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Blogging and ESL writing: a case study of how students responded to the use of weblogs as a pedagogical tool for the writing process approach in a community college ESL writing class



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jonesd17626.pdf (1.871Mb)

Date

2006

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Abstract

Weblogs (blogs) have become a potential tool to assist in the delivery of instruction for writing. The purpose of this study was to introduce blogging into a community college ESL writing class (2005 spring semester) and to examine the significance of its use for the process writing approach. The study also sought to examine ESL students' perceptions as well as those of the teacher regarding the implementation of blogs in the ESL writing class. Students in the class used blogs for four specific aspects of the writing process approach, peer responding (feedback), editing, revising, and publishing their writing assignments. Action research was used to collect data from five participants selected for in-depth study. Data analysis was performed using qualitative research and case study methods to provide thick descriptions and to identify emerging themes. Credibility of the findings was established by using triangulation of data, member checks, a debriefing group, and cross checking for confirmation or repudiation of conclusions. Results seemed congruent with previous research on technology and second language writing. Blogging proved to be an effective tool for the writing process approach as evidenced by the numerous benefits for its use that outweighed the drawbacks. Prior knowledge of technology was found to help the students adapt to blogging. Blogging facilitated the students' critical thinking skills; affected the quality of students' writing; provided examples of feedback and entries for the students to read, model, and from which to learn; facilitated meaningful learning for students; gave students a purpose for writing; and motivated students' writing and interaction by publishing for an authentic audience. The most significant finding was that blogging seemed to solve some critical issues related to the students' trust and confidence in peer editing and revising. At the same time, data also showed that the quantity and multiplevoiced feedback caused some confusion for students in deciding what and how to edit and revise their writing. Overall, the majority of the students had positive reactions and experiences throughout the semester.

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Writing for writing refers to the writing lesson as a major syllabus strand. It is a self-contained writing lesson that aims at developing the writing skill. There are three approaches to teaching writing "...process writing in the classroom may be construed as a program of instruction which provides the students with a series of planned learning experiences to help them understand the nature of writing at every point." Anthony Sewo, 2002, p.315. In this approach, the learners are encouraged to go through different stages before producing their final version. Recent studies on the genres of writing have revived interest in some features of the product approach. Genre writing is similar to the product approach in the sense that it also considers writing from a linguistic standpoint. Jolliffe writes, "through class discussions of the situations and people in the cases, students will hone their insights, perceptions, thought processes and interpersonal skills. . .". According to Silverman the following two factors are as important in Case Study Teaching as they are in any other forms of teaching, perhaps even more so, because an instructor has less control with case discussion than other forms of teaching. What do they know already that applies to the case? What are the issues (central and peripheral) that may be raised in discussion? Can the case "carry" the discussion (Is it appropriate to your objectives)? how the case and discussion will be introduced. preparation expected of students (written, submitted, papers?) the opening question(s).