the purpose of preparing competent and adaptable individuals to the complex and information rich society, educators need to reconsider their current educational practices by integrating emerging technologies into their classroom settings.

High broadband connections and user-friendly development tools generated a new genre of internet users who actively contribute to the development of media by editing and uploading videos to the internet and sharing them with their audiences within a community. Videblogging has emerged as a way of communication through audio-visuals in blogging activities and gained extensive popularity among today's Internet users by providing new ways of communication and representation of ideas through interactive channels. Although its popularity amongst Internet users has increased in the last couple of years, not a lot of educators focused on the use of videoblogging technology in education. As a highly developing trend on the Internet, videoblogging may offer teachers and students rich communicational channels for learning and communication of ideas through producing and sharing media.

This paper aims at exploring the educational uses of videoblogging activities in teaching and learning settings. The intent is to introduce this highly interactive technology to educators by mainly investigating its possible uses for educational purposes.

Blogging technology

Weblog, "an internet based personal publishing system" (Miles, 2005, p. 1), has gained tremendous popularity among the Internet users in the last couple of years. Weblogs are frequently modified webpages where data entries are listed in reverse chronological order (Herring et al., 2004, p. 1).

Armstrong et al. (2004) listed some of the characteristics of webblogging as follows:
- Ease of use, where the author can publish to the web without using any programming code.
- No need for installing any server software on the users' machine.
- The user has extensive control over how his or her blog looks and operates.
- Whenever the user edits his or her blog the results are instantly updated and available to others.
- Like any other website, blogs can be simply linked to and navigated.

Today, the majority of bloggers use webblogging as a form of personal communication and expression. According to Nardi et al. (2004) people blog for several reasons. Bloggers who participated in the study indicate that blogs serve as:
- documentaries of their life through which they publish updated information about activities and events,
- commentaries as a way of which people express their personal opinions and make their voices heard,
- catharsis as a means of expressing feelings and emotions,

- muses by which people structure their thinking through writing, shaping their writing with their audience and creating an archive,
- community forums in which bloggers share their pieces with others and reflect on other posts as well.

"Combined with the unprecedent opportunity, blogs provide for ordinary people to self-express publicly" (Herring et al., 2004, p. 11). As blogs continue to grow in popularity, their unique characteristics have also been explored by educators to meet the learning needs of digital native young generation. Below, some of the possible benefits of using webblogging in educational settings are summarized from the literature.

- *Blogs can be used as electronic journals where students document their learning* (Armstrong et al., 2006). Writing reflections on field practices, students can record and report what they learned.
- *Blogs can be used to foster collaborative work.* Bringing multiple users together to contribute and share their ideas in a platform, webblogs encourage students to have different perspectives through ongoing and interactive discussions and reflection on different ideas (Barlett-Bragg, 2003; Walker, 2005).
- *Blogs can serve as electronic publishing tools.* Publishing their works, reports and artifacts in their blogs, students can make their work public, receive immediate feedback from their peers, practice and develop their writing and readings skills (Barlett-Bragg, 2003; Ward, 2004).
- *Blogs can support individual reflection.* Webblogs provide students with opportunities to organize and map their learning progress (Xie & Sharma, 2004; Stiller & Philleo, 2003; Sharma & Fiedler, 2004).
- *Blogs can assist language learning.* Communicative language learning can be enhanced with writings and readings in blogs (Ward, 2004).
- *Blogs can serve as student portfolios.* Online portfolios have been used to enable students to organize their works and present them in a meaningful manner. Since webblogs archive students' works automatically, they can help students see their processes through the postings at different times (Lohnes, 2004).

What is videoblogging?

Videoblogging is now a new and popular trend in blogging circle and differs from its parent, textual blogging, by offering audio-visual capabilities to communicate. EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (2005) defines a videoblog as a "web log (blog) that uses video rather than text or audio as its primary media source" (p. 1). Borrowing from the definitions of Bryant (2006), this paper will use the term *videoblog* to refer to blogging activity; *vlog* to the posts and videos; and *videobloggers* to the people who produce and publish vlogs in their blogs.

Advances in broadband connections and video-hosting services, emergence of easy-to-use video editing software, affordable prices of video recording tools and accessible video technologies stimulated videblogging diffusion on the Internet. As Hoem (2004) affirms, "the importance of video, being a very powerful medium, the increased amount of video material on the web, and the possibilities offered by weblogs when it comes to collaboration sums up in 'videoblogs' as one of the most promising tools which may foster media literacy" (p. 3).

Vlogs combine images, audio, movies and text to communicate personal reflections, expression of feelings, documentaries and stories. Videobloggers generally edit their video with video editing tools, adding background music, sound or text and upload them to their videoblogs to share their vlogs with their audiences. Videobloggers share their videos within a community, receive comments on their videos and set a conversation with their audiences.

The videoblogging process is relatively simple for anyone who is familiar with video editing tools and blogging. A videoblogger first makes a short film, transfers the film from digital camera to computer, edits it with video editing software, becomes a member of a website which hosts video, uploads the video to the website, gives a title to the videoblog, shares it with the audience in the videoblog and gets feedback on vlog through comments. The quality of vlogs ranges from very basically edited vlogs to the professionally edited and esthetically created ones based on the technical skills of videobloggers and the intended message of vlog.

Reasons for videoblogging

People create vlogs for several reasons. "Videobloggers are artists, filmmakers, technology geeks and citizen journalists who go out and report news that major news networks may have overlooked or underreported" (Bryant, 2006, p. 12). The types of videblogs range from videoblogs on personal lifes to videoblogs about news, politics, environmental problems, magazines and entertainment. The power of video in delivering the message provides people from variety of backgrounds and interests to share what they feel and think in regard to a variety of

subjects. Bryant (2006) lists some of the reasons for videoblogging: Keeping in touch with distant friends and relatives; ego-stroking; archiving family history and interviews; ranting about issues in their lives; learning more about digital video technology; increasing the online presence of a minority group; making people laugh (for comedy vloggers); making new friends online; to make money (videblogging as employment) and to promote business as a means of delivering products (pp. 16-17).

In his videoblog travelvlog.blogspot.com, Graham Walker shares his vlogs about his trips around the world. Steve Garfield as a pioneer and supporter of videoblogging, creates vlogs about anything at stevegarfield.blogs.com/videoblog/ and produces '"The Carol and Steve Show" which displays short episodes from his daily life with his wife Carol. "It's part of the democratization of media," says Mr. Garfield. "It gives people the tools to express themselves and be creative in all different ways" (Searcey, 2005).

Videoblogging may serve as a platform for ordinary citizens to be journalists and reflect on what they see as essential for others to know, listen and see. Josh Wolf posts in his videoblog "the revolution will be televised" at http://thisrevolution.blogspot.com/ at least once a week to tell the stories that they believe are ignored by conventional news producers. The aim of the videobloggers like Wolf is to democratize media by promoting citizen journalism, the idea of promoting ordinary people to "report and produce news and entertainment, using new technology that gives them powers once held solely by the Fourth Estate" (Hua, 2005). Another videoblogger Raymond Kristiansen states that "We don't need the mainstream media to tell us what's interesting anymore. Millions of people want to tell their stories, and with videoblogging, they can tell their stories" (Boyd, 2005).

The number of videobloggers has increased in the last couple of years due to the abovementioned reasons and they are inspired by their audiences who are watching their vlogs and making comments on them. Communities are formed among videobloggers who advocate videoblogging such as "meet the vloggers: a series of focused on videoblogging" at http://meetthevloggers.blogspot.com. Vloggercon at http://www.vloggercon.com is another event that videobloggers come together to share, interact and collaborate with other videobloggers.

Videoblogging is considered as the next generation of communication through posting, sharing, producing and publishing content on the Internet. Among videobloggers are some educators who have been trying to explore the educational benefits of videblogging. This new and diffusing technology is being experimented to enhance educational settings by promoting active participation of learners in their learning process. The next section aims at informing educators about the educational benefits and possible educational uses of this fast growing technology trend and phenomenon.

Videoblogging in education

Videoblogging is one of these latest technologies that opened new ways of communication through public-created media. Since videoblogging is such a new technology and a trend on the Internet today, only few videobloggers have recognized the promises of videoblogging for teaching settings and have used it in their teaching practices. The teachers and educational practitioners who are interested in this technology come together in a forum "Vlogging for K-12 Teachers" at http://groups.google.com/group/Vlogging-for-K-12-Teachers, discuss their practices, share their works and find out other possible educational uses. Two interviews were conducted with these practitioners who have been using videoblogging technology in their educational practices since the very early days of videoblogging technology. The insights, ideas and experiences gathered in the interviews are summarized in two sections: Teachers as videobloggers and students as videobloggers.

Teachers as videobloggers

In videoblogging community, there are some teachers and educators as videobloggers who want to communicate their educational messages with this highly engaging tool. Among them was Bre Pettis who now makes magazines doing videoblogging. He generates videoblogs about the processes of making things in a humorous way. He put his video on the Internet in September 2003 and started videoblogging in the Spring 2004. He was keeping a textual blogging before and was later attracted by the offerings of new videoblogging technology. Since then, he has been keeping a videoblog about the things he creates and teaches his audience how to make those things at http://imakethings.com. He explains his reasons for videblogging:

I am an artist and I wanted to share the "I love you project" with more people than could see it in a gallery... I have two jobs in life, being creative and supporting other's creativity.

Last year he was a middle school teacher and used videoblogging in his art and writing courses. Mr. Pettis formed http://room32.com to teach people and to give his audience more opportunities for self-expression. He created those vlogs to share them with his students, parents and other colleagues. He created many vlogs to inform students about their future projects in the class, collecting their works in a video and share them with the

community. He prepared a videoblog "in the future" in which his students made some predictions about the future. Mr. Pettis comments on his experience:

> That was just something to do in the last 10 minutes of class one day. You can tell they felt comfortable taking creative risks in my class, everything from living on the moon to we will all die, world war three…I am proud of that video, it was really the best collaboration and a lot of my videos for room 132 are news-style updates with student work.
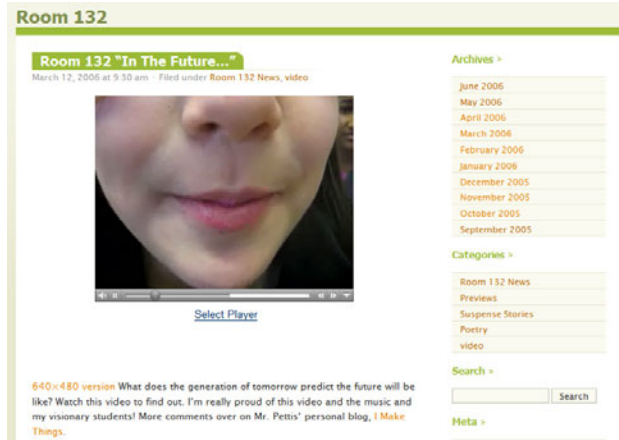

Figure 1-"In the Future…" vlog at http://room132.com/2006/03/12/in-the-future/

Mr. Pettis recorded those videos with the help of his teaching assistants. He explains his reasons for doing vlogs in the classroom:

> For me as a teacher the important parts were to document what I was doing and share it, let the parents know what was going on in class, and getting a bigger audience than my 150 students.

Mr. Pettis shared students' works on Animated Flip Books by doing vlogs about them and publishing at Room 132. Parents, other teachers and students watch this vlog and make comments on it.

Figure 2- Animation Flip Books Vlog at http://room132.com/2005/11/19/room-132-animation-flip-books/

According to Mr. Pettis teacher-created videoblogs and student-created videoblogs are two different educational practices and they have different dynamics in their applications. He stresses the impracticality of student-created videoblogs in schools which have limited technology infrastructures.

Students as videobloggers

Jonny Goldstein is one of the leading practitioners in videoblogging field trying to promote the use of videoblogging in educational practices. He is also an early adopter of videoblogging technology, publishing his first videoblog in December 2004, the time when people started doing videoblogging. He started doing videoblogging for personal reasons after he attended vloggercon (a yearly conference aimed at bringing videobloggers together,

) held in December of 2004 and he "fell in love" with this new technology. He talks about his reasons for videoblogging:

> It was a natural for me. I already was text and photo blogging partly because I enjoy expressing myself in text and images, partly to let my friends and relatives stay up to date on what I was doing, and partly to professionally promote myself starting in autumn of 2004. I was starting to perform a lot of stand-up comedy so it made sense for me to make funny videos to get my stuff out there.

He started doing videoblogging for educational purposes on October 2005. Although he was not a certified regular classroom teacher he had been working intermittently in various education-related jobs, working as a substitute teacher in the New York City public schools and as a theater, art, and music teacher in an afterschool program for a couple of years. His videoblogging practices for educational purposes started with his job as a project director for a private company, which was in the business of doing robotics, interactive multimedia, digital audio and digital video with children. The BX21 Videoblogging Project is made by Vision Education and Media and SOBRO and is financed by a 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant (http://vemnyvlogs.org/bx21/). The aim of the project was to make students to get ready for the work world and to connect school and real life with the technology component. Mr. Goldstein directed this project and worked within the campuses of five of the schools involved in the project.

> Students were volunteers and it was free and most of them were low income. Class size was varied from 15 to 4-5 active participant kids who would meet two afternoons a week. Kids usually did the videos as group projects so what was the aim of the program.

According to Mr. Goldstein the educational benefits of videoblogging are developing students communicational skills through storytelling, enhancing their visual literacy, improving their technical skills and learning how to blog to use a social software. The topics of the vlogs that students prepared as part of this afterschool project reflected the very benefits of videoblogging on student self expression and learning. For instance, a student prepared a short clip for a documentary which was about attitudes toward homosexuals by conducting interviews with his classmates, the other student prepared a video clip to do a review of a game and others did an opinion piece about school lunch.

Mr. Goldstein also talks about some of the challenges they encountered during the videoblogging activities in classrooms such as technical difficulties with uploading videos in the school labs due to the security settings , getting releases from the parents to put vblogs online and paying attention to ethical issues such as safety and privacy. Mr. Goldstein summarizes the precautions to be taken while incorporating videoblogging activities into classroom practices effectively:

- Have a good release prepared and get it signed.

- Discuss what is and is not appropriate with the students before they put work online.

- Discuss the Internet safety with students. Ask students not to use their last names and let you know if anyone left them an inappropriate comment or tried to contact them on the Internet.

- Review students' work before they post it online.

Although using videoblogging in classroom settings poses some challenges to teachers, today the young generation is much more comfortable with the technology, and technology is already integrated into their lives. In order to meet students' needs, educators need to be familiar with and incorporate new technological advances into their classroom practices. Mr. Goldstein makes some predictions about the future of videobloging:

> Teens or college students now are going to be way more comfortable with technology, "Do-it-yourself media social software", so it's going to shift; we're just at the beginning. More wireless connectivity, cheaper and better cameras, higher bandwidth connectivity…This means more people will be shooting video and putting it online everywhere…I think schools have got a big challenge, they are already in, because technology is changing so fast and their students are going to be the experts

Mr. Goldstein considers teachers' role in videoblogging activities as being guides who facilitate students' videoblogging activities. Creating a learning community in which both students and teachers learn from each other, communicate and contribute to the teaching-learning process, videoblogging is likely to engender valuable educational outcomes. Mr. Goldstein at "We are theMedia" blog (http://wearethemedia.com/2005/10/25/videoblogging-in-education) gives some examples of educational use of

videoblogs. He also proposes that teachers might place videoblogs on the Internet in a way that only selected viewers can have access to them with password-protected blogs. Therefore, teachers will be able to reduce security problems and feel much more comfortable in incorporating videoblogging into their classroom activities.

Videoblogging as a promising educational tool

Videoblogging offers rich experiences both to the teachers and students who want to communicate with movies, sounds and images, reflect on what they teach, learn and think and share them with a community. The possible educational benefits and uses of videoblogging activities are summarized below:

- *Meeting the learning needs of students*

Today's digital native students are born in this technology-rich society and have had closer contact with multimedia tools already. What they see and perform outside of the schools should be reflected in educational practices to answer their learning needs. Videoblogging can be used as a tool for meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Learners come to learning environments with their prior knowledge, unique characteristics and beliefs. Incorporating videoblogging activities into classroom settings will create opportunities for children to build their knowledge onto their unique prior understandings and different learning styles.

- *Videoblogs as a tool for reflection on learning:* Students' cognitive abilities can be enhanced with videoblog reflections, in which they come to realize what they know, what they learned and what they can learn in the future.
- *Videoblogs as a way of demonstrating understandings about variety of concepts:* Videoblogging can be used as a way to express variety of subjects and concepts. Learning by design approach can be used with videoblogging activities in which students create the meanings through the design processes of vlogs. Videoblogs can be part of design projects in which multiple intelligences are used effectively, students' higher order thinking skills are developed, and problem solving abilities are enhanced through the creation of a product for a real audience (Kahn & Ullah, 1996).
- *Videoblogs as a tool for collaborative work, creating learning communities:* Hoem (2004) stresses the importance of the function of videoblogs as wikis on the creation and production of collective videos. During vlog production phase, students may work together to design their documentaries and enhance that process by sharing their work on videoblogs with other students, even the people outside of the class. Their learning space can expand the borders of a classroom, creating new types interactions between them and the society.
- *Videoblogging for digital storytelling:* Digital storytelling has been considered as a powerful method for engaging students and teachers through telling their stories with multimedia tools such as images, audio, video and web technologies. "The use of videoblogs for digital storytelling may be one way to encourage strong student participation in e-portfolio projects" (EDUCAUSE, 2005*).
- *Videoblogging for improving media literacy:* Today we are surrounded by messages that are being conveyed in variety of forms. Media tools have been evolved over time from printed materials to highly interactive channels such as audio-visuals and the Internet. To become competent in this highly rich communicational environment, to understand and interpret messages and to create the messages by using media tools, students should have media literacy skills. Videoblogging may serve as a strong educational tool by providing students with rich opportunities to reflect on messages being conveyed and in the creation of their own messages.
- *Videoblogging and student journalism:* Citizen journalism has emerged with new technological advances that allow ordinary people to be actively involved in the creation and dissemination of the information and news to the rest of the world. Instead of passively demanding ready-made news, now anyone with some basic internet knowledge can be a journalist who can share his/her personal information or news with the audience. Encouraging students to be citizen journalists will help them understand their environment better, criticize ready-made structures and thus take the very first steps of being active citizens in the democratic society. Videoblogging when used as a tool for student journalism can be a powerful tool for helping them convey information and news that they think important for others to watch, think and reflect on.

Videoblogging and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK)

In order to overcome the challenges that teacher face today in integrating integrate technology in their classrooms appropriately, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) has emerged as a new vision in teacher education field addressing the "form of knowledge that goes beyond all three components (content, pedagogy and technology)" (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1028). TPCK framework focuses on technology integration into specific curricular topics with the selection of particular pedagogical techniques. Teachers need to consider the interactions between technology, pedagogy and content in their videoblogging classroom activities. Bull et al. (2007) state that "digital video technologies offer unique opportunities (through interactivity and user-generated content) to rethink the instructional paradigm particularly to match the needs of the subject to be thought" (p. 3). They give specific examples of the integration of digital video technologies into different disciplines with different pedagogical goals.

Table 1
An Illustration of Linking a Technology (Digital Video) with Pedagogical Goals in Different Content Areas (Bull et al., 2007, p. 6).

Discipline	Content	Technology	Pedagogical Goals
Science	Physics	Digital video	Rectifying Naïve Conceptions
Physics	History	Digital video	Supporting Historical Inquiry
Language Arts	Reading	Digital video	Reinforcing Visual Imagery
Mathematics	Trigonometry	Digital video	Connecting Representations

Similarly, videoblogging technology can be integrated in different content areas with different pedagogical goals with a focus on its affordances of publishing and sharing digital video content on the Internet and constraints of safety and privacy issues. If teachers consider the interactions between pedagogy, content and technology in their videoblogging classroom activities, they can offer unique learning opportunities to students.

Conclusions

Videoblogging activities can meet the needs of today's students who are surrounded with these highly dynamic and interactive technologies already. Students' interaction with producing and publishing media and sharing it with a community can improve their communicational and technical skills which are required for them to be successful and competent citizens in the society. When used effectively in educational settings, videoblogging may redefine classroom borders expanding learning experiences outside of the school to the community connecting school, students, teachers, administrators and parents in a learning community.

Videoblogging as an emerging tool, a popular trend on the Internet and a new way of media production has a lot to offer for educational settings. Without any doubt, more and more educators will start to experiment this engaging tool in the teaching and learning settings in the near future.

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