

Title: **Reflections on developing a community of practice with post-graduate students using web blogs**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Consider developing the use of web logs to develop a community of practice.
- Understand both staff and student perceptions of using the web log for developing a community of practice.
- Explore how the development of this Web 2.0 technology can enhance the learning experiences of their students.
- State the inhibitors and enablers to developing a community of practice using web logs.

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

This session focuses on research over 2 years at 2 universities in using web blogs to develop a community of practice within post-graduate programmes. The focus of the research has been with student teachers developing a community of practice to provide support for the students when they are out of university on placement. The experiences and developments from the research are therefore applicable across many disciplines.

This research seeks to build on that of others who have looked at the use of blogs in HE, the success of which is mixed. For example Dickey (2004) found blogs to be a means by which the isolation of pre service trainee teachers can be alleviated. Beldarrain (2006) reports benefits of using tools such as wikis and blogs to foster student interaction online. Divintini et al (2005) found limited use of blogs by students. Other research has analysed the dimensions of blogs in relation to university and college contexts, and the role they might play in education and professional contexts (Oravec, 2003). Bonk and Zhang report on the use of blogs, in the second part of their R2D2 model for distance learning by providing weekly feedback on their blog postings by a critical friend within the course (Bonk & Zhang, 2006). Beldarain (2006) reports on fostering student interaction on-line using blogs. Martindale and Wiley quote millions of people using weblogs all over the world but indicated limited success when using blogs for educational purposes (Martindale & Wiley, 2005).

We are able to report success, but it has taken 3 years to reach this point. We would share how we have reached this stage and how we know it is successful.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

We now plan to use this technique more widely, for example within the PGCHE programme and would like to explore at SEDA the experiences of others.

Our session would be:

10	Starter – discussion of the use of blogs in HE – this would explore some of the uses of the delegates.
15	Introduction and explanation of our research including lessons learnt and a demonstration of the web blogs.
15	Opportunity for discussion in group(s) depending on size. To focus on: An opportunity to share the experiences of others. Inhibitors and enablers to using Web logs – what are they in HE? Should we be using Web 2 technologies in HE – why/why not? Flip chart to record responses.
5	Plenary and final questions, thoughts, and the way forward for individuals – shared on a flip chart. Setting up a network of interested delegates.

References

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- Dickey, M., D. (2004). The Impact of Web-Logs (Blogs) on Student Perceptions of Isolation and Alienation in a Web-Based Distance-Learning Environment. *Open Learning*, 19(3), 279-291.
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- Oravec, J. A. (2003). Weblogs as an Emerging Genre in Higher Education. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 14(2), 21-44.